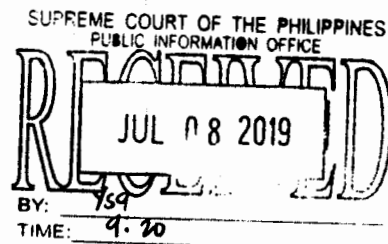




Republic of the Philippines
Supreme Court
 Manila



SECOND DIVISION

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNIT OF
 SAN MATEO, ISABELA, represented
 by CRISPINA R. AGCAOILI,
 Municipal Mayor, ARMISTACIO
 VILORIA, BEATRIZ RAMOS,
 JOSEFINA CABANILLA,
 HONORATO CALANTES, LORNA
 BUSTO, FLORDELIZA DELOS
 TRINOS, ROMEO REGINALDO,
 GUDIE REGINALDO, FRANCISCO
 RICAFORT, FELICIANO AGUSTIN,
 REGIDOR DIZON, ISABELO
 BRILLANTES, OLIVER MALAPIT,
 FERNANDO QUIPSE, FLOR
 VISAYA CADELIÑA, RUEDA
 MARQUEZ, MERCEDES CADIZ,
 PROCESO CADIZ, ANTONIO
 MANZANILLO, VIDAL CADIZ,
 WILSON VISAYA, NOIMI VDA. DE
 CADIZ, GERARDO
 CABANTUNGAN, LORENZO
 GANNABAN, ANTONIO
 GANNABAN, JOSE SALVADOR,
 VIRGINIA SALVADOR,
 CONSTANTE BURGOS, LORETO
 JUAN, LORENZO SIA,
 ENCARNACION FLORENDO,
 PAULINA TABALNO, BENITO
 FLORENDO, ROGELIO
 FLORENDO, ROMULO
 FLORENDO, JESSIE CLEMENTE,
 PEDRO CIRINEO, CRESENCIO
 BARBASA, BARTOLOME DURAN,
 PRIMITIVO SIA, PLACIDO
 CUNANAN, REYNALDO
 CUNANAN, FLAVIANO CUNANAN,
 ROGELIO CUNANAN, ANDRES
 VIERNES, GERARDO CAYMO,**

G.R. No. 214262

Present:

CARPIO, *J.*, *Chairperson*,
 PERLAS-BERNABE,
 CAGUIOA,
 J. REYES, JR., and
 HERNANDO,* *JJ.*

Promulgated:

13 FEB 2019

* Designated additional Member per Special Order No. 2630 dated December 18, 2018.

BENJAMIN SANTOS, ISMAEL
ESCOBIA, VICTORIA VDA. DE
ESCOBIDO, ABRAHAM FLORES,
MARIA VDA. DE BARBERO,
ROMULO ALCOREZA,
VICTORINO LUGA, JR.,
FRANCISCO COMA, FABIAN
TAGANAS, ROSALINA TAGANAS,
SANTIAGO MANUEL, EDGARDO
VISPERAS, CARLITO JUAN,
ARMANDO YAP, MARITES
FERRER, MARIANO FERRER,
PERLITO YABUT, DAMIAN
FERRER, NECITAS MARCELINO,
BONIFACIO GUILLERMO,
AURELIO CASTILLO, DANILO
GONZALES, EPIFANIO SORIANO,
LIWLIWA EPISTOLA, JOEL
EPISTOLA, MAYA FERRER,
SANAITA OLA, ROMEO
BAUTISTA, ANTONIO VICTORIA,
CARLOS SINAGUB, REYDANTE
RODRIGUEZ, SILVIO DEL
ROSARIO, FERNANDO COMA,
FLORDELIZA SALVADOR,
NENITA A. ABAD, JERTHEY
PASCUA, TERESITA MATEO,
TERESITA ARELLANO, JAKIE
RUIZ, LEONORA PALACIO,
FELICITAS DELOS TRINOS,
WINNIE DELOS TRINOS,
PRISILLA MARIANO, LUCILA
ALCOREZA, BRUGILDA BAYSA,
MELENCIO DOMINGO, MARTIN
CALIGAN, JESUS G. BERMUDEZ,
LEO R. DELOS TRINOS,
CONSTANTE BURGOS,
CONSORCIA L. BURGOS,
LAUREANA L. UMIPIG, PEPITO
PUCUT, EVARISTO SORIANO,
LOLITO RAMOS, JUANITO
TUNGPALAN, JONATHAN
BARANGAN, PATROCINIO
ALCOREZA, LINDON BAGAYAN,
RAUL FERRER, VIRGILIO
FRANCISCO, ERNESTO PADUA,
TERESITA PINTO, MELANIO
PASCUA, RAYMUNDO PRIETO,



FLORENTINO GALASINAO,
CRISPULO DATU, ANGELITA
PASCUA, GREG JUANGA, LOLITA
REYES, EDUARDO VELASCO
ABAD, SAN MATEO DWELLERS,
ROMMEL JUANGA, EDGAR
GARCIA, JAIME CALIGAN, SR.,
RUDY TIMBREZA, DIONICIO
FERRER, INOCENCIO MANUEL,
JESUS PALOMO, FE MENDOZA,
OFELIA GAVANES, LITO
LAURESTA, EMELITA
TAGUIMCOM, ROBERT YUSON,
ELPIDIO MACALANDA, ROGELIO
RIVERA, ANDRES ANTOLIN,
ERNESTO ADION, ICHAEL ADION,
JUANITO IDOS, ROSALIA
SINAGUB, ROMY YUSON, WILSON
YUSON, DELIA GARO, MANUEL
CASTRO, SR., AURELIO
TUMAMAO, LOLITO RAMONES,
BERNARD REGANIT, CATALINO
ABAD, MARTIN CALIGAN, RELY
ROY, PESING MARIANO, BRIGIDA
BAYSON, ALICE CORTEZ, GIL
TENEFRANCIA, EVELYN GARCIA,
JESS MARTINES, FEMIA JUANGA,
MAGDALENA BENONILLA,
GERRY V. ROY, JUANITO
TUNGPALAN, JR., GEORGE
BARBOZA, LITO SANTIAGO,
JAIME ROY, CESARIO MALLARI,
ROY, LOLITA TOLENTINO,
MARVI ROY, BENJAMIN
RETOTAR, JOSEPHINE MANEJA,
PETRONILA SINOTO, ESTELITA
PUCUT, LUISITO FERNANDEZ,
MANUEL ENCARNACION, JULIE
RUIZ, GAUDENCIO SOLOMON,
MARITES YANOS, JEFFERSON
SANIDAD, JAIME GAUIRAN,
ELMER YUZON, RODRIGO
CASTILLO, SR., FLORENCIO
BLANCHE, NELSON YUSON,
MARY ANN RUMBAOA, TIOFILO
SARABIA, AMADO GAMINO,
REMEDIOS ROQUE, CARLITO
VILORIA, RODOLFO SAMBRANO,



**EMILIO DE LEON, TERESITA
SUMAWAY, WILLY BAQUIL,
MERILOU BAQUIL, MARIA
MARTIN, EDITHA SINAGUB,
LORETO SOLOMON, ALBERTO
LADERAS, LEONORA OLA,**
Petitioners,

- versus -

**ESTEFANIA MIGUEL VDA. DE
GUERRERO,**
Respondent.

x-----x

DECISION

CAGUIOA, J.:

Before the Court is a Petition for Review on *Certiorari*¹ (Petition) under Rule 45 of the Rules of Court filed by petitioners Local Government Unit of San Mateo, Isabela (petitioner Municipality of San Mateo) and several residents of Barangays 3 and 4, San Mateo, Isabela (collectively, the petitioners) against respondent Estefania Miguel *vda.* De Guerrero (Estefania).

The instant Petition assails the Decision² dated November 15, 2013 (assailed Decision) and Resolution³ dated August 14, 2014 (assailed Resolution) promulgated by the Court of Appeals⁴ (CA) in CA-G.R. SP No. 108108, which denied the petitioners' Petition for *Certiorari*⁵ (*Certiorari* Petition) that sought the annulment of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR) Letter⁶ dated February 10, 2009.

The Facts and Antecedent Proceedings

As culled from the assailed Decision, as well as the records of the case, the essential facts and antecedent proceedings of the instant case are as follows:

¹ *Rollo*, pp. 14-36.

² *Id.* at 38-56. Penned by Associate Justice Ricardo R. Rosario, with Associate Justices Rosmari D. Carandang (now a Member of this Court) and Leoncia Real-Dimagiba concurring.

³ *Id.* at 58.

⁴ Fifth Division and Former Fifth Division, respectively.

⁵ *Rollo*, pp. 59-89.

⁶ *Id.* at 90.

In 1924, [respondent Estefania] filed an undated homestead application, numbered 151736 (“HA No. 151736”), over a parcel of land, subsequently denominated as Lot No. 7035 of Cad. 211, located in the (*sic*) San Mateo, Isabela.

On 28 November 1946, Andres Guerrero (“Andres”), common-law husband of [respondent] Estefania, relinquished his rights over a one-hectare portion of Lot No. 7035 in favor of [petitioner Municipality of San Mateo].

On 26 April 1948, allegedly under threat and intimidation by the municipal officials of San Mateo, the Guerreros executed a waiver over the remaining portions of Lot No. 7035 in favor of Angel Madrid [(Madrid)].

In 1948, Lot No. 7035 was subdivided by the Bureau of Lands into Lots 7035-A to 7035-F, under Plan Bsd-10188. The lots were distributed in this manner:

- In 1950, a homestead patent covering Lot No. 7035-A was issued to [Madrid]. A certificate of title to said land was subsequently issued to him in 1955.
- Lot Nos. 7035-B to 7035-D were set aside as municipal market site, town plaza, and municipal building site in favor of the Municipality of San Mateo, pursuant to Proclamation No. 90 dated 13 September 1948.
- Lot Nos. 7035-E and 7035-F were made available for and ceded through homestead and/or sales patents, with a portion of Lot [N]o. 7035-F titled under the name of Vidal Cadiz [(Cadiz)] on 22 December 1950.

On 12 January 1953, [respondent] Estefania filed a protest (“protest”) against any and all applications in conflict with her homestead application.

In the meantime, [respondent] Estefania filed on 5 May 1967 an application for registration of title before the Regional Trial Court of Cauayan, Isabela (“cadastral court”), which application was docketed as LRC Case No. N-259. This application was opposed by [petitioner] Municipality of San Mateo and the Director of Lands, among others. In the same court and proceeding, it appears that [respondent] Estefania filed a manifestation recognizing the ownership of [petitioner] Municipality of San Mateo over Lots 7035-B to 7035-D. On 9 June 1994, the cadastral court rendered a Decision dismissing [respondent] Estefania’s application for registration of title over Lot 7035.

Years passed without any official action taken on [respondent] Estefania’s homestead application or her protest.

It was only in 2000, through an undated letter-protest filed by Romeo T. Guerrero [(Romeo)] as attorney-in-fact of his grandmother [respondent] Estefania, that there was movement in the case. [Romeo] reiterated [respondent] Estefania’s plea for the approval of her homestead application and protest against the fraudulent issuance of patents in conflict with HA No. 151736. The DENR Secretary issued DENR Special



Order No. 2000-1187 creating a Special Team (“Galano Team”) to investigate the claim of fraud.

On 19 November 2002, the DENR Secretary promulgated Special Order No. 2002-994 creating another Special Team (“Recalde Team”) to investigate alleged anomalous issuance of patents by the DENR personnel of Region II, this time covering several lots, though Lot 7035 was still included.

Meanwhile, in a Memorandum dated 23 December 2002, the GSD [(Geodetic Surveys Division)] informed the Recalde Team that “Bsd-10188 was found to be a survey plan of a lot located in Taguig, Rizal and is designated as a cemetery, as per inventory records of the [GSD].”

Believing that the legitimacy of [respondent] Estefania’s claim would depend not only on the existence of her homestead application but more importantly, on the existence of an approved final proof which could at least confer a vested right in her favor subject to the defense to be put up by the titleholders, the Recalde Team submitted its Investigation Report on 19 May 2003, with the following comments/recommendations, to wit:

The land whose title dates back more than fifty (50) years are no longer in the name of the original titleholder. A great bulk of the lots involved has passed to innocent purchasers for value. These purchasers were transferees of the heirs of the homesteader [*e.g.*] Madrid and of Teodoro dela Cruz. They relied on the certificates of title of their vendors. To question the validity of its issuance after more than fifty (50) years ago would prejudice the rights of innocent purchasers, cause the citizens to lose confidence in the integrity of the Torrens certificates of title, disturb property right, and subvert public peace. This could be peculiarly unfair in that on its face it is directed against the alleged violators of the law but in reality it is the innocent persons who stand to feel (*sic*) the impact of the action. And when it is considered that it is not really the homesteader or the original titleholder who will bear the brunt of punishment but the innocent transferees the injustice would become seriously disturbing.

The facts and fundamental legal and equitable consideration preclude impugnation of the titles which have gone through several buyers and transferees in good faith and for valuable consideration during a period of more than fifty (50) years. It will undermine the principle of indefeasibility of titles which is a basic underpinning of the Torrens System of land registration and which was precisely instituted to quiet title to land.

The DENR Secretary instructed the Regional Executive Director (“Regional Executive Director”) of DENR-Region II to resolve the issue involving Estefania’s claim over Lot 7035 in a Memorandum dated 22 August 2003. Thus, on 22 September 2003, the Regional Executive Director promulgated Special Order No. 328 creating another team (“Pablo Team”) to investigate [respondent] Estefania’s claim.



On 6 January 2004, the Pablo Team submitted its Investigation Report, finding that there was no official rejection of HA No. 151736. It did not give credence to the notation "Rejected August 1931" handwritten on the upper left portion of the homestead application for the following reasons:

1. Resolution No. 84, dated October 1, 1946 of the Municipality of San Mateo resolving to obtain a Deed of Donation from lot owners where the Municipal Government Site and Public Market would be transferred;

2. Affidavit, dated November 28, 1946 of Andres Guerrero, husband of [respondent Estefania], forfeiting rights over a 1-hectare portion of Lot 7035 under H.A. 151736;

3. The records show that after the alleged 1931 rejection of H.A. 151736, there were still several investigations conducted by the Land District Office No. 4 of Ilagan, Isabela involving Lot 7035 pursuant to the directives of the Director of Lands;

4. Preliminary Investigation Report, dated November 30, 1946 stating that: the lot applied for by [respondent Estefania] is not claimed by anybody; applicant has been occupying and cultivating the land since 1930; the husband of the applicant is a qualified entry man; and the application of [respondent Estefania] was recommended that it be given due course.

The Pablo Team maintained that, based on the Certification of the Bureau of Lands (Central Office) that Plan Bsd-10188 does not correspond to any tract of land in Isabela but is located in Taguig, Rizal, any subdivision of Lot 7035 using Plan Bsd-10188 is fraudulent, spurious and irregular. Contrary to the recommendation of the Recalde Team, the Pablo Team believed that the certificates of title covering Lots 7035-A, 7035-E and 7035-F are not indefeasible because the original owners obtained them through fraud and misrepresentation. It thus submitted the following recommendations:

Considering that there are two (2) conflicting reports on the instant case rendered by the two (2) teams headed by officials belonging to a superior Office – Director Estanislao Z. Galano being from the Office of the Secretary and Atty. Alberto R. Recalde being the OIC, Assistant Director, LMB, it is strongly recommended that the herein treated case be referred back to the DENR Central Office thru the Director, Lands Management Bureau for final decision taking into account our findings that the application of [respondent Estefania] was never rejected and that the issuance of title over Lot 7035 was tainted with fraud.

Further, the following courses of action are recommended[,] to wit:

A. To set aside and/or declare Bsd-10188 non-existent in so far as the subdivision of Lot 70335 (*sic*), CAD 211 is concerned;

B. To initiate the proper proceedings for the cancellation of titles issued to certain individuals covering portions of Lot 7035 on the basis of adopting Bsd-10188 which is non-existent;

C. To relocate the metes and bounds of Lot 7035 in accordance with Bsd-6434 which was the first subdivision plan of Lot 7035 and was approved on October 11, 1938.

On 11 February 2004, the Regional Executive Director submitted its Memorandum for the DENR Secretary, concurring with the recommendation of the Regional Investigating Committee (the Pablo Team).

On 12 May 2005, [respondent Estefania] and the Heirs of [Andres], represented by Maria Teresa Guerrero and [Romeo], filed before the DENR Secretary an Urgent Omnibus Petition and Executive Summary re: the Miguel-Guerrero Case⁷ praying that the recommendation by the Regional Investigating Committee be affirmed and issue orders accordingly.

The DENR Secretary dismissed the petition in its Order⁸ dated 25 October 2005, finding that on two separate occasions, [respondent] Estefania and Andres executed documents waiving their rights to the land subject of their homestead application. The DENR Secretary reasoned that even if the execution of said waivers was allegedly vitiated by force, threat and intimidation, the Guerreros failed to have the purportedly voidable waivers annulled. The DENR Secretary concluded that, in the light of the waivers, the fact that [respondent] Estefania's homestead application was not rejected no longer has bearing.

The DENR Secretary also reasoned that, since the records show that the land covered by Plan Bsd-10188 had long been divided, with patents issued and registered under the Torrens system, the rights to these parcels of land had long been vested. Absent any showing that the subsequent transfers had been tainted by fraud, these rights must be protected.

The Guerreros moved for reconsideration, which was granted by the DENR Secretary in its Order⁹ dated 26 October 2006, the dispositive portion of which reads:

WHEREFORE, above premises considered,
judgment is hereby rendered as follows:

⁷ Id. at 91-100.

⁸ Id. at 103-111.

⁹ Id. at 114-138.



1. The Order, dated October 25, 2005 of this Office is hereby REVERSED.

2. The Homestead Application No. 151736 of [respondent Estefania] is hereby AMENDED to cover only Lot Nos. 7035-A, 7035-E and 7035-F, using the technical descriptions of said lots with that of Plans Ap-2590, Bsd-6434 as reference, and subsequently, the said Homestead Application be given FURTHER DUE COURSE. Accordingly, all present pending public land applications covering the said lots are hereby REJECTED.

3. Plan Bsd-10188 is hereby declared as non-existent insofar as the subdivision of Lot 7035, Cad 211 is concerned and Plan Bsd-6434 is hereby RECOGNIZED being the original Subdivision Plan for San Mateo Cadastre, Province of Isabela;

4. Lot Nos. 7035-B, 7035-C and 7035-D, having been reserved for public purposes of the Municipality of San Mateo under Proclamation 90, Series of 1948, are hereby segregated from the coverage of this case. Accordingly, the Municipality of San Mateo, Province of Isabela shall initiate appropriate legal actions to correct whatever defects that are found in its titles on the aforementioned lots;

5. The Regional Executive Director, DENR-Region II, Tuguegarao, Cagayan, is hereby directed to immediately initiate cancellation and reversion proceedings against the Original Certificate of Titles issued over Lots 7035-A, 7035-E and 7035-F, Plan Bsd-10188, or portions thereof, for not only utilizing a fictitious and spurious subdivision plan but for having been acquired through fraud and misrepresentation.

SO ORDERED.

In reversing the 25 October 2005 Order, the DENR Secretary found that there was fraudulent issuances of homestead patents to [Madrid] and [Cadiz], and accordingly ordered the Regional Executive Director to initiate cancellation and reversion proceedings. It also found that [respondent] Estefania had prefe[re]ntial right and interest over the lot.

[Petitioner] Municipality of San Mateo moved for the reconsideration of the above Order, while [respondent] Estefania manifested that [petitioner] Municipality of San Mateo is not entitled to Lot Nos. 7035-B, 7035-C and 7035-D except the one-hectare portion donated by [Andres]. Edgardo L. Dela Cruz and 40 other persons moved to intervene with attached comment in intervention.

The DENR Secretary dismissed all motions in its Order¹⁰ dated 24 April 2008, x x x[.]

¹⁰ Id. at 141-149.

x x x x

The above Order became final and executory on 30 July 2008.¹¹

[More than four (4) months after the finality of the DENR's Order, o]n 3 December 2008, [petitioner] Municipality of San Mateo filed a Motion to Stay Execution.¹² It also filed a Supplemental Motion to Stay Execution¹³ on 5 January 2009. It subsequently filed a Motion for Ocular Inspection¹⁴ on 16 January 2009.

The DENR, through Undersecretary Sering, informed [petitioner] Municipality of San Mateo by [a L]etter¹⁵ dated 10 February 2009 that it has no more jurisdiction to act on the motions, x x x[.]

x x x x

Petitioners filed a Motion for Clarification¹⁶ of the 10 February 2009 [L]etter, which was received by the DENR on 16 February 2009. Petitioners aver that this Motion for Clarification had not been resolved by the DENR.

Aggrieved, [the petitioners filed a] Petition for Certiorari¹⁷ [before the CA], raising this issue:

THE DENR COMMITTED GRAVE ABUSE OF DISCRETION AMOUNTING TO LACK OR EXCESS OF JURISDICTION WHEN IT DID NOT RESOLVE THE MOTION TO STAY EXECUTION, SUPPLEMENTAL MOTION TO STAY EXECUTION AND MOTION FOR OCULAR INSPECTION.

Petitioners argue that by disowning jurisdiction to resolve the three motions, the DENR gravely and seriously abused its discretion amounting to lack or excess of jurisdiction. They insist that the three motions were properly filed, and the motion to stay execution was directed to a final and executory judgment. They submit that the DENR[']s [L]etter dated 10 February 2009 did not resolve the pending motions and instead evaded resolution by simply stating that it has no jurisdiction. Verily, they pray that [the CA] nullify and set aside the [L]etter dated 10 February 2009 and grant their motion to stay execution.¹⁸

The Ruling of the CA

In its assailed Decision, the CA dismissed petitioner Municipality of San Mateo's *Certiorari* Petition. The dispositive portion of the assailed Decision of the CA reads:

¹¹ Emphasis and underscoring supplied.

¹² *Rollo*, pp. 168-176.

¹³ *Id.* at 177-179.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 180.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 90.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 181-182.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 59-89.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 42-52.

WHEREFORE, premises considered, the instant petition is **DISMISSED** for lack of merit.

SO ORDERED.¹⁹

As explained in the assailed Decision, the CA found in the main that the DENR did not commit grave abuse of discretion amounting to lack or excess of jurisdiction when it did not resolve the Motion to Stay Execution in favor of the petitioners in its Letter dated February 10, 2009.

Petitioner Municipality of San Mateo filed a Motion for Reconsideration²⁰ dated December 18, 2013 and a Supplemental Motion for Reconsideration²¹ dated February 11, 2014, which was subsequently denied by the CA in its assailed Resolution.²²

Hence, the instant Petition.

In a Resolution²³ dated December 8, 2014, the Court required Estefania to submit her Comment to the instant Petition. However, the records reveal that Estefania failed to submit any Comment as required by the Court.

Issue

The central question to be resolved by the Court is whether the CA was correct in ruling that the DENR did not commit grave abuse of discretion amounting to lack or excess of jurisdiction when it issued the Letter dated February 10, 2009 denying the Motion to Stay Execution filed by petitioner Municipality of San Mateo.

The Court's Ruling

The instant Petition is bereft of merit. Hence, the Court resolves to DENY the instant Petition.

The grant of a Rule 65 petition for *certiorari* requires grave abuse of discretion amounting to lack or excess of jurisdiction. Grave abuse of discretion exists where an act is performed with a capricious or whimsical exercise of judgment equivalent to lack of jurisdiction. The abuse of discretion must be so patent and so gross as to amount to an evasion of positive duty or to a virtual refusal to perform a duty enjoined by law, or to act at all in contemplation of law, as where the power is exercised in an

¹⁹ Id. at 56.

²⁰ Id. at 277-285.

²¹ Id. at 286-296.

²² Id. at 58.

²³ Id. at 319-320.



arbitrary and despotic manner by reason of passion or personal hostility. Mere errors of law are not correctible *via* petition for *certiorari*.²⁴

The CA did not err in holding that no such grave abuse of discretion is extant in the instant case; no error of law, more so grave abuse of discretion, was committed by the DENR in deciding not to stay the execution of its final and executory Orders dated October 26, 2006 and April 24, 2008.

It is not disputed by any party that the aforesaid Orders of the DENR, the execution of which are sought to be enjoined by the petitioners, have already attained **finality**, with the petitioners failing to timely appeal the same.

Hence, the DENR did not commit any whimsical or capricious act in holding in its Letter dated February 10, 2009 that its previous Orders are “already final and executory there being no appeal or motion for reconsideration that was filed by the aggrieved party as per Certification dated July 3, 2008 issued by the DENR Records Management & Documentation Division. Precisely the complete records of the case were already forwarded to the Regional Office for proper implementation and execution.”²⁵

According to jurisprudence, “[p]ublic policy and sound practice demand that, at the risk of occasional errors, judgments of courts should become final and executory at some definite time fixed by law; and **this rule holds true over decisions rendered by administrative bodies exercising quasi-judicial powers.**”²⁶ Thus, as correctly held by the CA in its assailed Decision, as the Orders of the DENR had already become final and executory, there is no valid reason for the DENR to stay their execution.

Moreover, a perusal of the grounds and issues raised in the instant Petition reveal that, in alleging grave abuse of discretion on the part of the DENR in issuing its Letter dated February 10, 2009, the petitioners are raising factual matters, asking the Court to rule on the factual circumstances surrounding the DENR’s final and executory Orders dated October 26, 2006 and April 24, 2008.

The Court cannot take cognizance of such issues.

Foremost, it must be stressed that the subject matter of the instant case, as made manifest in the petitioners’ *Certiorari* Petition,²⁷ is the purported grave abuse of discretion committed by the DENR in issuing its

²⁴ *Casent Realty & Development Corp. v. Premiere Development Bank*, 516 Phil. 219, 226-227 (2006).

²⁵ *Rollo*, p. 90.

²⁶ *Brett v. Intermediate Appellate Court*, 269 Phil. 722, 733 (1990). Emphasis supplied.

²⁷ See *rollo*, p. 61.

Letter dated February 10, 2009, and not its Orders dated October 26, 2006 and April 24, 2008.

Also, as seen in the allegations contained in the *Certiorari* Petition, the denial of which by the CA is the subject matter of the instant Petition, grave abuse of discretion was imputed against the DENR in issuing its Letter dated February 10, 2009, not because it previously ruled erroneously on the facts and the law surrounding its previous Orders, but due to the alleged evasion of duty supposedly committed by the DENR in holding that it no longer had any jurisdiction to stay the execution of its final and executory Orders.

The Court notes that the *Certiorari* Petition did not invoke at all as grounds for grave abuse of discretion the purported erroneous factual findings supposedly made by the DENR in its Orders dated October 26, 2006 and April 24, 2008. Accordingly, the assailed Decision and Resolution of the CA delved solely on the Letter dated February 10, 2009 and not the Orders dated October 26, 2006 and April 24, 2008, as the latter Orders were beyond the scope of the petitioners' *Certiorari* Petition.

To be sure, the Court's jurisdiction in a petition for review is limited to reviewing or revising errors of law allegedly committed by the appellate court.²⁸ Hence, any issue beyond the scope of the CA's assailed Decision and Resolution, such as the issues raised by the petitioners in the instant Petition concerning the DENR's other Orders, are not reviewable by the Court.

Further, it is elementary that the Court is not a trier of facts. Its jurisdiction is limited to reviewing and revising errors of law, with the findings of fact being generally conclusive and not reviewable by the Court.²⁹ Hence, to dwell and rule on the various factual issues raised by the petitioners in the instant Petition, as the petitioners would want the Court to do, would be a clear violation of this basic principle.

The factual findings of administrative bodies charged with their specific field of expertise, such as the DENR, are afforded great weight by the courts, and in the absence of substantial showing that such findings were made from an erroneous estimation of the evidence presented, they are conclusive, and in the interest of stability of the governmental structure, should not be disturbed.³⁰

In the instant case, the records show that the factual findings of the DENR in its final and executory Orders dated October 26, 2006 and April 24, 2008, the execution of which were not allowed to be stayed by the DENR in the assailed Letter dated February 10, 2009, were reached after a

²⁸ *Omandam v. Court of Appeals*, 402 Phil. 511, 518 (2001).

²⁹ *Donato, Jr. v. Civil Service Commission*, 543 Phil. 731, 742-743 (2007).

³⁰ See *Jose v. Novida*, 738 Phil. 99, 120 (2014).

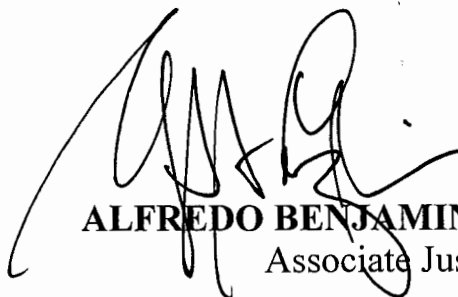
protracted, comprehensive and exhaustive investigative procedure conducted by the DENR. The Court does not see any cogent reason to reverse the DENR's factual findings. And to reiterate once again, the factual findings contained in the DENR's Orders that are being assailed by the petitioners in the instant Petition have already attained finality, there being no previous appeal or motion for reconsideration filed by the petitioners to assail such findings. Therefore, the factual issues raised by the petitioners in the instant case are not cognizable by the Court.

In any case, the issues raised by the petitioners in the instant Petition, which, in essence, delve into why the certificates of title covering the subject lots should not be cancelled, should be raised instead in the proper cancellation and reversion proceedings, and not in the instant case. To stress, the DENR's Orders dated October 26, 2006 and April 24, 2008 merely ordered the Regional Executive Director, DENR-Region II, Tuguegarao, Cagayan to initiate cancellation and reversion proceedings. Hence, the issues raised by the petitioners in the instant Petition should be properly ventilated in such cancellation and reversion proceedings, and not in the instant case where the sole issue is centered on the propriety of the DENR's Letter dated February 10, 2009 denying petitioner Municipality of San Mateo's Motion to Stay Execution.

All told, the Court finds that there was no reversible error committed by the CA in issuing its assailed Decision and Resolution that warrants the Court's exercise of its discretionary appellate jurisdiction.

WHEREFORE, premises considered, the instant Petition is hereby **DENIED**. The Decision dated November 15, 2013 and Resolution dated August 14, 2014 promulgated by the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. SP No. 108108 are **AFFIRMED**.

SO ORDERED.




ALFREDO BENJAMIN S. CAGUIOA
Associate Justice

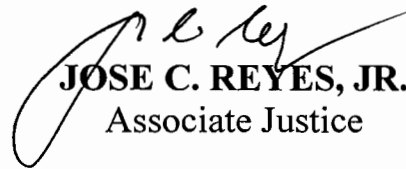
WE CONCUR:




ANTONIO T. CARPIO
Associate Justice
Chairperson



ESTELA M. PERLAS-BERNABE
Associate Justice



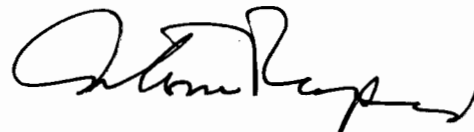
JOSE C. REYES, JR.
Associate Justice



RAMON PAUL L. HERNANDO
Associate Justice

ATTESTATION

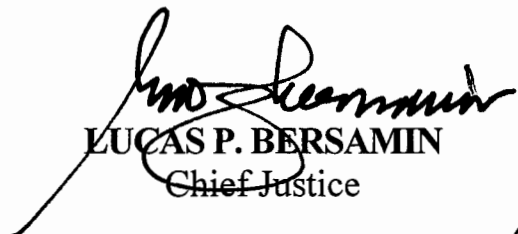
I attest that the conclusions in the above Decision had been reached in consultation before the case was assigned to the writer of the opinion of the Court's Division.



ANTONIO T. CARPIO
Associate Justice
Chairperson, Second Division

CERTIFICATION

Pursuant to Section 13, Article VIII of the Constitution and the Division Chairperson's Attestation, I certify that the conclusions in the above Decision had been reached in consultation before the case was assigned to the writer of the opinion of the Court's Division.



LUCAS P. BERSAMIN
Chief Justice

