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WEATHER BUREAU'S CENTENNIAL

ANNOUNCEMENT on the year-long observance of the Weather Bureau of its centennial anniversary has set off much thinking on the progress and shortcomings of this government agency, best known to the public here for its forecasting service.

This is a service that is vital in a country like the Philippines, a major portion of which lies in the typhoon belt. Storm warnings can spell the difference between survival or disaster. These are needed not only by people who could lie in the path of an oncoming storm but by ships at sea, aircraft aloft and countless others dependent on weather for life and livelihood.

Like other government agencies abroad performing similar functions, the Weather Bureau is very much taken for granted until something goes wrong with its forecasts. Weather may be fickle, and twisters, wet or dry, very much more so because of their very nature, but people at large expect the Weather Bureau to perform with the precision of a computing machine.

It has not so performed in the recent past, causing some people to wonder what's wrong and others to make odious comparisons with the performance of the old Manila Observatory and even the prewar Weather Bureau. These could be unkind. Those old agencies were not infallible, either, neither did those who ran them claim they were.

The present institution may have radar and other modern equipment to aid it in its work but it is still handicapped by sad lacks in many areas. It may have 300 weather stations all over the country, and numerous aircraft and ships reporting on barometric heights, cloud formations and other details. Still its facilities are far from adequate, particularly in the outposts whose observation reports can contribute to excellence or blunder in performance.

As the Weather Bureau marks its first 100 years of existence, let us bear its limitations in mind together with its work in the face of handicaps and limitations. Then, perhaps, we can get into the spirit of the celebration.