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Sibuyan mining firm suspends operations

By **Madonna T. Virola**
and **Melvin Gascon**
@InqNational

CITY OF CALAPAN—Following a weeklong protest against its mining exploration activities on Sibuyan Island in Romblon province, Altai Philippines Mining Corp. (APMC) announced on Monday that it was voluntarily suspending its operations.

In a statement, the company said it had decided to suspend all its exploration and testing activities on the island as it began coordinating with authorities to address the concerns or issues raised by protesters related to its operations.

"[APMC] is committed to maintaining the highest standards of environmental responsibility and community engagement," it said. The company did not say if and when it would reopen.

Earlier, the APMC was cited by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on Feb. 4 for violations, including building a causeway without an environmental clearance and cutting trees without a permit. It was ordered to suspend work on the causeway and to explain within 10 days why it should not be fined for violating the Forestry Code.

No reaction

In its announcement on Monday, the company did not address the issues raised by the DENR.

Instead, it said that its priority was "to maintain peace and order, to ensure the concerns and well-being of the Sibuyanons, and to ensure that no parties are negatively impacted by our operations."

Antimining residents, however, said that they would continue barricading APMC's port

in San Fernando town to ensure that the company's trucks would not haul nickel ore from its mining site on the island.

"We will still hold the line even if [APMC] voluntarily suspends [its] operations. We will continue our barricade," Rodne Galicha, leader of the protesters, said in a Facebook post on Monday.

According to the residents, the mining company did not obtain the necessary permits to operate on the island, which covers Romblon's towns of Cajidiocan, Magdiwang and San Fernando.

Antimining advocates expressed concern that the "illegal" mining activities of APMC would destroy the unspoiled ecosystem of the crescent-shaped island.

Since Jan. 29, protesters have formed a human barricade to stop the company's hauling trucks from leaving the port as they called on authorities to suspend

mining operations on Sibuyan.

On Feb. 3, two residents were injured when police officers tried to disperse the protesters who were blocking the path of the trucks.

Senate investigation

Sen. Risa Hontiveros called for an investigation of the clashes between local police and residents, as she filed proposed Senate Resolution No. 459, which urged the legislative body to look into the mining activities of APMC on the island.

"The peaceful resistance being put up by residents against the supposed aggression by a mining company need not end in violence, as it seeks to invade their places of abode. Barricading residents only wanted to protect the natural resources of their locality and they are well within their rights to protest," Hontiveros said on Monday. INQ



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Altai defends legality of Sibuyan, Romblon mining operations

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA
@jonlmayuga

ALTAI Philippines Mining Corporation (APMC) on Monday belied allegations that its operation on Sibuyan Island in Romblon province is unlawful, saying the company has secured all necessary permits and licenses to lawfully and peacefully conduct business in the area.

In a statement, APMC said its operation began many years before it even set up camp on-site by undertaking comprehensive environmental and socioeconomic studies and outcome analyses.

The mining company said it has also consulted with government regulators and agencies, and engaged the surrounding communities to ensure that operations will be safe, legitimate, and with minimal environmental effects.

"Given this, we categorically deny all allegations questioning the legality of our Sibuyan operations. Our company has secured all the necessary permits and licenses to lawfully

lines set by the law.

"We would like to assure the public that APMC will continue to strictly and uncompromisingly adhere to all laws pertinent to our activities, for the current exploration and future development, operation, and rehabilitation plans. We pray that those who may have grievances against this will observe the same," the company said.

The company said it remains committed to ensure that its mining operations involve and respect all stakeholders, minimize environmental impact, and prioritize a fair division of socioeconomic benefits.

The Social Action Network and Caritas Philippines, for its part expressed "serious concern over the recent events in Romblon and stand in solidarity with its people who are taking the boldest stance to protect their only home—the beautiful, ecologically rich, and peaceful Sibuyan Island."

In a statement, the group said:

■ We strongly support the Diocese of Romblon's efforts to protect the environment, by opposing the

and peacefully conduct our business in the area," APMC said.

According to APMC, the company's right to operate is "as inviolable as the right to peaceful protest and assembly."

To recall, a series of protests in San Antonio, Romblon led by a group called Sibuyan Against Mining has reportedly resulted in the violent dispersal of protesters last week, injuring two people.

Subsequently, following the protests, the DENR issued a Notice of Violations (NOV) to the company, followed by the call for the government to issue a cease-and-desist order to stop the company's operation on the island.

APMC said it is deeply saddened by the recent hostilities that happened near the vicinity of the company's mining exploration operations.

"Based on reports, there were a few incidents involving our employees, law enforcement personnel, and protesters who were purportedly hurt when tensions got out of hand at the site. Our company has exhausted all means to help those

mining project in Sibuyan.

■ We are committed to advancing the principles of Laudato Si and be bearers of hope in the face of an ecological crisis, following our Lord Jesus, our Redeemer. As such, we commit to "integrate the care of creation as our common home in our teaching and practice of Christian discipleship" through concrete ecological actions in caring for our

who may have been hurt, and to do whatever we can to de-escalate the situation," the mining company said.

However, the company said it is distressed by the fact that the ideology of the protesters may not be as different from our company's core values as it would seem.

"While the full and outright refusal of all mining operations is simply not realistic [nor economically sustainable], Altai Philippines Mining Corporation is equally opposed to all forms of illegal, reckless, and irresponsible mining," the company said.

It is for that reason that the APMC said it has repeatedly reached out to the protesters to establish dialogue, and hopefully find common ground.

"We hoped that we could assure them that our activities are lawful and compliant to government requirements, and fully aligned with global best practices. Unfortunately, these efforts did not bear fruit," the company said.

According to APMC, conflict resolution begins when the affected parties stay within the clear guide-

Common Horne.

■ We feel a moral duty to safeguard and uphold the well-being of our shared environment. Therefore, we believe that the project would not serve the overall interests of the province and would pose a threat, particularly to the lives and lands of the communities on the island, and the rich biodiversity in the area.



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Regional Updates

Probe of Sibuyan mining sought

A SENATOR has sought a probe of nickel and metallic mining operations on Sibuyan island in Romblon province south of the Philippines after residents set up a human barricade to block these activities.

"The Senate should hear all stakeholders and unravel the layers of issues that have plagued Sibuyan island for decades," Senator Ana Theresia "Risa" N. Hontiveros-Baraquel said in a statement on Monday.

"Large-scale mining is already damaging the environment, but it seems that the company is still breaking laws in the conduct of their business," she added in Filipino, referring to Altai Philippines Mining Corp. "There are repeated reports about the violence caused by mining companies and it's time the government really listened to the community's grievances."

In a statement, Altai said it is "committed to maintaining the highest standards of environmental responsibility and community engagement."

"In line with this commitment, we have decided to voluntarily halt all exploration and testing activities in Sibuyan Island and to continue our full cooperation and coordination with the relevant authorities to address any concerns or issues that have been raised," it added.

At least two residents got injured due to police dispersal, she said, citing news reports. "The residents' peaceful resistance to the intrusion of mining companies in their own homes should not turn into violence."

"Residents just want to protect the natural resources in their area," she added. "The residents are well within their rights to protest."

Ms. Hontiveros said Sibuyan residents have been fighting for close to two decades to stop mining exploration in their area. But the island soon became a mining hotspot for its nickel resource.

Escalation of mining activities, she said, increased further in September 2021 after the Environment department lifted its cease-and-desist order against Altai.

By December 2022, a mineral ore export permit had been issued to the company, allowing it to bulk test 50,000 metric tons of ore. But residents said the company had failed to get a village clearance, municipal business permit and foreshore lease contract from the Environment department, as well as a permit to build a private port from the Philippine Ports Authority.

The Department of Trade and Industry has said the Philippines would prioritize nickel exports as a core economic strategy.

"This economic prospect can urge mining companies to aggressively do business that will undermine the rights and welfare of the people of Sibuyan," Ms. Hontiveros said. "With the desire to advance quickly, they don't realize that there are already people being stepped on."

The senator noted Sibuyan's distinction of being "the Galapagos in Asia" for its extraordinary flora and fauna.

"We in the Senate should help champion the conservation of the island's endemic flora and fauna, defend its coastal communities from long-term ecological devastation and protect the residents from violent incursions of mining companies," she said. — Alyssa

Nicole O. Tan



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Gatchalians behind Sibuyan mining ops?

BY JING VILLAMENTE

Militant group Alyansa Tigil Mina on Monday bared that "Plastics King" William Gatchalian is the one behind the questionable mining operations of the Altai Philippines Mining Corp.

The ATM alleges that the Gatchalians own APMC. They claim that Gatchalian's involvement in the mining company is through his son Kenneth, who is also a director of APMC's parent firm.

The group provided the *Daily Tribune* some documents showing that Kenneth Gatchalian sits as chairman of Wellex Mining Corp., one of the 23 mining firms ordered closed in February 2017 by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources under then Secretary Regina Lopez.

The ATM also said Kenneth Gatchalian is the direct beneficiary of Dynamo Atlantic Ltd. that acquired Sibuyan Nickel Properties Development Corp., partner of Altai Philippines Mining Corp. whose president is a former official of the Wellex Group.

Kenneth Gatchalian is the brother

of Senator Sherwin Gatchalian who was recently appointed Department of Social Welfare and Development Secretary Rex Gatchalian.

Operations ceased

Over the weekend, the DENR had ordered APMC to cease its operations in Romblon due to lack of permits.

The department issued the order stopping the mining company's operations on Saturday after Sibuyan residents clashed with police to halt APMC's mining activities in their community.

According to a notice of violation issued by the DENR-Mimaropa Environment Bureau, Altai Philippines Mining Corporation had violated the implementing rules and regulations of the Water Code of the Philippines.

The DENR alleged that APMC did not have a foreshore lease agreement for a pier, had built a causeway without securing an Environmental Compliance Certificate, and had cut down trees without a permit.

EDJEN OLIQUINO



Sibuyan mining activities slammed

BY GERARD NAVAL

THE Catholic Church in the Philippines yesterday denounced the controversial mining activities in Sibuyan Island, saying the project of the Altai Philippines Mining Corporation (APMC) will not serve the interest of Romblon and will only damage the environment.

In a unified statement released by the Caritas Philippines, several dioceses and archdioceses, social action centers, and Caritas organizations called for the halt in the mining operations in Sibuyan Island.

"The Social Action Network and Caritas Philippines express serious concerns over the recent events in Romblon and stand in solidarity with its people, who are taking the boldest stance to protect their only home – the beautiful, ecologically rich, and peaceful Sibuyan Island," said the joint statement.

"We call on Altai Philippines Mining Corporation and other conglomerates to stop destructive mining," it also said, adding that the mining activities will only further escalate the degrading of the island's natural resources.

Worse, they said the project will not bode well for the communities living in the island, especially in the long term.

"We believe that the project would not serve the overall interests of the province and would pose a threat, particularly to the lives and lands of the communities on the island, and the rich biodiversity in the area," they said.

"We feel a moral duty to safeguard and uphold the well-being of our shared environment," they added.

The APMC, in a statement, announced it has "decided to volun-

tarily halt all exploration and testing activities in Sibuyan Island and to continue our full cooperation and coordination with the relevant authorities to address any concerns or issues that have been raised."

It reiterated that it is "committed to maintaining the highest standards of environmental responsibility and community engagement."

"Our priority is to maintain peace and order, to ensure the concerns and well-being of the Sibuyanons, and to ensure that no parties are negatively impacted by our operations. We pride ourselves as stalwarts of sustainable and responsible mining, so we take this as an opportunity to address all recent concerns brought up against our Sibuyan exploration. We look forward to working with all stakeholders to resolve any outstanding concerns," it also said.

Aside from calling on the mining firm to cease its operations, the Church organizations also called on the national government to perform its true mandate.

"We urge the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, as well as all government offices, to prioritize protecting people and nature before vested socio-economic and political interests," they said.

Similarly, the groups appealed to the police authorities to maintain partiality towards justice.

"We bid all law enforcement agencies to rightfully serve justice," said the groups.

Expressing solidarity and agreement with the unified statement are 63 dioceses and archdioceses, 30 social action centers, and 23 Caritas organizations.



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ALTAI MINING SA SIBUYAN KAKALKALIN NG SENADO

ISANG resolusyon ang inihain sa Senado na naglalayong imbestigahan ang aktibidad ng pagmimina ng nickel sa Sibuyan Island na maring tinutulan ng mga residente roon.

Sa Senate Resolution No. 459 ni Senadora Risa Hontiveros, nais nitong pakinggan at ungkatin ang mga isyung bumabalot sa aktibidad ng minahan sa Sibuyan Island na inabot na ng ilang dekada.

"The Senate should hear all stakeholders and unravel the layers of issues that have plagued Sibuyan Island for decades. Nakakasira na nga ang malakihang pagmimina sa kalikasan, mukhang may paglabag pa ng mga batas ang kompanya sa pagsasagawa ng kanilang negosyo," sabi ni Hontiveros sa isang statement.

"Paulit-ulit ang mga ulat tungkol sa kara-

hasang dulot ng mga mining companies at panahon nang tunay na pakinggan naman ng gobyerno ang hinaing ng komunidad," dagdag pa niya.

Noong Biyernes, dalawang residente ng isla ang nasugatan matapos nilang harangin ang mga trak ng Altai Philippines Mining Corporation (APMC) para hindi makapasok sa pribadong daungan. Ang kompanya ay minamay-ari ni 'plastic king' William Gatchalian.

Inutos na ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ang pagtigil sa operasyon ng minahan matapos ang paglabag sa implemennting rules and regulation ng Water Code of the Philippines.

Sa isang statement, inihayag ng Altai Philippines Mining Corporation na boluntaryo na nilang tinigil ang explo-

ration at testing activities sa Sibuyan Island. Nangako rin silang makikipagtulungan sa mga awtoridad upang maresolba ang isyu sa minahan.

Ang Sibuyan Island, ayon sa Google, ay tintuturing ng mga local at international natural scientist bilang 'Galapagos of Asia' dahil mayaman ito sa flora at fauna at dito rin naninirahan ang mga threatened species ng mga ibon sa Mt. Guiting Guiting National Park. (Dindo Matining)



May mga kumita ng milyones sa pagpasok ng mining sa Sibuyan island?



TUMIGIL na sa paghahakot ng nickel ores ang mga truck ng Altai Philippines Mining Corporation sa Barangay Spana, San Fernando, Sibuyan island, Romblon. Many thanks sa matinding pagtutol at pagbarikada ng mga residente, but no thanks sa local government unit ng San Fernando partikular sa kanilang alkalde na tila nagsilbi pang spokesperson ng mining company!

Ipinatigil ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources ang operasyon. Nilabag kasi ng Altai ang Presidential Decree 705, Revised Forestry Code of the Philippines tungkol sa pagpuputol sa mga puno; at nilabag ang Section 4 ng PD 1586 na nagsasabing: "No person, partnership, or corporation shall undertake or operate any environmental critical project

or operate in an environmental critical area without securing an environmental compliance certificate."

Sa mga paglabag na ito ng naturang mining company na pag-aari ng Gatchalians, dapat pagpanagutin sila sa mga pinutol na puno. Aba'y hindi puwede na ganun lang, pinatigil lang. Kung ang mag-uuling nga ay kinukulong at pinagmumulta kahit sanga lang ng mangga ang inuling, ito pa kayang daan daang magagandang puno ang tinumba!?

Dapat pagpanagutin din ng DENR ang Altai Mining sa ginawa nitong pier para sa mga barko na hahakot ng minerals. Aba'y napakaraming corals ang sinira nila sa baybayin ng San Fernando! Kung ang isang mangingisda nga na mahuling nag-uwi o nagbenta ng corals ay kinakasuhan, ito pang halos isang ektarya ng corals ang tinambakan ng Altai. Animal!

Alam nyo, mga pare't mare, sigurado akong may mga kumita na opisyal partikular politiko sa pagpasok ng Altai Mining sa isla ng Sibuyan. Oo!

Hindi magkakaalakas-loob ang mining company na ito na wakwakin ang bundok ng Sibuyan kung walang mataas na opisyal ng lalawigan na nagbigay ng permiso sa kanila kahit kulang-kulang-sila sa mga permit para magmina sa isang restricted

area ng DENR.

Sabi, may nabigyan ng P10 million, P5 million at P2.5 million na ilang opisyal na naghudas sa mamamayan ng Sibuyan island? Nabuking daw ito sa text ng isang politiko sa kanyang anak. Tsk tsk tsk...

Kumusta na kaya ngayon ang mga opisyal na ito? Nakakatulog pa kaya sila ng mahirbing? Sana bangungutin kayo, mga animal!

Dapat mag-ingat si Pangulong "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. sa mga dating opisyal na nasangkot sa katiwalian na nag-aaplay uli ngayon para makabalik sa gobyerno.

Makabubuting huwag niya nang tanggapin ang mga taong ito lalo kung may nakabinbin na kaso sa Ombudsman lalo sa Sandiganbayan. Dahil kapag nabigyan uli ng pagkakataon ang mga taong ito, tiyak magnanakaw uli sila sa gobyerno. Mismo!

Inaresto sa kanyang tahanan sa UP Diliman ang UP professor at dating presidente ng All UP Academic Employees Union na si Melania Flores. Dinala raw ito sa Camp Karingal. Bakit kaya? Subaybayan!



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Operasyon ng mining company sa Sibuyan sinuspinde ng DENR; mga pulis mananagot sa pagbuwag sa barikada

IPINAG-UTOS ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ang pagpapatigil sa operasyon ng mining company sa Sibuyan island, Romblon dahil sa ilang violations.

Base sa 'notice of violation' na ipinalabas ng DENR-Mimaropa Environment Bureau, lumabag ang Altai Philippines Mining Corporation (APMC) sa implementing rules and regulations ng Water Code of the Philippines.

Sinabi ng DENR na walang 'foreshore lease agreement' ang APMC para sa pier, nagtayo ng causeway ng walang 'Environmental Compliance Certificate', at nagputol ng mga puno ng walang permit.

Samantala, nagpulong ang gobyerno at company officials, maging mga lokal upang talakayin ang sitwasyon.

"Nakapag-release naman ang DENR ng order na... at nakapagpaskil na ipatigil muna ang operation ng Altai dito. Dahil sa napakaraming violations," pahayag ni Elizabeth Ibanez ng Sibuyanon Against Mining.

Samantala, matapos tangkain ng mga pulis nitong Biyernes na gibain ang barikadang inilagay ng mga nagpoprotesta sa operasyon ng APMC, inihayag ni Area Police-Southern Luzon commander Lieutenant General Rhoderick Armamento na mananagot ang mga sangkot na

pulis kapag inireklamo.

"Based on the reports, there were a few incidents involving our employees, law enforcement personnel, and protesters who were purportedly hurt when tensions got out of hand at the site," ayon naman sa APMC.

"We are particularly distressed by the fact that the ideology of these protesters may not be as different from our company's core values as it would seem. While the full and outright refusal of all mining operations is simply not realistic (nor economically sustainable), Altai Philippines Mining Corporation (APMC) is equally opposed to all forms of illegal, reckless, and irre-

sponsible mining."

"Given this, we categorically deny all allegations questioning the legality of our Sibuyan operations. Our company has secured all the necessary permits and licenses to lawfully and peacefully conduct our business in the area," pahayag ng kompanya.

"Our right to operate is as inviolable as the right to peaceful protest and assembly. For that reason, we repeatedly reached out to the protesters to establish dialogue, and hopefully find common ground. We hoped that we could assure them that our activities are lawful and compliant to government requirements, and fully aligned with global best practices. Unfortunately, these efforts did not bear fruit," patuloy nito.

Ang APMC ay pag-aari ng Gachalians.



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Mining protest in Romblon continues

BY BELLA CARIASO

AN official of Barangay España, San Fernando, Romblon on Monday said that the human barricade of residents will continue despite the suspension order issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Mimaropa Regional Office against Altai Philippines Mining Company (APMC).

In a radio interview, Barangay España Councilor Ihay Romero said that residents will continue barricading as the ship, barge and trucks of APMC remain in the area.

"Our barricade will continue as we are still monitoring the ship at the pier, as well as the trucks," Romero said.

Residents of Sibuyan Island in Romblon formed a human blockade to prevent the mobilization of trucks loaded with ore.

Romero noted that at least seven trucks of APMC are still parked in the mountains.

"The police are also here watching us," he said.

According to Romero, the mining company failed to secure permits from the village and municipality.

At the same time, he criticized the police for allegedly siding with the APMC after they allowed the entry of three trucks carrying the ore.

"The police should side with the residents of Barangay España but the chief of police

signaled as caught in the video to allow the entry of the trucks," Romero said.

He claimed that the APMC transported at least 20 trucks to operate on the island.

He noted that he was even handcuffed by the police even though the barricade being conducted in the area remains peaceful.

"We have been barricading the area for 12 days and we even provided the police with snacks like sweet potatoes, coffee and bread because we thought they were on our side," Romero said.

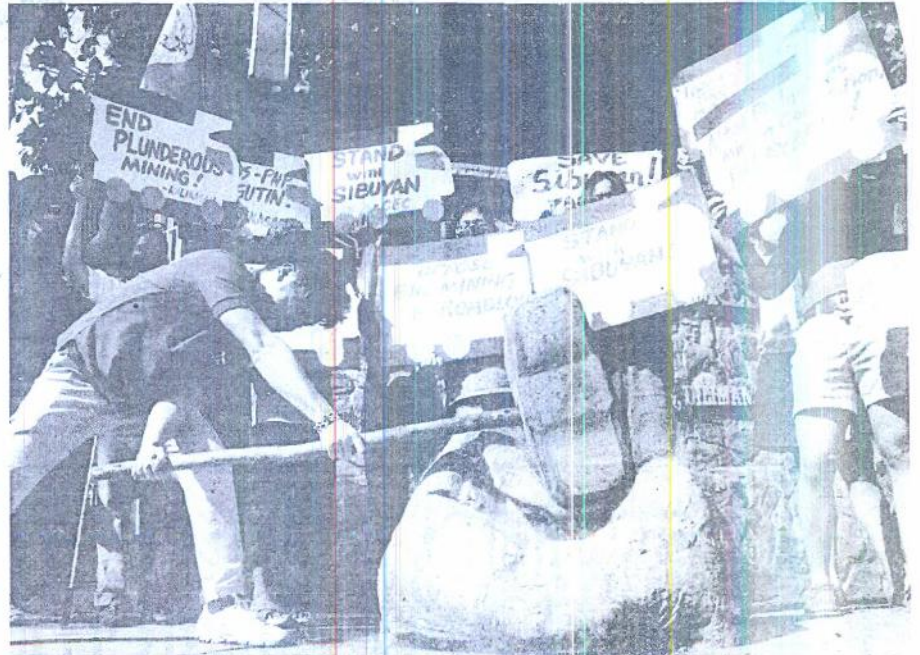
He added that the police did not entertain his complaint against the personnel who handcuffed him.

"They did not accept my blotter since the respondent is their officer," he noted.

Romero said the mining operation already resulted in the denudation of forest in the mountains.

"As you can see in the video, there is a portion of the mountain that has no forest cover," he said.

On Feb. 2, 2022, DENR Mimaropa regional director Joe



NO TO MINING Members of Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment rallied in front of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources central office in Quezon City to protest against the mining operations in Sibuyan Island, Romblon on Monday, Feb. 6, 2023. PHOTO BY MIKE DE JUAN

Amil Salino ordered the APMC to suspend its mining operation in Sibuyan Island.

Salino also issued a notice of violation against APMC for operating a causeway project without

an environmental compliance certificate.

In his letter to APMC Chairman and President Hanniel Ngo, Salino also ordered the former to submit within 10 days

an explanation why the mining company should not be fined with P'50,000.

"You are hereby directed to suspend and further developments relative to the construction

of operations of the causeway project effective immediately," Salino said.

He also directed Ngo to attend a technical conference on Feb. 7, 2023.



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ANTI-MINING PROTEST.

Members of Kailakasan People's network stage a demonstration-protest in front of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) main office in Quezon City to denounce mining in Sibuyan Island.

Manny Palmero





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Manila Water: DENR should accept SC order

MANILA Water Co. on Monday said it would abide by a Supreme Court decision that settled fines imposed against the firm and the Manila Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) for violating the Clean Water Act.

In a disclosure filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Manila Water said it was jointly and severally liable with the MWSS for a total amount of P921,464,184.

The Supreme Court denied a motion for partial reconsideration filed by the Office of the Solicitor General for the respondents, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), et.al.

It also ruled that no further pleadings or motions would be entertained and that entry of judgment would also be made immediately.

"With this denial by the Supreme Court of the government's Motion for Partial Reconsideration, the DENR will have no basis to continue to refuse to accept the company's payment of fines as computed by the court," Manila Water said.

Aside from the solidary liability to pay the fines as modified by the July 19, 2022 resolution of the Supreme Court, the firm is required to submit a completion plan for the establishment and operation of water, sewerage and sanitation projects covering the period up to 2037, to include periodic five-year completion targets with the end-goal of achieving 100 percent water, sewerage and sanitation coverage.

The high court earlier cut down fines

imposed on Maynilad Water Services Inc., Manila Water and MWSS for their noncompliance with the Clean Water Act. From the previous P921 million, the tribunal reduced the fine to P202 million.

The Supreme Court in 2019 fined Maynilad and MWSS P921,464,184 and separately fined Manila Water and MWSS the same amount.

The water concessionaires were "found liable for violation of Sec. 8 of the Philippine Clean Water Act," which requires the connection of existing sewage lines in all subdivisions, condominiums, commercial centers and other establishments, including households, to an available sewerage system.

In 2009, the DENR imposed a P29.4-million fine against MWSS, Maynilad and Manila Water for having failed to install and maintain wastewater treatment facilities within five years after the Clean Water Act was enacted in 2004. The Court of Appeals (CA) upheld the DENR's decision in 2013.

Both Maynilad and Manila Water filed separate motions for reconsideration, where they called on the Supreme Court in 2019 to reverse the CA decision as it was "impossible" to establish a complete centralized sewage system within five years.

According to Manila Water, it now operates 41 treatment facilities, and is increasing wastewater treatment capacity by 925 percent, from the previous 40 million liters per day (MLD) to 410 MLD at present.

FRANCIS EARL CUETO



Manila Water readies plan for sanitation projects until 2037

MANILA Water Co., Inc. on Monday said that it would submit its completion plan to build and operate water, sewerage and sanitation projects until 2037.

In a regulatory filing on Monday, Manila Water said it had received on Monday a copy of the Jan. 17, 2023 notice from the Supreme Court (SC) that "denied with finality" a motion for partial reconsideration filed by the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

"It also stated that no further pleadings or motions will be entertained, and that entry of judgment will be made immediately," the listed company said.

With the denial, the DENR will have no basis to continue to refuse to accept the company's payment of fines as computed by the court, Manila Water said. The fines were imposed on the water concessionaires in their case for non-compliance with Republic Act No. 9275 or the Philippine Clean Water Act of 2004.

Aside from the fines, the company said the SC notice also mandated the east zone water concessionaire to submit as required by its legislative franchise a plan for the establishment and operation of water and sanitation projects until the 2037 period.

This includes a five-year completion target, which will achieve 100% water, sewerage and sanitation coverage by 2037.

In October last year, the SC unanimously affirmed its 2019 ruling that the Metropolitan Water Works and Sewerage System (MWSS), Manila Water, and Maynilad Water Services, Inc., should be held liable for violating Section 8 of the Clean Water Act.

However, the High Court also allowed the lowering of the fines imposed on the two concessionaires to P30,000 per day from P200,000 per day from the day of the violation on May 7, 2009 to Jan. 21, 2022, which amounts to P202.26 million.

In 2009, the DENR filed a complaint against MWSS and its concessionaires, Maynilad and Manila Water, for their failure to provide, install, operate, and maintain adequate wastewater treatment facilities for the

sewerage system, resulting in the degraded quality and beneficial use of the receiving bodies of water leading to Manila Bay.

Section 8 of the Clean Water Act mandates the connection of existing sewage lines in all subdivisions, condominiums, commercial centers and other establishments, including households, to an available sewerage system within five years from the law's effectivity in 2004.

Manila Water said it made several attempts to pay the fine but the DENR rejected the payment. The OSG then filed a motion for partial reconsideration on Nov. 2, 2022.

In the SC notice denying the motion, the court said that "the issues raised by the OSG have been passed upon and no substantial arguments were presented to warrant the reversal."

MAYNILAD

Meanwhile, Maynilad is set to spend around P3.2 billion for the construction of four modular treatment plants in Cavite, the west zone water concessionaire said on Monday.

"Cavite is the farthest point of our concession area, so there are portions that do not yet receive 24-hour water supply. The new modular treatment plants will draw water from adjacent dams, and serve as a dedicated supply source that can lengthen supply availability for these underserved areas," Maynilad Chief Operating Officer Randolph T. Estrellado, said in a media release on Monday.

The modular treatment plants are expected to be completed between 2023 and 2024, these will be located in the province of Cavite in the cities of Bacoor and Imus, the four modular treatment plants will have a combined water output of 47 million liters per day (MLD) which can provide water supply to about 200,000 households.

Metro Pacific Investments Corp., which has a majority stake in Maynilad, is one of three Philippine units of Hong Kong-based First Pacific Co. Ltd., the others being Philex Mining Corp. and PLDT Inc. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**



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Restoring Pasig River

EVERYMAN

By Melandrew T. Velasco

FIRST, the Tullahan River.

This year, San Miguel Corporation (SMC), one of the country's most diversified companies, is poised to accomplish another feat: the rehabilitation of the historic Pasig River.

Approximately 27 kilometers long, Pasig River connects Laguna de Bay and Manila Bay.

The main Pasig River passes through the cities of Taguig, Pasig, Makati, Mandaluyong and Manila, and the municipality of Taytay in Rizal.

The river system has four major tributaries—Marikina, Pateros-Taguig, Napindan and San Juan—and 43 minor tributaries such as creeks and esteros mostly in Manila.

Pasig River, which played an important role in the development of Manila and its neighboring cities and town, was famous for its pristine waters.

It was not only a source of water, livelihood nor a transport route; it was also a place for recreation.

I came across a speech by the late President

Ferdinand E. Marcos Sr. delivered before the Philippine Jaycees in 1970 where he reminisced about Pasig River.

"I remember when I was young, I used to be a member of an outboard motorboat race's group, and we used to race down the Pasig River. I turned turtle right in front of Malacanang, or rather, just behind Malacanang. But the water was so clean that it was a pleasant swim to the river bank," the late president said.

That was the Pasig River before the onset of rapid urbanization and settlements of informal settlers along its riverbanks.

Apart from pollutants from factories and households that end up in the river, the proliferation of water hyacinth and other seasonal phenomena such as algal bloom, and salt water intrusion have contributed to the river's water quality.

Over the years, several attempts have been made in the hope of rehabilitating and reviving the river to improve its water quality and flood water carrying capacity, and restore its environmental integrity.

The recent pronouncement by SMC

"We too can show our love for our country by becoming good stewards of the country's resources"

President and CEO Ramon S. Ang that SMC expects its P2-billion Pasig Clean-up project to surpass the one million metric tons threshold in silt and solid waste extracted from the river this month is good news to all of us.

According to SMC, the dredging teams will focus efforts on both ends of the river where water flow restriction is usual.

SMC's clean up teams have removed a total 927,198 metric tons of silt and waste from the Pasig River to date. Monthly, SMC targets to extract more than 70,000 tons.

Being an archipelago, the country is highly vulnerable to water-related hazards. Manila and its neighboring cities and towns along bodies of water are prone to flooding especially during the rainy season and onslaught of typhoons.

The rehabilitation of the Pasig River will mitigate the flooding in these areas as its flood-carrying capacity has vastly improved.

The dredging and de-silting of the river increased the depths to five-six meters from just two-three meters when the project started.

"Hopefully, by the time the rainy season sets in later this year, our cities will feel the benefits of the Pasig River's larger carrying capacity, along with government's other flood mitigation and control programs," RSA said.

With its increased hydraulic capacity, Pasig River as a transport route will also be vastly improved. River ferries will be able to provide better intra-city connectivity and help decongest thoroughfares in the metropolis.

The rehabilitation of the Pasig River is the second initiative of SMC in support of DENR's Adopt-A-River Program after the Tullahan River rehabilitation.

It also contributes to efforts being undertaken in compliance with the continuing Supreme Court mandamus to clean up the Manila Bay.

It is the largest such initiative by a single entity in the country which I hope will inspire other entities from the private sector to emulate.

The Memorandum of Agreement for the implementation of the P2-billion Pasig Dredging Project was signed between DENR and SMC on June 9, 2021.

The rehabilitation of the Tullahan River which was completed in 27 months and the ongoing Pasig River project are just two initiatives of SMC led by RSA that demonstrate the conglomerate's love for the country.

Like SMC and RSA, we too can show our love for our country by becoming good stewards of the country's resources.

(Velasco is a prolific book writer who has at least 50 titles to his credit. He is also the executive director of the Million Trees Foundation, a non-government outfit promoting environmental protection and tree planting in watershed areas.)



PMA wins case over 28-hectare property

BAGUIO CITY – The Philippine Military Academy (PMA) has won in a land dispute case involving a 28-hectare property located within the military reservation.

In a ruling issued on Jan. 19, the Municipal Trial Court in Cities (MTCC) Branch 1 affirmed the PMA's right over the disputed land and declared the claimants guilty of encroachment.

The ruling came two years after the PMA filed a case against the respondents, who claimed to be the heirs of a certain Gusec Dacdacan.

The court cited a survey report of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) confirming the contested land is part of the military reservation, which was established through Proclamation 2405.

Although the claimants possessed a survey plan approved by the DENR in 1961, the court ruled that it was not sufficient to prove their ownership over the land.

The court said there were no records showing the legality of the claimants' entry into the disputed property.

It said the claimants have no right over the land due to a pending status of their petition for a Certificate of Ancestral Land Title (CALT) with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP).

"The NCIP has no policy directions yet on the processing of CALTs in the city of Baguio," the court said.

It also cited a Supreme Court ruling in 2019, stating that the NCIP does not have any legal power to reclassify lands that were previously included as part of the Baguio Townsite Reservation, as provided under Section 78 of Republic Act 8371 or the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997.

The respondents admitted that they along with other claimants have repeatedly entered the property and introduced some improvements despite being told by the PMA that the area is within the military reservation.

The court said such acts violate Presidential Decree 1227, which penalizes unlawful entry into any military base in the country.

The respondents were sentenced to 10 days in prison and ordered to pay a fine of P100 each. – Artemio Dumlao



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BARMM joins climate, disaster plan for Mindanao

By CORY MARTINEZ

MINDANAO'S climate and disaster resilience and sustainable development goals will soon be enhanced with the collaboration of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Energy (MENRE) of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).

DENR Secretary Antonia Loyzaga and BARMM-MENRE Minister Akmad A. Brahim signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) during the recently-held DENR Multistakeholder Forum in Cagayan de Oro City, which aims to support their respective programs and projects based on the objectives and strategies defined in the Mindanao Climate Resilience Framework Plan and the output of the forum.

Loyzaga explained that the diversity in Mindanao requires a "systemic, consultative, and contextualized approach to environmental conservation and

protection." "The DENR is committed to ensuring that consultation with communities and different sectors are at the basis of the fundamentals and groundworks that need to be done in order to become responsive to these various needs," Loyzaga said.

Under the MOU, the DENR will provide technical assistance to MENRE-

BARMM for the exploration, development, and utilization of natural resources under its territorial jurisdiction.

The assistance includes the mobilization of DENR bureaus, attached agencies, and regional offices in Mindanao to assist BARMM in exercising its authority over the ancestral domain and natural resources, classification of public lands, and

ecological solid waste management and pollution control enshrined in the Bangsamoro Organic Law on Environment and Natural Resources.

"This partnership is a promising development in ensuring complete, nationwide protection and conservation of our environment and natural resources. We have to work together to nurture our nature; besides, we are all stewards of the environment," Brahim said.



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Department of Environment and Natural Resources
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT BUREAU
DENR Compound, Visayas Avenue, Diliman Quezon City 1116
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Website: <http://www.emb.gov.ph> / Email: mail@emb.gov.ph

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

On the ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS) of the proposed BAYABAS SMALL RESERVOIR IRRIGATION PROJECT of the NATIONAL IRRIGATION ADMINISTRATION - REGION 3 to be located in BARANGAYS BAYABAS, DOÑA REMEDIOS TRINIDAD, BULACAN.

Notice is hereby given to all parties who wish to give their opinion regarding the implementation of the proposed BAYABAS SMALL RESERVOIR IRRIGATION PROJECT to attend the Public Hearing scheduled on:

Date	Time	Venue
22 February 2023 (Wednesday)	9:00 AM <i>Registration starts at 8:00 AM</i>	Baranggay Bayabas Covered Court, Bayabas, Doña Remedios Trinidad, Bulacan

The Public Hearing is being conducted in connection with the review of the EIS of the aforementioned project by the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The following is the project information:

Project Name	Bayabas Small Reservoir Irrigation Project
Project Location	Baranggay Bayabas, Doña Remedios Trinidad, Bulacan
Project Capacity	Reservoir Inundation Area: 218 Hectares Storage Capacity: 53.137 MCM
Proponent	National Irrigation Administration -Region 3

All interested parties who wish to attend or participate in this Public Hearing should preferably confirm their attendance/participation and may give their opinion(s) in a concise position paper to the ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT DIVISION (EIAMD) of this Office through email at eia@emb.gov.ph, three (3) days before the Public Hearing schedule. Those who will not be able to register or submit written positions may be given the opportunity to share their issues on the day of the hearing itself.

The project's EIS and Executive Summary for the Public are downloadable on our website: (*kindly access the Notice of Public Hearing/ Consultation link found in our website*) while copies will be available in the following offices:

- 1) **EMB Region 3**
Masinop Corner Matalino St., Diosdado Macapagal Government Center
Maimpis, San Fernando City, Pampanga
(045) 455-3080 / (045) 420-5070
- 2) **Baranggay Bayabas Barangay Hall**
Baranggay Bayabas, Doña Remedios Trinidad, Bulacan

For more details, please contact the EIAMD Division at this Office at telephone number 8539-4378 loc 116 and look for the project case handlers Engr. George Silvederio and Engr. Joel Polintan.

P.S. February 7 & 14, 2023

Protect the environment... Protect life...