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DENR forum seeks review of policy on reclamation

By RAYMUND ANTONIO

Although the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) took note of the “significant ecological and social costs” of reclamation, President Marcos spearheaded the formation of an experts’ forum to craft policy recommendations to enhance the country’s reclamations. ▶ 4

DENR forum seeks review of policy on reclamation ◀

This move, a statement from the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said, was in line with the development goals of the Marcos adminis-

tration and was done with the support of the DENR aimed at reviewing and enhancing the country’s policies related to reclamations.

However, a concept note by DENR also revealed misgivings cited by various stakeholders on what reclamations cost society.

“In general, the concept note said there are differing opinions on what makes for a successful reclamation based on the experience of Hong Kong and Indonesia, which, while fostering economic growth, also came at sig-

nificant ecological and social costs as claimed by various stakeholders,” the statement read.

The same concept note claimed that global sources on reclamation show how reclamation can potentially contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals, stressing the importance of crafting enhanced policies for the country.

“The expected output is a set of policy recommendations on reclamation that will review and enhance the country’s policies related to reclama-

tion,” the DENR said.

It identified several laws and policies needing review and enhancement.

These include Executive Order No. 74 s. 2019, Philippine Reclamation Authority Administrative Order No. 2019-4 s. 2019, DENR Administrative Orders No. 2003-30 and 2018-14, and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Memorandum Circular No. 2022-018.

“Among the forum’s objectives, include enabling dialogue among experts and stakeholders to get insights

on reclamation, identifying gaps and entry points to enhance policy, and obtaining expert recommendations on enhancing national and local level policies on reclamation,” the statement said.

During his 2022 State of the Nation Address (SONA), Marcos stressed the need for companies to “follow the law.”

“Companies who exploit our natural resources must follow the law... there is no question that the preservation of the environment is the preservation of lives,” he had earlier said.



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COMMONSENSE

MARICHU A. VILLANUEVA

Right-size the jobs to the right people

Two separate legislative bills that were originally pushed in the 19th Congress would have created two new Executive Departments. President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. (PBBM), however, it seems stepped on the brakes against the proposed creation of the two new Departments. These are the bills on the proposed creation of a Department of Risk Reduction (DRR) and a Department of Water (DoW).



The two pending bills remain pending at the Senate and at the House of Representatives but henceforth relegated at the back burners of the legislative mills.

Thus, the two bills will not see the light of day any time soon, not unless another major crisis arises.

The Senate and the House of Representatives have only four weeks left before the first regular sessions of the 19th Congress adjourn *sine die*. Several proposed bills previously lined up for approval included those drawn up and agreed upon at the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC).

Initially, PBBM kept an open mind to these two bills when they were first broached to him at the start of his administration. Actually, the two proposed bills are not new but were re-filed legislative measures from the Congresses past. PBBM opted to exercise his powers to issue and sign executive fiats instead of Congress passing these laws to create the two new Executive Departments.

Last Monday, Malacanang released Executive Order (EO) 24 that PBBM signed on April 30. This created the Disaster Response and Crisis Management Task Force that will be composed of the Office of the Executive Secretary; Office of Civil Defense; and the Departments of National Defense, Interior and Local Government, Social Welfare and Development, Health, Trade and Industry, Science and Technology, Public Works and Highways, and Transportation.

Taking effect immediately, EO 24 empowered the President to designate the task force's chairperson and vice chairperson from among its members, with the member agencies also designating senior officials to act as their representatives to the task force. It will take over from the existing National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC).

At present, the NDRRMC that was created under Republic Act (RA) 10121 is responsible for ensuring the protection and welfare of the people during disasters or emergencies. It is composed of various government agencies, private sector organizations and the civil sector.

Thus, the two bills will not see the light of day any time soon, not unless another major crisis arises.

For a disaster-prone country, both from natural and man-made calamities, lawmakers have been pressing for the creation of a full-fledged DRR patterned after the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In fact, no less than presidential cousin, Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez has filed a bill to create FEMA-like structure for DRR. Several major earthquakes, severe flooding and typhoon damages later, the DRR bill got drowned at the legislative mills. Now, we know why.

On April 27 this year, PBBM signed EO 22 creating the Water Resources Management Office (WRMO) in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Under EO 22, all water-related agencies will be attached to the DENR, namely, the National Water Resources Board; Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System; Local Water Utilities Administration and the network of local water districts; and the Laguna Lake Development Authority.

Following the issuance of EO 22, Malacanang announced WRMO will be headed by an undersecretary to be appointed by the President upon the recommendation of DENR Secretary Antonia Loyzaga. That is, as I've heard, if she is not too busy traveling in and out of the country while the El Niño or long dry spell period has already set in.

Incidentally, Loyzaga was among the Cabinet delegation during PBBM's official visit to Washington D.C. On the other hand, Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno begged off from joining the Cabinet delegation. The 75-year-old Diokno was tested positive for COVID-19 five days before their departure to the US.

Meanwhile, several of the Marcos administration-endorsed bills in Congress are among those up for approval before *sine die* adjournment on June 2. Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri reiterated this commitment last week during our *Kapihan sa Manila Bay* news forum.

At the resumption of the Senate sessions last Monday, Zubiri announced these priority bills include the proposed amendments to the Build-Operate-Transfer Law, the proposed Medical Reserves Act, the establishment of the Centers for Disease Control, the creation of the Virology Institute, the proposed Internet Transactions Act, the Philippine Passport Act, and the bill creating the Maharlika Investment Fund (MIF).

Zubiri noted there are pet bills of the Senators that they in the Upper Chamber will approve before adjournment. This include the proposed measure to revitalize the country's salt industry and the nine wage hike bills that the Senate chief is pushing to increase to P150 the national daily minimum wage.

For the past ten years, two Presidents of the country created three new Departments. Dividing the Department of Transportation and Communications, a Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) was created by former President Noy Aquino under RA 10844 that he signed on May 23, 2016.

Former President Rodrigo Duterte signed RA11201 on Feb. 14, 2019 creating the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development out of the various government agencies in the defunct Housing and Urban Development Council. Mr. Duterte also signed RA 11641 on Dec. 30, 2021 that took out from the Department of Labor and Employment agencies involved with overseas Filipino workers and created the Department of Migrant Workers.

The proposed establishments of DRR and the DoW were frowned upon as inconsistent with the desired "rightsizing" of the bloated Philippine bureaucracy. The size does not matter but the rationale of this streamlining scheme is to right-size the jobs in the government to the right people.



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GOTCHA

JARIUS BONDOC

Using Masungi slopes for prisons will destroy our homes, shops



Ongoing reforestation of Masungi in Marikina watershed has lessened floods in half of Metro Manila and Rizal. To use it for prison officials' offices and manors will set off deadly deluges below.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources should be the first to oppose the Bureau of Corrections' headquartering there. Its silence means consent to the ruinous consequences.

DENR is instead defaming Masungi Georeserve Foundation (MGF) that's rewilding hillsides by itself. What's with DENR, which was also mum on the Mindoro oil spill, Romblon illegal mining and Zambales nickel ore smuggling?

Twenty armed BuCor officers in five vehicles swooped down on Masungi recently. Waving a newly-minted title, they scanned 270 hectares for National Bilibid Prison and office relocation.

Basic science shows unsuitability. Construction will necessitate levelling of slopes. Uprooting trees will erode soil that shield millions of lowland homes and shops from floods. It will disintegrate the spine of the 65 million-year-old limestone formation that earned Masungi Geopark worldwide renown.

Masungi Foundation protested. Justice Sec. Jesus Remulla, under whom BuCor is, blustered: "Relax lang kayo. Masungi will be preserved but government will use idle portions. You're not the only ones who can protect nature." Another science flunker?

BuCor's "Lot 10" title stemmed from president Gloria Arroyo's 2006 allocating 270 hectares for 29,200 convicts, plus 30 hectares for DENR regional office. Nearby communities howled. In 2009, then-Sec. Lito Atienza instructed DENR-Southern Luzon to look for other prison and office sites. That year superstorm Ondoy devastated Metro Manila-Rizal. Floods killed 464.

Two earlier proclamations by President Ferdinand E. Marcos preserved the mountains of Nueva Ecija, Bulacan, Rizal and Quezon. Focal was Marikina watershed in Montalban, San Mateo, Antipolo, Tanay and Baras of Rizal. In 1993 DENR head Angel Alcala, a National Scientist, named Masungi a Strict Nature Reserve and Wildlife Sanctuary, banning quarries and other ecologically harmful activities.

Still, DENR crooks in 1999 granted three 25-year quarry permits on Masungi's hilltop. In the Baras quarry area rose a dozen picnic resorts sans business permits. Culverts diverted rivers onto swimming pools. Protectors are a retired and an active-duty general.

Three years prior, in 1996, DENR contracted Blue Star Construction Development Corp. to build environmentally sustainable staff housing on 130 lower hectares. Reforestation began the following year. DENR in 2002 expanded the housing-cum-reforestation into Lot 10's 300 hectares. There Blue Star's Ben Dumaliang saw the degraded limestone ecosystem and restored it to its present state.

With daughters Ann and Billie and ecologists, Ben formed MGF. Wildlife returned within two decades of regreening the first 130 hectares. In 2017, Sec.



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GOTCHA

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Gina Lopez tasked MGF to rewild the upper 300 hectares, Lot 10. The illegal resort owners resisted, with goons shooting and mauling MGF park rangers.

Present DENR Sec. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga cancelled the three quarries a year before 2024 expiration. Yet she has not talked to MGF nor appointed a DENR manager for the oversight committee. Then came the BuCor title, which Remulla said he has discussed with her. The Land Registration Authority is also under him.

Yulo twitted the late Lopez's memo for Masungi to be "a perpetual land trust for conservation... so long as there is no neglect or violation [by MGF]." Supposedly this negates the Constitution's Article XII, National Economy and Patrimony, Section 2, which limits natural resource concessions to 25 years.

But natural resource preservation is not commercial use. A watershed is for perpetuity. So states the National Integrated Protected Areas System Law.

The National Museum defended MGF, awarded by United Nations and European conservationists. Karst (limestone ridges) need careful management, it said. Masungi's limestone forest is habitat for unique species of plants, mollusk, crab, other crustacean, insects, fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds, mammals.

Like flora and fauna, limestone formations can degenerate if unprotected. Woodcutting, agriculture, land clearance, quarrying, waste dumping or landfilling in the vicinity of Masungi geo-tourism park can ruin the karst. Water level and quality can drop.

Wanting quarries back, certain congressmen deride MGF in House hearings. DENR bureaucrats coach them to babble that natural resources must be given away to businessmen for infrastructure. Supposedly floods are inevitable in Marikina, Cainta, Taytay and other cities below. That's why the valley never was inhabited in olden days.

Wrong! Up to the 1500s, Cainta was in fact a kingdom beside the Pasig River. It was surrounded by bamboo thickets and fortified with logs and *lantaka* (Malay bronze cannons). Just that, when Gat Maitan refused to pay tribute to Spain, Juan de Salcedo pillaged it in August 1571 on orders of uncle Miguel Lopez de Legazpi.

Today's leaders petition to protect Masungi and Upper Marikina Watershed. Signatories are Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte, Marikina Mayor Marcelino Teodoro, Pasig City Mayor Vico Sotto, Muntinlupa Mayor Jaime Fresnedi, Angono Vice Mayor Gerardo Calderon, Pasig City Administrator Jeronimo Manzanero and Malabon City Administrator Voltaire dela Cruz.

As well, Marikina barangay chairmen Bernard Bernardo of Sta. Elena, Segundo Cruz of Calumpang, Randy Leal of Nangka, Miguel Punzalan Jr. of Marikina Heights, Rizalina Teope of Fortune, Ronnie Tiburcio of Barangka and Mary Jane Zubiri-dela Rosa of Concepcion are signatories.

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'MAJOR POLLUTANT OF OUR GENERATION'

MICROPLASTICS IN METRO MANILA AIR ALARM SCIENTISTS

By Krixia Subingsubing
@krixiasINQ

Metro Manila residents are now at risk of inhaling microplastics, or tiny plastic fragments in the environment, according to a new study by Filipino scientists who warn of the insidiousness of this new "major pollutant of our generation."

This was the first time researchers established the presence of microplastics in the ambient air in the Philippines, one of the world's largest plastic polluters, environmental scientists Rodolfo Romarate and Hernando Bacosa of the Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology said.

"This is really a new realm for us unlike heavy metals in the atmosphere which are heavily studied," Bacosa said in an interview with the Inquirer.

"This is a major pollutant of our generation and yet there is a dearth of studies and there is a need to further establish [associated risks]," he added.

Published in the Environmental Science and Pollution Research Journal and funded by the Department of Science and Technology, the study tested air samples from 17 local governments in the National Capital Region from Dec. 16 to 31, 2021, or at the peak of the

Among other findings, the scientists confirmed the presence of microplastics in all 17 local governments, with the highest concentrations in Mandaluyong and Muntinlupa cities (19). The lowest concentration of microplastics was found in Malabon (1), followed by Quezon City (2), Pasig (3), Parañaque and Las Piñas (both 5)

COVID-19 pandemic.

Romarate said the team positioned their samples 1.5 meters from the ground "to simulate the average human height."

They then filtered the air samples and sorted any debris found there.

Landlocked cities

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Malabon (1), followed by Quezon City (2), Pasig (3), Parañaque and Las Piñas (both 5).

For now, it's unclear why these cities recorded such concentrations, Bacosa said.

But he theorized that wind currents from shoreline cities were blowing the fragments inward, which is why landlocked cities like Mandaluyong were receiving the brunt of it.

Asked to explain the phenomenon in simple terms, Romarate said that if a human being were to inhale three *balikbayan* boxes' worth of air in one day, they are likely to

breathe in at least one particle of microplastic.

This also means they could inhale up to 88 such particles in a year.

According to the United States National Ocean Service, microplastics are plastic debris less than five millimeters in length, or "about the size of a sesame seed," and "come from a variety of sources, including from larger plastic debris that degrades into smaller and smaller pieces."

These include microbeads, or very tiny pieces of manufactured polyethylene plastic that are added as exfoliants to health and beauty products, such as some cleansers and toothpastes.

"These tiny particles easily pass through water filtration systems and end up in the ocean and Great Lakes, posing a potential threat to aquatic life," the agency said.

But the ocean service acknowledged that as an emerging field of study, "not a lot is known about microplastics and their impacts yet."

Bacosa, however, cited the findings of earlier studies suggesting potential dangers posed by microplastics on human health, such as those showing they could cause stress to internal organs and enter the bloodstream.

MICROPLASTICS IN METRO MANILA AIR ALARM SCIENTISTS

FROM A2

Studies of microplastics in marine life, on the other hand, have also shown that microplastics could cause tissue damage and oxidative stress in fish, he noted.

When suspended, microplastics are also potential carriers of bacteria and viruses, Bacosa added.

Most of the microplastics collected by the researchers for the Metro Manila study were fi-

brous microplastics, or lint degraded into even smaller sizes, which had likely lofted into the air, Romarate explained.

Both Romarate and Bacosa made it clear, however, that the "fate and the health effects of these [microplastics] would remain uncertain."

"There are still many aspects to be considered, like the health implications of microplastics in the air or what causes them to be concentrated in certain cities," Bacosa said.

For now, according to

Romarate, their team has forwarded policy recommendations to the national government on how to address what could be a ticking time bomb, including radical changes in the country's plastic waste management.

"We see these data as something that should make us think about our consumption of plastics but also how we address it as a function of policy," Bacosa said, adding: "At the end of the day, it is a complex problem." INQ

Keep toxic cargo off VIP, groups ask gov't

At House hearing on Mindoro oil spill, civil society, fisherfolk representatives stress importance of protecting livelihood of coastal communities

By Madonna T. Virola
@mvirolaINQ

CITY OF CALAPAN—Civil society groups and fisherfolk representatives on Tuesday asked the government to prohibit all tankers carrying toxic cargo from passing through the Verde Island Passage (VIP), the strait separating Mindoro and Batangas, to protect its critical biodiversity.

The call was made as the House committees on ecology and on natural resources jointly held a hearing on Tuesday in relation to the oil spill caused by the Feb. 28 sinking of the fuel tanker MT Princess Empress off Oriental Mindoro.

"The complexity of responses necessary in the aftermath of a disaster of this scale shows that we should not allow such incidents to happen in the first place," said Gerry Arances, executive director of the Center for Energy, Ecology and Development (CEED), in a statement. CEED is coconvener of the environmental advocacy group Protect VIP.

He added: "Tankers carrying toxic cargo like industrial oil and other fossil fuels should be banned from coursing through the VIP."

A part of the "coral triangle," VIP is regarded by scientists as the "center of the center of marine shore fish biodiversity" in the world.

The groups raised the alarm over the high number of vessels carrying fossil fuel and toxic cargo allowed to ply critically biodiverse seas, especially the marine-significant VIP, without a complete and thorough assessment of their seaworthiness right from their point of



UNDER THE SEA Home to thousands of marine animal and plant species, the Verde Island Passage teems with life that provides livelihood to coastal communities in the provinces of Oriental and Occidental Mindoro, Batangas, Marinduque and Romblon. This underwater photo was taken in September 2021.

—PHOTO COURTESY OF PROTECT VERDE ISLAND PASSAGE

departure, citing the MT Princess Empress' case.

Oil tanker MT Princess Empress sank off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, and was later found at the bottom of the waters off nearby Pola town. Since then, the 800,000 liters of industrial fuel that the tanker was carrying have been slowly leaking into the sea and affecting several coastal areas in Oriental Mindoro, Palawan, Batangas and Antique.

Fisherfolk group representatives who attended the hearing lamented the insufficient and problematic responses so far made for communities impacted by the oil spill, including unclear processes for the delivery of compensation, inedible products in food packs, and a lack of plans for long-term support for alternative livelihoods.

"It is disheartening to see the finger-pointing at the hearing earlier [which included] the discussion of allowing MT

Princess Empress to sail despite having no permit to sail..." said Dindo Melaya, convener of the fisherfolk coalition Koalisyon ng Mangingisdang Apektadong Oil Spill.

Lives at stake

Melaya said he hoped that their presence in the hearing served as "a reminder to the government that lives and livelihoods are at stake here."

"In the middle of all this, we call for a clear and long-term plan, such as providing an alternative livelihood program for our fisherfolk who are yet to resume fishing activities, retrieval of the sunken tanker, and full accountability from the polluters—not insults by sending us canned tuna that are unsafe even for our dogs," he said.

The groups also pointed out that the absence of representatives from the ship owner made the hearing "unable to genuinely facilitate the exacting of accountability from polluters."

"Government agencies and members of our Congress can go on with the blame game as much as they want, but there will be no justice if the polluters that caused this ecological disaster are allowed to play truant," Arances said.

He hoped that the government would take "punitive actions" against the companies involved, "including the compensation they owe to communities whose livelihoods they robbed and whose welfare they harmed."

"These polluters should stop sending stand-ins, and instead, stand up and face the consequences of their actions," Arances said.

Protected area

Environment Secretary Antonia Yulo Loyzaga and governors of the five provinces surrounding the VIP on Tuesday reiterated their calls for the so-called Amazon of the Seas to be declared a protected area by law.

In a statement, Loyzaga said the highest level of protection for what is touted as the center of the world's marine biodiversity would keep VIP "a sanctuary to thousands of marine species and off-limits to business activities that will threaten its pristine ecosystem."

The VIP, Loyzaga said, is a marine protected area, but the governors wanted it to be a legally protected area.

The call was the result of a meeting between Loyzaga and Governors Hermilando Mandanas of Batangas and Presbitero Velasco Jr. of Marinduque. The threat of the recent oil spill in Oriental Mindoro on VIP was also discussed at the meeting.

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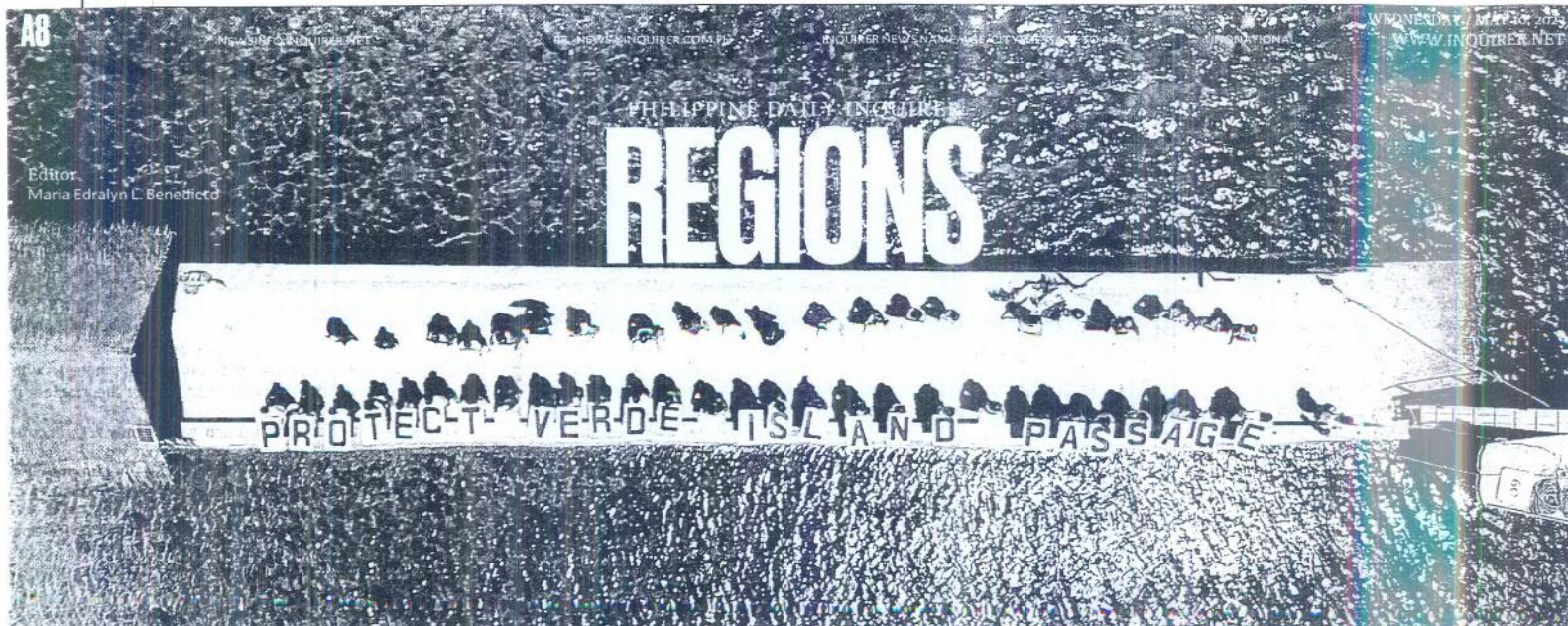
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CALL FOR ACTION Villagers form a "human boom" along the shore of Isla Verde in Batangas City on April 21 to call for reparations, accountability, livelihood response and protection of the Verde Island Passage, almost two months after a fuel tanker sank off Oriental Mindoro and spilled oil into the province's waters. —PHOTO COURTESY OF PROTECT VERDE ISLAND PASSAGE

Mindoro oil spill: DOJ readying raps

By SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

The Department of Justice (DOJ) will start filing charges against those involved in the illegal operations of the sunken tanker *Princess Empress*.

"The DOJ will certainly file cases, that's for sure. It's just a matter of time. The only reason why we have not filed cases as of now is the conscious decision taken by the task force to ensure that cleanup and retrieval operations be done first," DOJ Undersecretary Raul Vasquez said at yesterday's joint inquiry of the House committees on natural resources and ecology on

the oil spill from the sunken vessel.

"Nothing is more important than going after those people who are responsible in the issuance of a non-existent (document)," Vasquez said.

Members of the House panel expressed concern on the supposed falsification of documents that allowed the tanker to sail nine times despite the lack of a permit.

The Maritime Industry Authority had earlier told a Senate hearing that *Princess Empress* did not have a permit to operate in the form of an amendment to its certificate of public convenience.

Meanwhile, the insurance company of the sunken tanker has agreed to cover the cost of retrieving the remaining industrial fuel from the vessel.

Vasquez said Shipowners Protection and Indemnity (P&I) Club notified the DOJ about its readiness to retrieve the fuel from the vessel.

"We are happy to (report) there's a bright light to this... P&I Club af-

firmed and sent us a letter confirming its readiness," he said.

Vasquez said the insurance company signed the contract with Salvor Corp., which will "siphon off the remaining fuel on the hull of *Princess Empress*."

The DOJ said it expects retrieval operations to start by June 18.

The vessel was carrying more than 800,000 liters of industrial fuel when it sank off Naujan town in Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28.

The oil spill has affected the coastlines of several towns in Oriental Mindoro and three barangays in Caluya, Antique.



From Magellan to Hinatuan: How mining keeps Eastern Samar deeply wounded

Last of 2 parts

FILIPINOS are indebted to Magellan for his expedition that, although it led to their subjugation by the Spaniards, introduced them to Christianity. Among the invading colonizers were priests, missionaries and members of religious groups that all belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. The influence of Church leaders over the conduct of government affairs facilitated the mass conversion of the natives to the universal church.

Today — some 500 years after the Spanish conquest — demographic data shows that up to 90 percent of the population belongs to Christian denominations (in the 2015 Philippine Statistics Authority census, 79 percent of the general population tagged themselves as Catholics while 11 percent said they belonged to various affiliations among Protestant churches), with the rest being Muslims (6 percent) and other churches (4 percent).

Centuries of Spanish rule (followed by more than 50 years of American control) shaped the social, economic and political norms that guide the country in the way its government relates to the people — and vice versa. Alive in this land are superficial trappings of a democratic society — from the way leaders are elected (where a majority of voters are ill-informed) to judicial double standards (where the rich, even if indicted for nonbailable offenses, are free on humanitarian grounds while the poor are detained even for relatively trivial offenses).



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People know that corruption in government exists, yet they have in large part accepted that fact and adapted themselves to it probably because they believe they are too inconsequential to be able to change anything. How inequities work is public knowledge: people can build connections when they have money and things get done when money talks. At the time when indulgences were up for sale (during the medieval period, circa 5th to 15th centuries), people could even build worldly connections to the heavens.

This unjust world order is best shown by the scourge of mining in Eastern Samar. (In the 1980s and 1990s, during martial law, the entire Samar island was pillaged with rapacious, merciless and unbridled intent by both mining and logging companies). The more the rich get richer from resource bases from which people draw their livelihood, the poorer the latter end up on account of their growing deprivation of access to those resources.

Just an example: company records show that the net annual income of Nickel Asia Corp., the mother company of Hinatuan Mining Corp. (HMC), has steadily increased from P3.8 billion in 2019 to P5.5 billion in 2020 (up by 43 percent), then doubled to P10.6 billion in 2021 (up by 94 percent). Manuel Zamora, one of Nickel Asia's owners, is also known

as a prominent political player in the Philippines; he was a major supporter of the candidacy of eventual winner Joseph Estrada during the 1998 presidential election; a forbes.com report lists mining as his source of wealth and ranks him number 32 among the Philippines' richest 50 individuals.

On the other hand, communities in the mined areas continue to struggle from a livelihood perspective. Villardo Abueme, the president of the Homonhon Environment Resources Organization, has been quoted by media as saying that "mining has caused forest denudation and water siltation. Most of the people on Homonhon Island are fisherfolk and farmers, and mining has reduced fish catches as well as the amount of arable land." Narcissa Baddilla, the coordinator of the Save Manicani Movement, stated that "mining has reduced the amount of land available to farmers and siltation into the ocean has impacted fishing... These environmental effects have damaged the livelihoods of the island's residents. To quote her further: "Without mining, agriculture and fishing could sustain the inhabitants. But now with mining, people have become poorer."

While Philippine Statistics Authority poverty incidence data for Guiuan shows a slow but steady improvement, from 42 percent in 2009 to 36 percent in 2012, and 34 percent in 2015 — a downward trend that mirrors those at the provincial, regional and national levels — the resource base-rich municipality rates below Borongan, Eastern Samar's capital city (which does not

host large-scale mining), with poverty incidence rates of 38 percent, 26 percent and 32 percent for the same period. Guiuan also compares poorly in relation to regional data (31 percent in 2018 and 29 percent in 2021), and even more poorly at the national level (12 percent in 2018 and 13 percent in 2021).

Even if one sets aside for the moment non-negotiable issues related to incidental human rights breaches and unjust distribution of cost and benefits among key stakeholders, who must include the succeeding generations, there is no denying mining's negative impact on the environment. Mined areas have to endure hazardous chemicals (e.g., cyanide and mercury), water contamination, air pollution, deforestation, threats to biodiversity, water siltation and water depletion, among many other environmental risks, even years after mining activities have stopped.

Yet for the most part, past and present administrations have made it a policy to promote mining. With the country's erstwhile major export products down (the agriculture sector is sick, the textile industry has been overrun by ukay-ukay, etc., the combined total value of which is equivalent to just a single sale of a fighter jet by the US), the government has been hard pressed to prop up its balance of payment position with proceeds from mining and the old reliable diaspora surplus (remittances from OFWs).

But where government hesitates, the Catholic Church in the Philippines — one that had been linked from the beginning to Homonhon island — has not wavered in its opposition to mining in general.

Since the 1990s, the Church, whose social teachings — the latest of which is Pope Francis' "Laudato Si" (On care for our common home) — exhort its members to be the church of the poor, has rallied public support for government action on the need to stop mining in Eastern Samar. Borongan Bishop Crispin Varquez once said that "we cannot remain deaf and blind and not denounce the excesses of mining while our people suffer the consequences not of their own making." He adds that he cannot allow the continued exploitation of "our already much-wounded land."



Scars of mining in Homonhon. PHOTO BY ALREN BERONIO, ESTE NEWS



Future-ready PH: Invest on infrastructure development, climate change adaptation and mitigation now



BEYOND BUDGET
AMENAH F. PANGANDAMAN
DBM SECRETARY

Assalamu alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh.

Intense heat is really on in the country. Lately, we would hear parents reminding their children to always stay hydrated or indoors, while others choose to travel to cooler places! Indeed, climate change is an inescapable reality, as its disastrous effects are now the focus of global leaders and policymakers.

This, I was able to confirm recently during the Asian Development Bank (ADB) meetings in South Korea, which was attended by finance and budget ministers, and central bank governors.

The momentous assembly presented a joint report by ADB and ASEAN+3 titled: "Reinvigorating Financing Approaches for Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure in ASEAN+3."

The report touched on innovative financing solutions for infrastructure investments in the ASEAN+3 region and the need for sustainable financial solutions to address climate change.

I wholeheartedly believe that developing countries like ours need to ramp up its infrastructure to meet its economic and social goals. Numerous articles in the past mentioned that the Philippines is two to three decades behind on infrastructure despite the increase in public expenditure.

And so we need to act fast. No more delays. Now is the best time to close that infrastructure gap.

But, while it is true that fast-tracking the completion of needed infrastructure is vital to the country's recovery, it likewise plays a crucial role in addressing climate change. Climate change, on the other hand, plays a big role in infrastructure planning and development. Everything is interconnected.

The ASEAN+3 region recognizes the need to make sustainable finance part of its agenda "to boost investments in renewable energy and climate-resilient infrastructure to support a fair, affordable, and secure energy transition and address the effects of climate change."

Thus, the ADB report is actually a user-friendly policy toolkit on creative infrastructure financing models for economic leaders, policymakers, and investors.

As ADB Managing Director General Woochong Um said, "Innovative financing mechanisms are needed to attract private and institutional capital — along with public funds — to fund critical infrastructure that will create jobs and generate revenue for local

economies."

But the question is — How much infrastructure investment is needed to see sustained economic growth? According to ADB, the estimated total infrastructure investment need of ASEAN is at \$2.8 trillion (baseline) and \$3.1 trillion (climate-adjusted), placing the annual investment need at \$184 billion and \$210 billion, respectively.

These infrastructure gap figures do not include the additional expenditure associated with climate change, that increasingly impact existing infrastructure in Southeast Asia. Note that according to the long-term climate risk index for 2000–2019, the Philippines ranks among the 10 countries most affected by weather-related loss events and are most vulnerable to climate-linked risks.

Difficult? Yes. But mind you — addressing these infrastructure and climate change financing gaps is possible. However, narrowing these gaps isn't the sole job of governments. Private sector participation is also a key player.

The ADB report mentioned that in order to scale up ASEAN+3 economies as they bounce back from the pandemic, "innovative finance mechanisms are needed to catalyze private and institutional finance for infrastructure."

There are various financing options such as ADB facilities, local or international markets, private sector investments and climate-related financing innovations. These include: blended financing that mobilizes and combines resources (multilateral institutions, private investments and public funds); public-private partnerships; local government bond issuances that empower local communities to identify and address their own infrastructure or climate financing gaps; green bonds designed to fund projects favorable to environmental and climate change resilience; convertible loans and debt structures that allow borrowers to reach certain milestones in exchange for condonation of payment of loan interest and principal; asset securitization that transforms assets into more liquid marketable securities or cash; carbon-credit mechanisms that incentivize entities to reduce emission by issuing tradable credits; and transition funds, such as ADB's Energy Transition Mechanism (ETM) that provide credit opportunities for borrowing entities to transit to low-carbon, energy efficient and green infrastructure-based economy.

In fact, in November 2021, ADB said that ETM aims to deliver \$100 billion in cumulative climate financing until

2030, \$34 billion of which is dedicated to adaptation projects.

Apart from national government funds, there are other funding sources that can be tapped, such as bilateral funding by countries, global development funds, sovereign wealth funds, among others.

It is important to note, however, that while innovative financial solutions open new doors to facilitate development, access to these available options is likewise crucial.

In April 2020, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), led by then BSP governor and now Finance Secretary Ben Diokno, crafted the Sustainable Finance Framework circular, which cites the crucial role of financial service industries in pursuing sustainable and resilient growth through environmentally and socially responsible business decisions.

Even then, Sec. Diokno emphasized that green investments, such as on energy efficiency, green infrastructure, support for low carbon vehicles, among others, are integral tools to recovery.

Now, through the Medium Term Fiscal Framework, the administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. aims to maintain high infrastructure spending at five to six percent of annual GDP from 2022 to 2028. Further, in 2023, ₱1.3 trillion has been allocated in the national budget to sustain the momentum of the public infrastructure boom (Build, Better, More).

₱464.5 billion was likewise allotted to address climate change, which is equivalent to 8.8 percent of the total national budget — higher than its ₱289.7 billion allocation in 2022.

I've always believed that it will take a whole-of-nation approach to slow down the risks and effects of climate change. With the continuous help and support of every Filipino, we can work toward climate resiliency to safeguard a sustainable future for our country.

Beyond budget, financing programs supporting environmentally-sound businesses are imperative. It takes an entire ecosystem that begins with sustainable financing policies to private sector partnerships to realize the emergence of a progressive and resilient future-ready Philippines.

(Amenah F. Pangandaman is the current Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management.)



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Water level in major dams continues to dip

THE Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said Tuesday the water level in five major dams in Luzon continues to drop.

These dams are Angat and Ipo in Bulacan, La Mesa in Quezon City, San Roque in Cordillera, and Caliraya in Laguna.

As of 6 a.m. Tuesday, Angat Dam's water level was 193.72 meters, 0.18 meters lower than its 193.90-meter level on Monday.

The reservoir supplies about 90 percent of the raw water requirements for Metro Manila through the facilities of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System. It also irrigates about 28,000 hectares of farmland in Bulacan and Pampanga.

The water level at Ipo Dam decreased to 98.89 m or a slight 0.01 m lower than the previous 98.90 m level.

Angat Dam's normal high water level (NHWL) is 210 m while Ipo Dam's is 101 m, Pagasa said.

Ipo Dam is part of the Angat-Ipo-La Mesa water system, which also supplies water to the National

Capital Region or Metro Manila.

From 76.88 m Monday, the water level at La Mesa Dam also decreased, although at a slight 0.03 m.

Meanwhile, San Roque Dam's level dipped to 231.92 m, 0.40 m lower than Monday's 232.32 m. It is now 5.31 m lower than the 237.23 m rule curve elevation or the level required to supply water and perform other functions.

Caliraya's level went down to 286.89 m, or 0.41 m lower than the previous 287.30-m level, the weather bureau said.

Pagasa said the water levels in Ambuklao Dam in Benguet and Magat Dam in Isabela also dropped by 0.25 m and 0.26 m, respectively.

On one hand, Pantabangan Dam in Nueva Ecija and Binga Dam in Benguet reported increases in water level, but these were below the normal level.

Last week, Pagasa issued an El Niño alert based on its forecast of an 80-percent probability of the occurrence of the phenomenon from June to August this year.

ARLIE O. CALALO