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**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

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# For greener pastures



mike about town  
**ATTY. MIKE TOLEDO**

It is a known fact that the United States was the strongest ally of then-President Ferdinand Edralin Marcos.

The strength of this alliance has not waned, even during the current presidency of Ferdinand's son, his namesake, President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. or PBBM.

And so, it was expected that PBBM would once again pay an official visit to the United States, to reaffirm the special relationship between the Philippines and the US, but this time to the White House to meet with US President Joe Biden, his second high-level meeting with POTUS, or the President of the United States.

This four-day official working visit of PBBM, his second trip to the United States after attending the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September of last year, was the first by a Philippine president in more than 10 years, and was touted to be the latest in a series of high-level meetings the Philippines has held with leaders of the US.

The visit kicked off with a bilateral meeting at the White House, then an expanded meeting with Cabinet officials, followed by meetings with legislators and key American business leaders.

"When we met in New York last year," President Biden said to President Marcos Jr., "you told me that a strong alliance has to continue, quote — I'm using your phrase — 'to evolve as we face the challenges of this new century.' And we are facing new challenges. And I can't think of any better partner to have than you."

President Biden likewise said, "And we're going to announce that — we're going to announce today that I'm sending a first-of-its-kind presidential trade and investment mission to the Philippines. We talked about that very briefly — up in New York.

"And the United States also (remains) ironclad in our commitment to the defense of the Philippines, including the South China Sea, and we're going to continue to support the Philippines' military modernization goals," Biden continued. "Mr. President, our countries not only share a strong partnership, we share a deep friendship — one that has been enriched by millions of Filipino-Americans in the communities all across the United States of America." (Not surprising there that Tagalog is acknowledged as the fourth most-spoken language in the US now.)

Joining the President on this visit were First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos, Speaker Martin Romualdez, former President and Senior Deputy Speaker Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and members of the Cabinet that included Special Assistant to the President Antonio Lagdameo Jr., National Security Adviser Eduardo Año, Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo, Defense Secretary Carlito Galvez, Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla, Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla, Information and Communications Technology Secretary Ivan Uy, Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo Pascual; and PAGCOR chairman and CEO Alejandro "Al" Tengco.

There was a time that the US was the Philippines' number-one trading partner, but this has now fallen to number three.

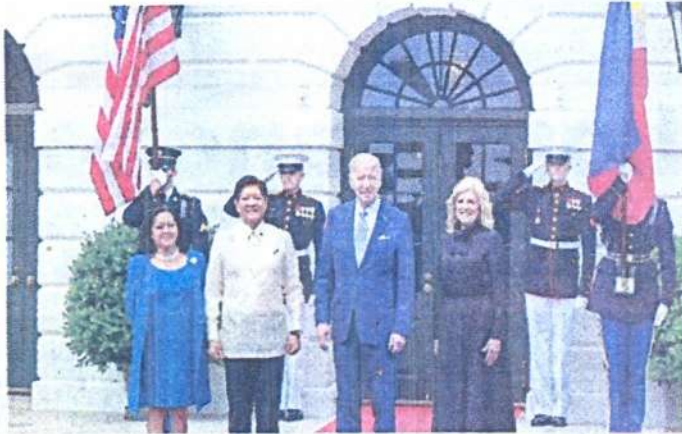
So this official working visit was not just an opportunity to strengthen bilateral political ties, but business and trade ties as well.

Indeed, a "lean and mean" business delegation of tycoons and key Philippine business leaders once again accompanied PBBM to seize opportunities to finalize investment deals with American companies looking again, closely, to the Philippines.

From the private sector were Aboitiz Group chair and Private



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President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. and First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos with US President Joe Biden and First Lady Dr. Jill Biden.



US Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Kritenbrink, Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo, LT Group's Michael Tan, Energy Secretary Raphael "Popo" Lotilla, the author, DICT Secretary Ivan Uy and Defense Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr.



Secretary Lotilla, Senior Deputy Speaker and former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the author, PCCI chair George Barcelon, Environment Secretary Antonia Loyzaga and Michael Tan.



The author with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.



Special Assistant to the President Anton Lagdameo and Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual.



Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin "Boying" Remulla.

Sector Advisory Council chair Sabin Aboitiz; Ayala Corp. chair Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala; SM Investments Corp. vice chair Tessie Sy-Coson; JG Summit Holdings chief Lance Gokongwei; Lucio Tan Group director Michael Tan; Alliance Global Inc. CEO Kevin Tan; San Miguel Corp. president and CEO Ramon S. Ang; ICTSI and Prime Infra chair Enrique Razon; Philippine Airlines president Stanley Ng; Ambassador Jose E.B. Antonio of the Century Properties Group; Noel Oñate of the APEC group; George Barcelon of the PCCI; Ernesto Sta. Maria of Pilipinas Global Network Ltd.; Monch Cruz of Vesticom; and myself, representing both Metro Pacific Investments Corp. and the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines.

These meetings resulted in commitments that included negotiating a US-Philippines civil nuclear cooperation agreement (123 agreement); cooperation on wind, solar, and geothermal energy; cooperation on reducing greenhouse-gas emissions from the waste, road, and shipping sectors; increased cooperation and knowledge sharing through the Science and Technology Agreement (STA); plans for the establishment of an Open-RAN Interoperability Lab in Manila; and plans to convene the first bilateral Civil Space Dialogue this year.

In his talk before the US-ASEAN Business Council, the President said that he wanted the country to go beyond mineral extraction and to actually produce batteries to prop up the local value chain. However, he also pointed out that it would need technology and strong industry participation to see this materialize.

The President mentioned the Philippines' role in leveraging its mineral resources and floated the possibility of producing batteries in the country with the availability of green metals such as cobalt and nickel.

President Marcos said buyers of mineral products should insist

upon declaration of proof that the products that they are being sold were built using green energy.

"And that, I think, is going to be an important part in making, hopefully, the manufacturing of batteries in the Philippines a success," he remarked.

PBBM also met with the Pinoy community there. He was welcomed like a rock star. The US remains the top destination of overseas Filipinos. About 4.21 million Filipinos live in the US, making them the biggest source of OFW remittances.

"Filipinos are much admired in America for the excellence and quality of their work," PBBM told the Filipino community in Washington DC. "Every one of you is an ambassador of the Philippines."

And, speaking of ambassadors, this official working visit was successful because of the hard work and determination, as well as passion, of our main man in Washington, the Philippine Ambassador to the United States, Jose Manuel "Babe" Romualdez, and embassy staff.

Kudos as well to Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez for the success of this official working visit and, likewise, for his meetings with US congressional leaders.

Led by our President, who has shown an indefatigable desire to let all and sundry know that the Philippines is open for business, these officials do not merely rest on their successes, but continue to soldier on, with passion and patriotism, for the good of the country and the Filipino people, so that greener pastures, like those found in the US, will also be found here; that our countrywomen and men need not go elsewhere. *Mabuhay!* \*

(We welcome your suggestions and comments.  
Please e-mail me at [monsrt@gmail.com](mailto:monsrt@gmail.com).  
Follow me on Instagram @monsromulo.)



## 'Only 478 of 1,634 LGUs have access to landfills'

Only 29.25 percent or 478 of 1,634 local government units (LGUs) in the country have access to sanitary landfills despite a steady increase of generated solid waste, according to the Commission on Audit (COA).

Records showed the country generated 16.63 million tons of solid waste in 2020 from 9.07 million tons in 2000.

In a report on the Solid Waste Management Program (SWMP), the COA said that it has been more than 20 years since Republic Act (RA) 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management (ESWM) Act of 2000 was enacted, but the government has yet to implement an effective garbage management program.

The 181-page performance audit report was uploaded on the COA website recently.

State auditors said the situation became apparent amid a steady increase in generated solid waste and the lack of sufficient material recovery facilities (MRFs) and sanitary landfills.

Enacted in January 2001,

RA 9003 paved the way for the creation of the National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC) tasked to address the country's growing solid waste problem.

The audit body said the situation may be attributed to the "frail enforcement and compliance with the law" due to political, financial and technical limitations of the LGUs and implementing agencies.

It said a majority of the LGUs have yet to comply with an order seeking to create their solid waste management boards, submit 10-year SWM plans and establish MRFs.

Citing data from the NSWMC and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the COA said that as of 2021, there were only 11,637 MRFs serving 16,418 of 42,046 barangays.

The audit body said the shortage of MRFs resulted in inconsistent implementation of waste segregation and diversion, wherein a significant volume of mixed wastes end up in landfills.

- Elizabeth Marcelo



## 19,892 oil spill victims to receive assistance

Close to 20,000 residents of Oriental Mindoro displaced by an oil spill from the sunken *M/V Princess Empress* will receive emergency employment and other assistance from the government.

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) said it has signed an agreement with other government agencies for the implementation of the *Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged / Displaced workers* or TUPAD.

"While the DOLE provides temporary aid to displaced workers under the TUPAD program, the agency still strives to bring more sustainable and inclusive assistance to affected individuals and families," Labor Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma said yesterday.

Under the agreement, 19,892 victims of the oil spill in several areas in Oriental Mindoro will

receive P110 million worth of emergency employment and livelihood assistance.

The Department of Tourism will conduct capacity development training programs for qualified workers in different areas of tourism such as culinary or food, farm, micro retail, and health and wellness tourism.

The local government will serve as coordinator to ensure systematic coverage of affected workers and smooth implementation of the project.

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority will set up a training center in Lipa, Batangas for the worker-beneficiaries.

The training center aims to deliver sustainable and demand-driven programs and produce 1,200 graduates annually who will work in various industries in the region.

— Mayen Jaymalin



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# Govt pours aid to Oriental Mindoro oil spill victims

BY SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA [@sam\\_medenilla](#)

**A**ROUND 20,000 people in areas affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro will receive P110 million worth of government aid, according to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

Calapan City will receive the bulk or P19,840,932 of the funds, which will be used to provide emergency employment and livelihood assistance to oil spill victims.

The other areas, which will benefit from the program include Pola (P5,065,073); Naujan (P9,143,103); Maswalay (P11,051,103); Pinamalayan (P17,886,147); Bansud (P7,787,673); Bu-

laIacao (P13,355,514); Gloria (P8,207,055); Bongabong (P7,782,042); Roxas (P7,748,256); and San Teodoro (P344,835).

DOLE signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the Department of Tourism (DOT), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (Tesda) and the Provincial Government of Oriental Mindoro (PGOM) to imple-

ment the initiative.

Under the MOA, DOLE will provide emergency employment to the affected workers through its Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) program as well as livelihood aid.

DOT will hold training programs for qualified beneficiaries on culinary/food tourism; farm tourism; tourism micro retail; and health and wellness tourism, among others.

Tesda will provide National Certificate (NC) II skills training in construction; agriculture; tourism; automotive; and other relevant sectors, as well as livelihood training programs through its training centers and registered mobile programs. It also designed short-term programs on critical competencies for each of the identified NC II courses.

For its part, PGOM will act as the coordinator in charge of ensuring the systematic coverage of affected workers and smooth project implementation, as well as monitoring the integration of trained beneficiaries to establish their self-reliance.

According to DOLE's regional office in Mimaropa, they will provide salaries to the beneficiaries, who will be covered by TUPAD.

They will also provide livelihood assistance for the beneficiaries, who will complete their training from DOT or Tesda.

Last month, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) reported a total of 193,436 individuals nationwide were affected by the oil spill caused by the sinking of motor tanker MT Princess Empress, when it sank off Oriental Mindoro last March.

The ship carried 800,000 liters of industrial fuel when it sank.



## The macro-scale nightmare of microplastics

LAST week, two scientists from Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology shared the results of a study they conducted in December 2021, which showed that there are microplastics in the air in all 17 cities of Metro Manila. Although there are a growing number of studies confirming that microplastics are present almost everywhere one looks for them, the findings of the Mindanao State researchers are still alarming, because they make the nightmare of microplastic pollution personal.

Put more plainly, if you are in Metro Manila, every breath you are drawing as you are reading this contains a detectable concentration of microplastics. If you are somewhere else, you're probably also breathing in microplastics; we just haven't gotten the research study to confirm that.

If you are unsure if this is a real problem or not, just Google "effect of microplastics on human health" and be prepared to be horrified. Medical researchers candidly admit that they do not fully understand all the health consequences of inhaling or ingesting microplastics — which, again, is something all of us are doing constantly — but that so far, they have discovered that microplastics can cause endocrine disruption, ir-



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regular immune system response, cytotoxicity, neurotoxicity, certain forms of cancer, and if the microplastic particles are small enough, interfere with our DNA.

Microplastics have been found in plants and animals both in the sea and on land, in bodies of water of all kinds, in the soil, in the ice in both polar regions, and floating in the upper atmosphere. The publication of the Mindanao State research coincidentally happened at about the same time as new research on microplastic pollution from plastic recycling facilities, which is supposed to help fix the problem. Unfortunately, it seems they are one of the worst sources of microplastic pollution; even with filtration systems designed to catch microplastic particles as small as 50 microns (0.05 millimeters, about the thickness of a human hair), a plastic recycling plant can produce between 1,300 and 3,000 metric tons of microplastic pollution per year in its wastewater. Even if that wastewater is subsequently

treated, it does not affect the microplastics, so they pass straight into the environment.

Here in the Philippines, the biggest source of microplastic pollution is thought to be the astonishing amount of regular plastic pollution — macroplastic, as it were — as the country is unfortunately one of the world's top producers of ocean plastic pollution. However, there are other largely overlooked sources as well, here and elsewhere. Vehicle tires are a prolific source of microplastic, as they constantly erode as they roll along; the lighter particles can be suspended in the air, while heavier particles are washed into drainage systems, waterways and the soil near roads.

Another huge source of microplastic pollution, one that is aggravated by the Philippines' relatively primitive wastewater systems, is laundry. Despite what people think, modern clothing that is completely made of organic fibers is actually quite rare, because in the context of clothing manufacturing, it is expensive, difficult to work with, and not particularly durable. That 100-percent cotton blouse you bought because of its all-natural material is almost certainly sewn together by at least partly synthetic thread, and may very well contain at least a small

amount of synthetic — i.e., plastic-based — fiber in the fabric itself, unbeknownst to you or the well-meaning vendor who sold it to you. And of course, most people's wardrobes typically contain a great deal of fully synthetic or blended materials. Laundering clothes causes them to shed small fibers, and while the plant-based ones will decompose rather quickly, the microplastic ones will not and remain in the water until absorbed into something else.

Finally, though we may not realize it, many of the everyday products we all use, such as soap, toothpaste, and other personal hygiene products contain microplastics. For example, that slightly abrasive texture of your toothpaste that gives your teeth that fresh, clean feeling is thanks to the addition of tiny bits of plastic such as cellophane, polyethylene, polypropylene, polyvinyl chloride, or polyamide, depending on what brand you prefer.

There are, of course, a great many people working to find ways to reduce microplastic pollution, but it is becoming increasingly clear that this is a battle that cannot be won. Plastic has become such an integral part of modern life that we cannot separate ourselves from it, nor

►Kritza5



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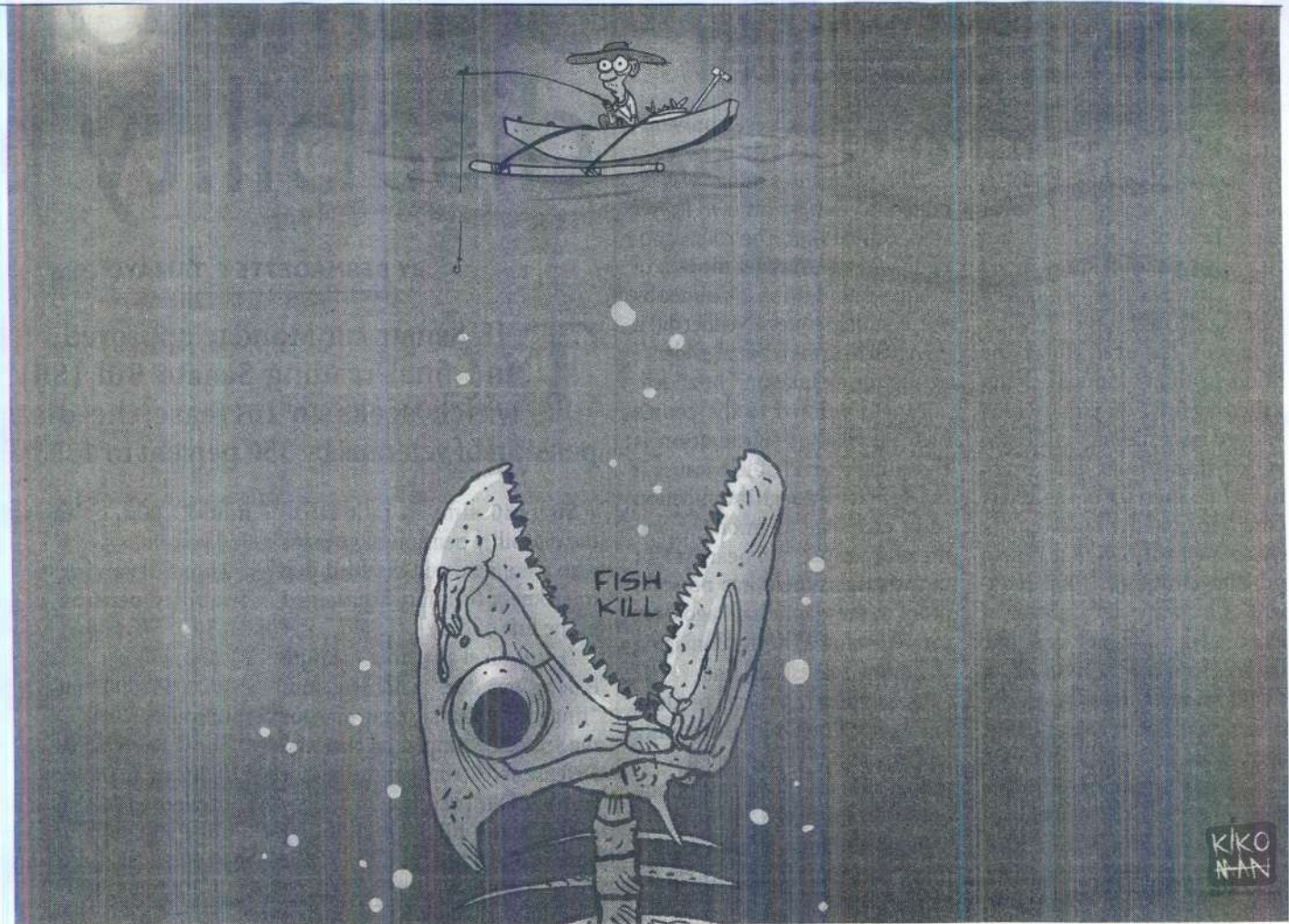
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## The macro-scale nightmare of microplastics

“manage” plastic waste to eliminate toxic microplastics. Attempting to do so is a bit like fighting the mythological hydra; eliminate one source of microplastic, cut one head off the monster, and two more will appear in its place.

The prescribed solution, to reduce our reliance on plastics and replace them with more sustainable substitute materials is unlikely to accomplish much, simply because plastic is so damned useful. Materials science may have some breakthroughs in the future, but as things stand now, our record of finding good substitutes is pretty poor. We can’t even get drinking straws and grocery bags right; the prospects of finding other ways to manufacture more complex and more critical items — think about the vast amount of plastic found in medical supplies and equipment, for example — seem very remote indeed.

And again, even if we solve that impossible puzzle, virtually every bit

of plastic ever produced (since 1907, when the first fully synthetic plastic resin was created) still exists on Earth, and will forever — save for the insignificant fraction of the total that we’ve launched into space, or destroyed down to the molecular level in tiny experiments with chemical pyrolysis, or incidentally through the detonation of nuclear weapons.

The great, mostly unspoken fear of humanity — well, all of it except for the few amoral dullards who persist in trying to gaslight the public into believing that our observed and measurable reality is a hoax — is that we will someday, or perhaps already have applied our ingenuity to create problems that cannot be fixed, and which will be the seeds of our own destruction. Unless we still have some ingenuity left, it now appears those seeds are in the form of microscopic plastic bits. Good job, people.

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RIVER RETAINING WALL AT RISK

# FAMILIES EVACUATED FROM SINKING GROUND IN SAN CARLOS CITY

BACOLOD CITY—At least 58 persons from 10 families were evacuated on Friday after a wall along the Palampas River in San Carlos City, Negros Occidental, showed signs it could collapse anytime as ground fissures grew and the soil began to sink in the same area.

Joe Alingasa Jr., head of the City Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office (CDRRMO), said the ground fissures threatened to swallow the houses in Purok Tindalo, Barangay 1.

“A portion of the retaining wall along Palampas River has early signs of possible collapse due to scouring,” he said.

Ten adjacent houses, he said, were found to have cracks in the floors while one already sank.

“Portions beneath the houses are hollow and water has seeped in. It looks like a cave now,” Alingasa said.

Personnel of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), City Engineering Department and CDRRMO Community Risk Assessment Team had conducted an investigation on the cause of the visible cracks in the retaining wall and ground fissures.

**No prior inspection**

Village chief Joselito Lopez and Councilman John Pomar Jr. led the evacuation together with the CDRRMO. The affected families were brought to the village’s multipurpose gymnasium and were provided with food.

“They will remain in the evacuation center until some solution is reached to ensure their safety,” Alingasa said.

Heavy downpour or flood, he said, could worsen the situation and cause the houses to sink.

“When the retaining wall was built, the structural situation beneath the 10 houses was not checked because they are located on private property,” he said.

“When cracks were seen on the retaining wall and on the ground where the houses are located, it was discovered that it is hollow beneath the houses where water has seeped in,” he added.

Alingasa said they found what appeared to be a cave underneath the houses where mudfish abound.

“There is a hole in a section of the river wall that collapsed where humans can enter and swim beneath the houses to catch mudfish,” he said.

The San Carlos City Engineer’s Office has been working with the DPWH to find ways to ensure the safety of residents, Alingasa said. —CARLA P. GOMEZ INQ



**CRACKS** Ground fissures, as shown in this photo taken on May 12, threaten at least 10 houses in San Carlos City, Negros Occidental. —PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SAN CARLOS CITY DISASTER RISK REDUCTION MANAGEMENT OFFICE



**NOT SAFE** The appearance of big cracks at the river wall and nearby residences has forced the evacuation of at least 10 families in Purok Tindalo, Barangay 1, Barangay San Carlos, Negros Occidental over the weekend. PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY SAN CARLOS CDRMMO

# Ground fissures force families to evacuate

BY EUGENE Y. ADIONG

**B**ACOLOD CITY: At least 10 families in San Carlos City, Negros Occidental have been ordered to evacuate their homes after a portion of a nearby retaining wall along the Palampas River showed signs of a potential collapse.

Joe Alingasa Jr., head of the San Carlos City Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office (CDRRMO), said large cracks are visible

at the river wall located in Purok Tindalo, Barangay 1.

Alingasa said personnel from the Department of Public Works

and Highways, City Engineer's Office, and a risk assessment team from the CDRRMO went to the area to investigate the ground fissures and find the cause of the cracks.

"A portion of the retaining wall along Palampas River at Purok Tindalo, Barangay 1 shows early signs of possible collapse due to scouring," he said.

Ten adjacent houses were also found to have cracks in their concrete floors, Alingasa said.

"Portions beneath the houses

are hollow and water has seeped in. It looks like a cave," he said.

The City Engineer's Office, in a statement, declared the area "not safe" to residents. They are advised to evacuate their houses and return only when given the green light by the government.

Alingasa said Mayor Renato Gustilo has ordered that all the affected families will be housed at the City Evacuation Center so that they can assuredly receive assistance from the city government.



## DOH tells hospitals: Prepare for El Niño

By RHODINA VILLANUEVA

As the country continues to prepare for the El Niño phenomenon which is seen to affect most areas nationwide starting this June, the Department of Health (DOH) advised all hospitals and health care facilities to adopt measures to help mitigate its ill effects.

In Department Circular 2023-0183, the DOH said it is imperative for all health care facilities to be prepared for the weather phenomenon to ensure continued service to the public.

"We are advising all government and private hospitals and health facilities to take necessary measures to prepare and ensure resilience in time of El Niño," said the DOH.

"Hospitals and other health facilities shall prepare their respective institutions to maintain service continuity."

Signed by DOH officer-in-charge Maria Rosario Vergeire, the circular said "all health care facilities must

maintain an adequate amount of water supply, including safe drinking water that is good for at least 72 hours."

The DOH also advised all hospitals to coordinate with local water concessionaires to ensure their water reserve allocations; account or procure water storage equipment that are filled up to maximum levels; repair all potential sources of water wastage, such as leaking pipes and faucets and orient all hospital staff members on proper water management strategies.

"Orient hospital staff and initiate applicable water management strategies on storage, reusing and sourcing alternative water sources, reduction of water loss, engineering or piping fixtures preventive maintenance and securing emergency water sources," the health department said.

It also advised hospitals to anticipate intermittent power supply interruptions by inspecting and maintaining their electrical system in the facility; ensure backup power

generation good for at least 48 hours and opt to use equipment with energy saving features.

"Energy saving strategies may also be adopted, such as efficient ventilation, use of daylight and other illumination controls and use renewable energy," the DOH said.

At the same time, the DOH also advised health care facilities to be prepared for an increase in consultation involving infectious, dermatologic, food and waterborne or systemic illnesses, diseases or disorders brought by prolonged exposure to hot weather, water unavailability or poor water quality.

The DOH said hospitals should orient, update or train relevant staff members on the detection and case management of these illnesses, diseases or disorders while ensuring ample resources, medicines, supplies and equipment such as oral rehydration solutions, antibiotics, anti-spasmodics, paracetamol, intravenous fluids and other essential commodities.



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## Dipolog sizzles with 47°C heat index

The heat index in Dipolog, Zamboanga del Norte reached 47 degrees Celsius on Sunday as 11 other areas also recorded dangerous levels, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration.

PAGASA said the highest heat index in Dipolog was recorded at 3 p.m.

Meanwhile, Pasay City recorded a heat index of 43 degrees Celsius at 2 p.m. of the same day.

In Quezon City, the heat index peaked at 41 degrees Celsius.

Other areas with dangerous levels of heat index were Butuan in Agusan del Norte, Dagupan in Pangasinan, Le-

gazpi in Albay, Masbate City in Masbate and Science City of Muñoz in Nueva Ecija with 43 degrees Celsius.

Davao City, Laguindingan Airport in Misamis Oriental and Roxas City in Capiz logged 42 degrees Celsius.

State weather forecasters said that continued exposure to dangerous levels of heat index may cause cramps, exhaustion and stroke.

Data from PAGASA showed that the highest heat indexes recorded from May 1 to 14 this year were in Legazpi City with 50 degrees Celsius, Butuan City and Guiuan in Eastern Samar with 49 and Dipolog, 47 degrees Celsius.

- Bella Cariaso