

31 May 2023 Wednesday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**



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## WE MUST MEASURE WHAT WE TREASURE—DENR CHIEF

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

[@jonlmayuga](#)

**‘W**E must measure what we treasure as a country.”

This was stressed by Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga as she gave full support to a proposed measure to develop a system of accounting that accounts for the full value of the country’s natural assets that contribute to economic development. She aired her support during the Senate Committee on Economic Affairs hearing on the proposed Philippine Ecosystem and Natural Capital Accounting System (Pencas).

Three senators—Loren Legarda, Ramon “Bong” Revilla Jr., and Joel Villanueva—have separately filed with the Senate similar bills seeking to institutionalize Pencas. The counterpart measure was filed by Negros Occidental 3rd District Rep. Jose Francisco “Kiko” Benitez in the House of Representatives.

In a statement, the DENR chief said the agency strongly and categorically supports pro-

posed measures that aim to institutionalize Pencas, saying it will not only provide the country with a snapshot of the environment, but its contribution to the economy as well.

“Pencas helps map possible directions in the development of the nation beyond traditional indicators and allow us to explore multiple trajectories for social, economic, and environmental development from the valuation of our natural resources,” she told lawmakers.

Loyzaga said Pencas will not only serve as a tool for determining the contributions of ecosystems to economic development but also for better management of natural resources and improving climate and disaster resilience.

“The Department believes that these bills will more accurately reflect the true state of the nation’s wealth as derived from its natural resources. It will enable strategic planning for sustainable development and climate and disaster resilience by establishing the baseline accounts for the Philippine Development Plan,” she pointed out.

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Loyzaga said Pencas may serve as a core means of achieving agendas on biodiversity, climate, Sustainable Development Goals, and green recovery; lay out a comprehensive data framework of natural capital statistics and accounts; and provide tools and measures to contribute to the protection, conservation, restoration, and resiliency of ecosystems.

Moreover, Loyzaga said Pencas will help equip the Water Resources Management Office in the DENR, which was recently created by virtue of Executive Order No. 22 issued by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

She said Pencas can provide information on the physical flows of water within and between the economy and the environment; stocks of water assets and changes to these stocks; economic activity; and transactions related to water resources.

Loyzaga disclosed that the DENR had already identified significant actions it will undertake in support of Pencas in line with its mandates and the Roadmap to Institutionalize Natural Capital Accounting in the Philippines.

The DENR, she said, will lead efforts to put in place site-specific and area-based ecosystem accounts; establish the national geospatial database for natural resources as a key reference to natural capital accounting; promote awareness of valuable opportunities and benefits of the natural environment, biodiversity,

and ecosystem; ensure availability of tools, methods, and skills; and cooperate with space agencies and spatial data providers to optimize the utilization of ground- and space-based monitoring in establishing the baseline conditions of ecosystems.

Legarda, who presided over the Senate hearing, said that institutionalizing Pencas "will allow the government to measure environmental inputs and outputs, and which information is vital for economic management and policy-making."

The DENR earlier established its national natural resource geospatial database under Loyzaga's leadership to enable it to identify and value the country's natural resources, while keeping in mind how these should be sustainably developed and managed.

Loyzaga said the DENR supports the provisions in the Pencas bills pertaining to the establishment of a dedicated unit to carry out its responsibilities and allocating budgetary resources to meet the requirements for the effective implementation of the proposed system.

However, she said the agency suggests that Pencas establish clear concepts, definitions, and classifications of ecosystem services and their components to be able to set up an innovative payment scheme for ecological services that encourages local governments and businesses to reward people's efforts.



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# Manila Standard



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**RIVER WARRIORS.** Elements of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR) River Warrior conduct cleaning operation along the shores of Manila Bay at the Baseco complex in Tondo, Manila. Inset shows workers of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority also clearing the Talayan creek along Araneta Ave, Quezon City of silts and debris. **Norman Cruz and Manny Palmero**

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**DIRTY JOB** — River warriors of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Pasig River Coordinating and Management Office (PRCMO) help in cleaning up parts of Pasig River near Manila Bay in Baseco, Tondo, Manila, on Tuesday, May 30, 2023, as part of preparations for the rainy season. (Juan Carlo de Vela)



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# Protocols in responding to oil spills and environmental disasters pushed

BY JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ  
@joveemarie

**A** LAWMAKER is pushing for the establishment of interagency protocols that would bring government agencies in close coordination with each other to swiftly mobilize and address the impact of environmental disasters on affected communities and ecosystems.

Bicol Saro Party-list Rep. Brian Raymund Yamsuan said a "whole-of-government" approach could change the current "reactionary" mindset in

government of addressing the widespread and debilitating effects of environmental hazards and catastrophes, such as the oil spill from the sunken

MT Princess Empress, which capsized in the waters off Oriental Mindoro last February 28.

Yamsuan encouraged the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and other agencies involved in handling the effects of the oil spill to "get their acts together" and put in place protocols to ensure that incidents of this nature would be better dealt with in the future.

"How many oil spills have happened in the entire Philippines? Up to now we have not yet formed established protocols that we can follow. I'm saying this because we cannot solve the problem in this manner," said the lawmaker.

Yamsuan made the call at the hearing after resource persons from various government agencies appear to be uncoordinated in their efforts to address the MT Princess oil spill three months after the incident, which has affected close to 41,000 families living in shoreline communities and left over 200 people ill.

The issue of food safety, for one, received different responses from the DENR and BFAR.

The hearing by the ecology commit-

tee chaired by Biñan City Lone District Rep. Marlyn Alonte, and the natural resources committee chaired by Cavite 4th District Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr., was a continuation of the inquiry into the MT Empress oil spill.

Yamsuan suggested that government agencies speak with one voice on the issue and create a task force to better deal with the problem.

"It's high time for us to change our mindset. We should not be reactionary. Not like this, where you point fingers at others when we conduct hearings," he said. "I suggest that you get your acts together," added Yamsuan.

At least 10 municipalities in Oriental Mindoro as well as coastal areas in Palawan, Antique, and Romblon have been affected by the oil spill.

The area of the oil spill is a rich fishing ground that provides food and livelihood to more than two million people.

According to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), traces of oil spill from the sunken vessel had reached Verde Island in Batangas City, which is at the heart of the Verde Island Passage (VIP), recognized as the center of global shore fish biodiversity.



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## DA-BFAR provides P117-M aid to oil spill-hit areas

THE Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) will provide over P117.864 million in emergency and relief assistance to areas affected by the oil spill from the tanker that sank off Oriental Mindoro in February.

The bureau said that P12 million in fuel assistance was given to affected fisherfolk in Region 4B (Mimaropa).

Also, P4.4 million was allotted for post-harvest training of various fisherfolk associations and cooperatives, and over P1.5 million was utilized for food assistance to more than 5,000 fisherfolk in the region.

"Supplementary interventions are in the pipeline, including the grant of additional FRP (fiber-glass-reinforced plastic) boats, fish aggregating devices, aquaculture feed mill projects, bangus fry, tilapia fingerlings, and fish cages to

areas affected by the oil spill," the BFAR said in its statement.

In addition, BFAR has also deployed monitoring, control, and surveillance vessels, as well as PPE sets and other materials for clean-up activities.

The latest monitoring of the DA-BFAR in affected fishing areas showed that the fishing waters of Calapan, Bansud and Gloria are safe. Likewise, the bureau's analyses also showed that the fishing waters off Bongabong, Bulalacao, Mansalay, Roxas, Baco, Puerto Galera and San Teodoro remained safe.

However, the DA-BFAR recommended to keep the fishing ban in Pola, Pinamalayan and Naujan.

Mayor Jennifer "Ina Alegre" Cruz of Pola, Oriental Mindoro said the oil spill caused an estimated loss of P300 million in the livelihood of fisherfolk. She placed

the damage to mangroves and shorelines at P134 million. Damage to the environment caused by the oil spill may reach P7 billion, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources said.

### No complaint filed

The affected residents of Mindoro, meanwhile, asked the government to file a formal complaint against the owner and operator of the tanker.

This developed as the Hanayng Yumayabong na Mangingisda (Hayuma) and the Serve the People Corps-Southern Tagalog (STPC) held a dialogue with Calapan City's Sangguniang Panglungsod (City Council) on Tuesday, May 30.

In a letter addressed to the vice mayor and the city council's presiding officer Bim Ignacio and read during the session, members

of Hayuma said that while they appreciate the aid that they are receiving from the different government agencies, they wanted a clear presentation on where the calamity funds allotted for them went and why there is no formal

complaint yet filed against the entities behind the oil spill.

"We are thankful to the aids that we have been receiving although we all know that these are not enough for our needs. We want a detailed accounting of the calamity funds from the city and provincial governments. What puzzles us also is why there is no complaint yet filed by the local government units against the owner of the oil tanker and who chartered them," the fishermen said in their letter, a copy of which was furnished to *The Manila Times*.

The STPC, in a separate state-

ment, said that the P355 per day cash-for-work program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Department of Labor and Employment is not enough for the needs of the affected fishermen.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) announced the arrival on Monday of the DSV Fire Opal that would conduct the siphoning of the remaining oil from the sunken MT Princess Empress.

PCG spokesman Rear Admiral Armand Balilo said an estimated 120,000 to 240,000 liters of oil remains inside the tanker out of the 800,000 liters it carried when it sank. Balilo added that it would take 20 to 30 days before all the oil can be siphoned off depending on the weather condition and subsea progress.

**JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL AND  
IRE JOE V.C. LAURENTE**



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REGIONS

## Mindoro fishers seek more aid

CALAPAN CITY—Three months after the oil spill that hit Oriental Mindoro towns, local fishermen and affected communities still reeling from the tragedy continue to demand justice as they decried the inadequate aid from the government. A coalition of environmental advocates also assailed the government for the lack of sanctions against companies and agencies responsible for the environmental disaster. —STORY BY THE INQUIRER STAFF

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# Or. Mindoro fishers decry inadequate government aid

Coastal communities still reeling from oil spill impact 3 months after tanker sinking





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**By Madonna T. Virola,  
Delfin T. Mallari Jr.,  
Jane Bautista  
and Frances Mangosing**  
@Team Inquirer

CALAPAN CITY—Three months after the oil spill, fishers in Oriental Mindoro and other affected communities still reeling from the tragedy continue to demand justice from authorities.

The groups of fishers in this provincial capital questioned the perceived “politicized” distribution of food and financial aid to affected communities, as some residents in coastal areas here had yet to receive support from the government.

This developed as a coalition of environmental advocates decried the lack of sanctions against the companies responsible for the sunken MT Princess Empress that caused a massive oil spill that displaced thousands of fishers in Oriental Mindoro; and damaged marine and coastal resources in the province, up to as far as Caluya Island in Antique and Taytay town in Palawan.

The spill also threatened the resource-rich Verde Island Passage (VIP), a 1.14-million-hectare marine ecosystem located off the coastlines of Batangas, Romblon, Marinduque, Occidental Mindoro and Oriental Mindoro provinces.

According to Benedict Sibayan, president of Hanay ng mga Yumayabong na Mangingisda (Hayuma) in Calapan City, fishers in his group were wondering why their province was placed under a state of calamity “but until now, we cannot feel the funds allocated for us” nor were they called to a promised meeting by government authorities to discuss their concerns.

Estelito Regala, head of the fishers organization in the city’s village of Ibaba East, said fishers were impoverished and had no more food to eat amid the continuing fishing ban in many municipal waters of Oriental Mindoro, three months since the vessel sank off the province on Feb. 28 while carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel.

Fisherman Bitol Sibayan from Calapan’s Barangay San Antonio also revealed they were not receiving information on the results of the water analysis conducted by different agencies.

**Confusing directives**

Sibayan added there was also a confusion in the implementation of the fishing ban as their local government leader would allow them to continue fishing but the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) would reprimand them when they sail off Mindoro’s waters to catch fish.

“Who should we follow? In the meantime we are suffering (from the fishing ban),” he said.

Hayuma said they have submitted a letter to the provincial board of Oriental Mindoro asking them to explain the inaction to prosecute the polluters and to be transparent in the disbursement of the calamity fund.

Based on the data from the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, Oriental Mindoro sustained an estimated environmental damage of over P7 billion and P3.8 billion in damage to fisheries, including income loss caused by the oil spill.

The government’s failure to take legal action against those responsible for the oil spill was also raised by the members of Protect VIP, a network of groups protecting the marine corridor teeming with biodiversity, who trooped to the House of Representatives on Monday.

“While the government dillydallies in exacting accountability and justice, the damage to Verde Island Passage’s ecosystem and resulting impacts on stakeholders continue to worsen. Companies responsible for this must be punished,” said Fr. Edwin Gariguez, lead convenor of Protect VIP.

He was referring to RDC Reield Marine Services, which owns the sunken vessel, and SL Harbor Bulk Terminal Corp., a subsidiary of San Miguel Corp., which chartered the MT Princess Empress.

Gariguez called on lawmakers to set a precedent in holding

the corporations accountable, noting that “despite clear violations and disruption, justice remains elusive.”

“This national disaster has been going on for three long months, but we fear that it is still not being treated as one,” Gariguez added.

**Siphoning work starts**

The PCG, which has been leading the cleanup operation in spill-affected areas, said work has begun to siphon off the remaining oil from MT Princess Empress, which has now completely sank in the waters off Naujan.

Dynamic Support Vessel Fire Opal arrived on Monday at the Calapan Anchorage Area in Calapan City and then proceeded to the area where MT Princess Empress sank to siphon off the remaining fuel from the tanker and expected to extract 120,000 liters to 240,000 liters of oil, the PCG said on Tuesday.

The siphoning vessel—which was chartered by Malayan Towage and Salvage Corp., one of the two contractors hired by RDC Reield Marine Services to help with the oil spill cleanup—arrived in the Philippines from Singapore last Friday.

The extraction could take 20 days to 30 days depending on the weather and subsea progress, according to Commodore Geronimo Tuvilla, commander of the incident management team in Oriental Mindoro.

Countries like the United States, Japan, South Korea and France have provided assistance to the oil spill response.

The Presidential Communications Office, on May 27, said that in an update to President Marcos earlier this month, Defense Senior Undersecretary Carlito Galvez Jr. has reported that of the 74.71 kilometers of affected coastline, 62.95 km, or 84.26 percent, had already been cleaned up as of May 10.

Galvez said 6,801 liters of oil waste and 300,603.60 liters of oil-contaminated waste had been collected through the efforts of various agencies and organizations. INQ



**CLEAN-UP OPS** — Liberian vessel DSV Fire Opal starts siphoning operation in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on Monday, May 29, 2023 to extract the remaining 120,000 to 240,000 liters of industrial fuel oil from the sunken MT Princess Empress. (Photo from the Philippine Coast Guard)

## 120,000 to 240,000 liters of oil still in sunken tanker — PCG

By MARTIN SADONGDONG

From around 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil, there remain 120,000 to 240,000 liters in the sunken motor tanker (MT) Princess Empress, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) revealed, as oil siphoning finally began deep down the waters of Oriental Mindoro.

Dynamic support vessel (DSV) Fire Opal started oil siphoning operation in Naujan municipality on Monday, May 29, to extract the remaining “black oil” from the sunken tanker, said PCG spokesperson Rear Admiral Armando Balilo.

“Mula sa humigit-kumulang 800,000 litro na langis, nasa 120,000 hanggang 240,000 ▶ 3

## 120,000 to 240,000 liters of oil still in sunken tanker — PCG

litro pa ang inaasahang hihigupin ng DSV Opal (From around 800,000 liters of oil, DSV [Fire] Opal is expected to extract 120,000 to 240,000 liters),” Balilo said.

DSV Fire Opal, a Liberian vessel, was chartered by the Malayan Towage and Salvage Corporation, and contracted by the

Protection and Indemnity Insurance Club.

It sailed from Singapore on May 19 and arrived at the Subic Bay Freeport Zone in Zambales on May 26. The vessel then sailed to Calapan Anchorage Area on Monday morning to start the siphoning.

The siphoning operation is seen to

take 20 to 30 days depending on the weather and “subsea progress,” or the handling and treatment of the collected oil, according to Commodore Gerónimo Tuvilla, commander of the Incident Management Team-Oriental Mindoro (IMT-OrMin).

“Once the oil removal is completed, we hope the process will pave the way for the rehabilitation of affected areas and finally transition to the normalcy of lives of affected Mindoreños,” Tuvilla shared.

MT Princess Empress sank 400 meters below sea level in Naujan after experiencing rough sea conditions on Feb. 28. The incident resulted in a massive oil spill in Oriental Mindoro that spread to Antique, Batangas, and Palawan.

A total of 42,487 families or 200,244 individuals were affected by the oil spill while damage to agriculture was pegged at ₱4.7 billion, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC).



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## Siphoning of oil from sunken tanker starts

Siphoning of the remaining fuel oil from the sunken motor tanker *Princess Empress* has started, according to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG).

The dynamic support vessel *Fire Opal* arrived at the Calapan anchorage area on Monday.

PCG spokesperson Rear Admiral Armand Balilo said around 120,000 to 240,000 liters of oil in the tanker would be removed.

The vessel was chartered

by Malayan Towage and Salvage Corp. and contracted by Protection and Indemnity Insurance Club. It departed from Singapore on May 19 and arrived at the Subic Bay Freeport Zone on May 26 before it sailed toward Oriental Mindoro.

Incident Management Team-Oriental Mindoro commander Commodore Geronimo Tuvilla said it may take 20 to 30 days, depending on the sea condition and "subsea progress," before siphoning

of the remaining oil can be completed.

"Once oil removal is completed, we hope that the process will pave the way for the rehabilitation of affected areas and finally transition to the normalcy of lives of affected Mindoreños," Tuvilla said

Meanwhile, Balilo denied reports that the PCG received P50 million intended for fishermen affected by the oil spill.

He clarified that the PCG

received P33 million, but the amount came from the Oil Pollution Management Fund, and was intended to finance oil spill cleanup.

"It was not intended to be given to affected people. The amount will be used to buy equipment such as oil spill booms and absorbent pads," Balilo said.

*Princess Empress* was carrying 800,000 liters of oil when it sank in the waters off Naujan town on Feb. 28.

- Evelyn Macairan



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## Plastic pollution: Treaty talks get into the nitty-gritty

COUNTRIES grappling with the "immense" task of ending plastic pollution began a new round of talks in Paris on Monday, amid protests and warnings of the urgency to act.

Representatives of 175 nations with divergent ambitions met at the Unesco headquarters with the aim of making

progress toward reaching by next year a historic agreement covering the entire plastics life cycle.

As the talks opened, the head of the negotiations, Gustavo Meza-Cuadra Velazquez of Peru, said the challenge was "immense, as we all aware here,

► **PollutionA8**

but it is not insurmountable."

"The world's eyes are on us," he said.

French President Emmanuel Macron urged participating nations to put an end to a "globalized and unsustainable" production model, where richer countries export plastic waste to poorer ones.

"Plastic pollution is a time-bomb and at the same time already a scourge today," he said

in a video message, adding that the materials, based on fossil fuels, posed a risk to global warming goals as well as to biodiversity and human health.

He said the priorities of the negotiations should be first to reduce production of plastics and to ban "as soon as possible" the most polluting products like single-use plastics.

The stakes are high, given that annual plastics

production has more than doubled in 20 years to 460 million tonnes, and is on track to triple within four decades.

Two-thirds of this output is discarded after being used once or a few times, and winds up as waste. Less than 10 percent is recycled, while more than a fifth is dumped or burned illegally.

Environmental groups have raised concerns about the influence of industry lobbying on the talks, with protests outside the venue on Monday carrying signs saying "Kick industry out."

"What do we want? Global plastic treaty! When do we want it? Now!" protesters chanted.

In nature, microplastics have been found in ice near the North Pole and in fish navigating the deepest recesses of the oceans.

In humans, microscopic bits of plastic have been detected in blood, breast milk and placentas.

Plastic also contributes to global warming, accounting for 3.4 percent of global emissions in 2019, according to the OECD.



POLLUTION FROM A1

## Plastic pollution: Treaty talks get into the nitty-gritty

### 'Gushing pollution'

In February 2022, nations agreed in principle on the need for a legally binding UN treaty to end plastic pollution around the world, setting an ambitious 2024 deadline to reach an agreement.

Policy actions to be debated during the talks include a global ban on single-use plastic items and production caps on new plastic production.

Delegates in Paris have to narrow down what elements should be included in the eventual draft treaty text, though technical debates had already slowed down the schedule on Monday.

Environmental groups are concerned the treaty may not include targets to reduce overall plastic production.

Reduction of plastic use and production is part of a plan by the High Ambition Coalition of some 50 nations led by Rwanda and Norway, and including the European Union, Canada, Chile and — as of a few days ago — Japan.

But many countries are reluctant to aim for absolute cuts in production, insisting that recycling and improved waste management are the answer.

These include China, the United States, Saudi Arabia and other OPEC countries, all of which have large petrochemical industries.

AFP



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## EDITORIAL

### Poisoning the planet

Earlier this month, scientists sounded the alarm on the presence of microplastics in the polluted air of the National Capital Region. The warning was based on tests conducted on air samples from 17 local government units in the NCR from Dec. 16 to 31, 2021, at the height of the COVID pandemic.

Today, World No Tobacco Day, health experts are pointing out that the second highest form of plastic pollution worldwide comes from cigarette filters, which contain microplastics. Last year the World Health Organization reported that approximately 4.5 trillion cigarette filters pollute oceans, rivers, urban areas, beaches and soil annually. Tobacco products including vapes and e-cigarettes, which contain 7,000 types of toxic chemicals that leech into the environment when discarded, are the most littered item on the planet, according to the WHO.

In a report titled "Tobacco: Poisoning Our Planet," the WHO said the carbon footprint of the tobacco industry – an estimated 84 million tons of carbon dioxide annually – is equivalent to one-fifth of the carbon footprint of commercial aviation and therefore worsens global warming. The WHO wants cigarette filters to be classified as single-use plastic to be covered by appropriate regulation.

The warning on tobacco's carbon footprint is apart from the WHO's long-standing warning about smoking-related

deaths, placed at eight million annually. Much progress has been made in the campaign to ban smoking in enclosed public places.

These days the WHO is also moving to raise public awareness on the risks posed by EVALI – E-cigarette or Vaping-Associated Lung Injury. Vapes also contain nicotine and certain brands are laced with the active ingredient in marijuana. Health experts in the United States have warned about serious lung injuries from EVALI.

For this year's World No Tobacco Day, the WHO is urging governments to provide incentives for crop switching from tobacco to sustainable food commodities amid a worsening global food crisis. "Grow food, not tobacco" is the theme this year. Despite warnings about green tobacco sickness – a type of nicotine poisoning that afflicts tobacco farmers – resistance to this campaign is expected in the Philippines, which is the world's 15th largest producer of tobacco and the second biggest in the Western Pacific after China.

But even if the Philippines is currently led by a native of the country's tobacco-producing region, the admonition from the WHO can be explored for appropriate even if gradual action, in the interest of public health, food security and environmental protection. There are so many other cash crops, and they don't cause such harm to the health of humans and the planet like tobacco.



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## House approves bamboo devt bill

**T**HE House of Representatives has approved a measure seeking to promote the development of the Philippine bamboo industry.

With 282 votes, lawmakers passed on third and final reading House Bill (HB) 7941, which aims to achieve such development by strengthening the Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council.

The bill will now be transmitted to the Senate for its own deliberations.

According to the measure, the State shall recognize the strategic importance of the bamboo as a sturdy, versatile, and replenishable material that can be a sustainable source of livelihood and catalyst for agricultural productivity.

"There is a lot of potential in the local bamboo industry. Currently, we are the fifth largest bamboo exporter in the world. With smart planning and 'malasakit,' especially to our bamboo planters, the Philippine bamboo industry could be a behemoth a few years down the road," Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez said.

Some of the principal authors are Reps. L Ray Villafuerte, Mujiv Hataman, PM Vargas, Miguel Luis Villafuerte, Tsuyoshi Anthony Horibata, and others.

Through the measure, a program for a sustainable utilization, propagation and promotion of bamboo as furniture, food, construction and design material, and other uses shall be established.

The Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council shall be tasked to create Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Program, which shall include plans of actions and projects for the scientific propagation, development and management, processing, utilization, business development, and commercialization of Philippine bamboo and bamboo products, through the cooperation of all stakeholders of the industry.

These include producers of raw materials, processors, marketing and promotion service providers, and concerned national agencies and local government units (LGUs), the bill said.

The bill will also create the Bamboo Industry Re-

search and Development Center, which will serve as the secretariat of the Council.

The program shall aim to make the Philippine bamboo industry competitive in the local and global markets and provide opportunities for local employment and the establishment of bamboo-based community enterprises.

Among other functions, the program will ensure that the bamboo industry has sufficient quality raw materials through the establishment and management of bamboo nurseries and plantations; provide continuous training and capacity building in bamboo plantation operations, bamboo processing, and product development and design; promote investment in the bamboo industry by providing substantial incentives to investors and encouraging the establishment of bamboo plantations and bamboo processing operations; and provide skilled labor and manpower through continuous relevant capacity building.

The measure also provides for the participation of local government units (LGUs) in the program.

"All provinces, cities, and municipalities shall establish a Bamboo Industry Development Council and shall endeavor to capacitate agricultural workers and encourage entrepreneurs in harvesting and post-harvesting operations," it said.

Meanwhile, incentives for bamboo plantation development are also enumerated in HB 7941.

Some of these are a) exemption from the payment of rent for the use of government lands for commercial bamboo plantation for the first five (5) years of operation reckoned from the date of the first harvest of the plantation; b) In the case of private plantations, exemption from the requirement to secure a cutting permit for the harvesting of bamboo and a transport permit for as long as the plantation is registered with the Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR); and c) exemption from the payment of forest charges and other fees for taxes that LGUs may impose. *Jovee Marie N. Dela Cruz*

# Rizome invests \$100 M for PH bamboo project

By BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT

Florida-based Rizome Philippines is investing \$100 million, approximately (P5.5 billion) for an engineered bamboo plant in Cagayan de Oro in support of the government's move to develop the bamboo sector in the country.

Former Agriculture Secretary Luis P. Lorenzo Jr., a global investor at Rizome Philippines through subsidiary Bamboo Ecologic Export Corp (BEEP), is bringing in cutting edge, proprietary technology in bamboo wood manufacturing.

Rizome International is financing its investments in the Philippines through loans, "offset credits" for capital equipment startup and operational expenses.

In a statement, Lorenzo said that Rizome is progressively infusing capital from \$20 million to \$100 million in its Cagayan de Oro plant.

Rizome buys bamboo slats from agrarian reform beneficiaries who have planted bamboos in Bukidnon, North Cotabato, Agusan provinces, and Surigao province. It also buys bamboo from communities in mining areas.

At present, Rizome produces panels, boards, veneers, and strand woven made of giant asper bamboo. It exports the manufactured bamboos to Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) in America, Europe, Middle East, Africa, and Asia Pacific.

"I became a global investor because I want to bring the best technology here. I don't want the Philippines to be second class. The investment is big. But (even now) our business is already a billion peso industry. And it employs thousands," said Lorenzo.

Lorenzo just met with Phil-

ippine Bamboo Industry Development Council (PBIDC) Vice Chairman Deogracias Victor B. Savellano, who has been pushing for priority legislation to institutionalize execution of Executive Order 879 issued in 2010.

The House of Representatives gave its final approval on Monday, May 29, to the measure promoting the development of the Philippine bamboo industry, as embodied in House Bill (HB) No.7941. Once passed into law, it will buttress the provisions of EO 879 which aims to capture a piece of the \$8 billion bamboo market dominated by China.

this, after 282 congressmen voted in favor of HB No.7941 during nominal voting in Monday's plenary session

"There is a lot of potential in the local bamboo industry. Currently, we are the fifth largest bamboo exporter in the world," House Speaker Martin Romualdez said in statement shortly after the bill was approved on third and final reading.

Lorenzo seconded efforts to make bamboo a priority industry. Prior to his appointment as agriculture secretary in 2002, Lorenzo ran one of Philippines' biggest banana export firm, Lapanday, and pineapple firm Del Monte.

"Please make it a priority. I hope government would be friendly toward a new industry. Government is technically pushing housing. Why not import-substitute all the components of housing construction," he said.

Despite China's vast bamboo plantation, Lorenzo said Philippines can compete with any country in the world in bamboo wood quality. This is particularly on Giant Aster species that grow abundantly all over Mindanao.





DEPARTMENT OF  
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# Betty leaves minimal damage in Northern Luzon

Contrary to what was expected, Typhoon Betty had minimal impact on Northern Luzon provinces, with minimal damage to property.

Assistant Secretary Raffy Alejandro, spokesman for the Office of Civil De-

fense (OCD) and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), said the worst is probably over.

"Based on reports we received, the effect is very, in a way, very minimal

compared to what we projected a few days ago that it was a super typhoon," he told reporters yesterday.

Alejandro said there were only 5,488 people who were pre-emptively evacuated in the province of Cagayan and

in Region 2 or the Cagayan Valley as a whole.

"There were more evacuees in Region 6. And in terms of damage, its very minimal and we're very happy

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## Betty From Page 1

with that, there was no serious damage," he added.

Alejandro said it was good that the OCD, the NDRRMC and local government units (LGUs) still exercised preparedness protocols and procedures.

Cagayan Gov. Manuel Mamba said the damage due to Typhoon Betty in the province was minimal. Except for a collapsed warehouse at the Cagayan Special Economic Zone (CEZA) in Santa Ana town, Mamba said no other major damage to property was reported in the province.

He added that there were no casualties at the warehouse at the CEZA.

"That's the only reported damage. We thank God that the storm changed course and is now moving away," he said over *Teleradyo*.

Mamba said around 400 individuals from Santa, Calayan and Gonzaga Cagayan who were preemptively evacuate are expected to return to their homes.

The governor added that it is up to the mayors if they will still suspend classes in coordination with the Department of Education.

### Betty weakens

Tropical cyclone wind signals are still up over parts of Northern Luzon even as Typhoon Betty is expected to further weaken into a severe tropical storm by late Thursday or early Friday on its way out of the Philippine area of responsibility (PAR).

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said Betty (international name Mawar) was monitored 315 kilometers east of Basco, Batanes as of 4 p.m. yesterday. It was carrying maximum sustained winds of 150 km/h near the center and gustiness of up to 185 km/h.

Signal No. 2 is still hoisted over Batanes while TCWS No. 1 is still up over the northern and eastern portions of Isabela, Apayao, the eastern portion of Ilocos Norte, the northern portion of Kalinga, the northeastern portion of Abra and Cagayan,



Boats lie along a road as villagers braced for the possible onslaught of Typhoon Betty in Ivana, Batanes yesterday. The storm, with international name Mawar, was moving slowly toward southern Japan. AP

including Babuyan islands.

PAGASA said stormy weather is expected in Batanes and rains with gusty winds in Babuyan Islands, Cagayan, Isabela, Apayao, Kalinga, Abra and Ilocos Norte due to Betty. The bureau warned of minimal to minor threat to lives and properties due to strong winds.

PAGASA said Betty is forecast to steadily weaken due to cooler ocean waters, dry air intrusion and increasing vertical wind shear. A faster weakening rate is not ruled out due to the extent of the effect of dry air intrusion on the typhoon.

Meanwhile, the southwest monsoon and Betty will bring cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms over MIMAROPA, Western Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula, the rest of Ilocos Region, Cordillera Administrative Region and Cagayan Valley.

Around 50 to 100 millimeters of rain are forecast over some parts of northern Luzon.

Isolated rainshowers are forecast over Metro Manila and the rest of the country due to the southwest monsoon.

PAGASA said flash floods or landslides are possible during moderate to at times heavy rains.

Betty is forecast to move slowly northward until today over the waters of Batanes before gradually accelerating north northeastward on Thursday.

It is forecast to exit PAR by late Thursday or Friday early morning.

### Pre-emptive evacuation

Twelve families, composed of 42 individuals including 19 children, living near the river in Barangay Lanao, Bangui, Ilocos Norte were preemptively evacuated Tuesday morning due to Betty, according to Col. Julius Suriben, Ilocos Norte police director.

Suriben told *The STAR* that the families were preemptively evacuated upon the instruction of Gov. Matthew Marcos Manotoc to ensure their safety due to heavy rainfall brought by the typhoon.

Suriben said he and Gani-rex Corpuz, head of Bounty Agroventures Inc. (Chooks to Go), distributed roasted chickens to 12 family heads and 19 Jollibee kiddie meals with toys to the children.

In La Union, Gov. Raphaelle Ortega-David has suspended classes in all levels, both public and private schools, including work in government offices. David said the suspension of classes is to ensure the safety of students.

David decided to suspend classes in the whole province after the towns of Luna and Sudipen earlier canceled classes on Monday.

In Cagayan, the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office said some 310 families or around 1,016 residents fled their homes for safer grounds - at least 140 families (425 individuals) from Sta. Ana town, 104 families (371 individuals) from Gonzaga town and 54 families

(182 individuals) from Calayan Island, six families (18 individuals) from Gattaran town and six more (20 individuals) from Sta. Teresita.

All evacuees were provided by concerned LGUs with food packs from the DSWD, the Cagayan provincial information office claimed as initial assistance to them.

Rescue and retrieval teams of the provincial government are also on standby, together with the Philippine Army, Bureau of Fire and Protection and local policemen.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development has extended assistance to residents of localities affected by Typhoon Betty, both in northern Luzon and western Visayas.

The Disaster Response and Management Bureau reported that the DSWD Field Office in Cagayan Valley distributed P99,150 worth of food and non-food items to the municipalities of Basco, Batanes; Alcalá, Cagayan and Cabagan, Isabela.

The DSWD has also extended assistance to the western Visayas Region, which has been experiencing scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms caused by the southwest monsoon that was enhanced by Betty.

The DSWD Region 6 sent P484,972 worth of humanitarian assistance to families affected by the southwest monsoon rains in Hinoba-an, Negros Occidental. - Michael Punongbayan, Rudy Santos, Artemio Dumlao, Emmanuel Tupas, Romina Cabrera

## After 'Betty,' El Niño

**A**fter "Betty," El Niño  
As we were writing this column, residents of Luzon were heaving a collective sigh of relief.

PAG-ASA had just reported that "Betty" had just been reported downgraded to the category of "typhoon." International forecasters said the typhoon "will most likely stay north" of the country. The chances that it will make landfall in the Philippines as it did in Guam is almost nil. We have been warned, however, that the presence of "Betty" north of Luzon may trigger heavy rains, landslides, flooding, and gale-force winds in several parts of the island.

For a brief moment, we were anxious that "Betty," which was then still a super typhoon, would directly affect portions of the country, or even make landfall. That was a scary thought which triggered memories of what "Yolanda" did to Leyte. It also got us to reflect on how prepared we are for the possible onslaught of this phenomenon called "super typhoons" and why they seem to be happening more frequently in recent times.

Now that the scary moment is over, our collective attention will focus once more on another climatic issue – the worrisome coming of "El Niño."

It will be recalled that PAGASA had earlier warned us that we may soon feel the onset of this weather system.

The same warning has been issued by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). This is a specialized agency of the United Nations. Similar to the World Health Organization, WMO facilitates international cooperation for the exchange of information on weather and climate.

The Philippines became a member of WMO in April 1949.

In a bulletin issued early this month, the WMO said that there is now an increased likelihood of El Niño "later this year (2023)." It explained that this development means we may experience weather and climate patterns that are the opposite of the long-running La Niña.

One of the first indications of its onset is the possible higher global temperatures.

"The unusually stubborn La Niña has now ended after a three-year run and the tropical Pacific is currently in an ENSO-neutral state (neither El Niño nor La Niña)," the WMO said.

"There is a 60 percent chance for a transition from ENSO-neutral to El Niño during May-July 2023, and this will increase to about 70 percent in June-August and 80 percent between July and September," it added.

It also pointed out that there is yet no indication of the strength or duration of El Niño.

Consistent with the earlier PAGASA statement, the WMO said the effects of El Niño "usually plays out in the year after its development and so will likely be most apparent in 2024."

"The world should prepare for the development of El Niño, which is often associated with increased heat, drought, or rainfall in different parts of the world," the WMO advised.

This is a timely advice for all of us. It is worrisome that the passing by of "Betty" triggered doubts about the reliability and credibility of the warning about the coming of El Niño. The recent downpours triggered by afternoon thunderstorms may have caused many to think that the long dry spell which weather agencies have warned us about may not be coming after all.

It will be good to heed the warning of meteorological experts than

to rely on gut feel or wishful thinking.

The first major concern is our supply of water.

As we mentioned in an earlier column, our supply of clean, potable water is finite. Water is a resource shared by various sectors, including agriculture and power generation. The national government has to allocate this scarce resource based on the availability of supply and the urgency of the requirement. When drought occurs, the requirement of all the sectors sharing the dwindling supply becomes urgent.

Regarding this, the national water agencies and the private sector have to join hands and work faster to build the necessary infrastructure where water can be stored while the supply is abundant. They also have to work faster in tapping the full potential of other freshwater sources to serve the potable water requirements of the public.

The worry over "Betty" showed that government – at the national and local levels – is able to quickly respond to immediate risks. We were able to mobilize human and logistical resources in our bid to mitigate the possible damage that could be brought about by a super typhoon.

We must also develop our ability to think long-term and make our water supply more secure and resilient, less subject to the erratic moods of Mother Nature.

(For feedback, please email it to [antipolocitygov@gmail.com](mailto:antipolocitygov@gmail.com) or send it to Block 6 Lot 10 Sta. Barbara 1 cor. Bradley St., Mission Hills Subd., Brgy. San Roque, Antipolo City, Rizal.)



### THE VIEW FROM RIZAL

DR. JUN YNARES