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Govt working on 'harmonized recovery'

for oil spill-hit areas

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

@jonlmayuga

THE government is now drawing up a "harmonized recovery" plan for areas in the Mi-

maropa and Western Visayas regions that were affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro waters.

Mimaropa, particularly Oriental Mindoro and Western Visayas, were severely affected by industrial

Oil from the sunken MT Princess Empress that sank off the waters of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro. The vessel was said to be carrying some 900,000 liters of industrial oil when it sank on February 28.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) revealed last April 19 it seeks to "harmonize" the recovery plans of different national government agencies with the overall goal of addressing the oil spill's "intersecting impacts to the people, environment, tourism and the local economy."

Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga was quoted in a statement as saying that the recovery plan must be consistent with the "whole-of-government approach," or "Woga," espoused by the Marcos administration in responding to the oil spill disaster.

"We have a convergence framework where we look at each of our mandates, at the point of how we can support the building of resilience for inclusive and sustainable activities," Loyzaga said.

Bouncing forward

LOYZAGA said the recovery plan should "not only look at bouncing back, but bouncing forward" as it must guarantee the resiliency of communities and ecosystems.

In her opening remarks at the

event last week in Quezon City, Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia-Frasco reported that over 1,600 workers dependent on tourism had already been deprived of their livelihood due to the oil spill.

Frasco, nonetheless, said the Department of Tourism will provide "full support for a cohesive approach on tourism development that is sustainable and regenerative."

With the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) as one of the main agencies leading the recovery efforts, OCD Administrator Ariel F. Nepomuceno recognized that a scientific approach is crucial in these initiatives. Thus, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) and the OCD will seek more accurate guidance from science-based agencies, such as the Department of Science and Technology, Nepomuceno added.

Recommendations

DURING the event, DENR-Biodiversity Management Bureau Senior Ecosystems Management Specialist Jhorace E. Tupas presented the latest results of the Rapid Biodiversity Assessments in Oriental Mindoro and Palawan for Mimaropa and Semirara Island in Caluya, Antique for Western Visayas. Tupas showed the potential threats of the oil spill to marine life and mangrove ecosystem.



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DOJ: Oil spill claims in areas affected may reach \$284m

By Rey E. Requejo

THE Department of Justice (DOJ) on Wednesday said people affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro may receive only a total payment of \$284 million from the International Oil Pollution Compensation Funds.

"The maximum coverage for the oil spill based on the IOPC would only be up to 203 million SDR (special drawing rights) or in United States dollars it would be \$284 million," said Justice Undersecretary Raul Vasquez said, during an interview with ANC.

Vasquez stressed the recoverable amount is pursuant to the Protocol of the International Convention for Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage where the Philippines is a state party.

According to the official, the IOPC has "some kind of mutual fund" that is "par-

ticipated in by all maritime industry member states."

"Everybody contributes and the fund would be the source of the payment for all the claims in respect to oil pollution," he said.

The DOJ has been leading the inter-agency dialogue over the oil spill caused by MT Princess Empress which sank off the waters of Oriental Mindoro last Feb. 28 after allegedly ignoring gale warnings.

The latest dialogue was held Tuesday, April 25, at the DOJ which was attended for the first time by IOPC Director Gaute

Sivertsen. Vasquez noted there is an ongoing compensation caravan at the affected areas in Oriental Mindoro.

"They would then bring all these claims to the United Kingdom where the IOPC holds office for the vetting, assessment and verification of all the claims," the DOJ official added.

Various national government agencies headed by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) meanwhile have started drawing up a harmonized recovery plan for areas affected by the oil spill.

The DENR spearheaded an activity held at its central office in Quezon City recently to coordinate the recovery plans of different national government agencies with the overall goal of addressing the oil spill's intersecting impacts to the people, environment, tourism, and the local economy, a statement said.



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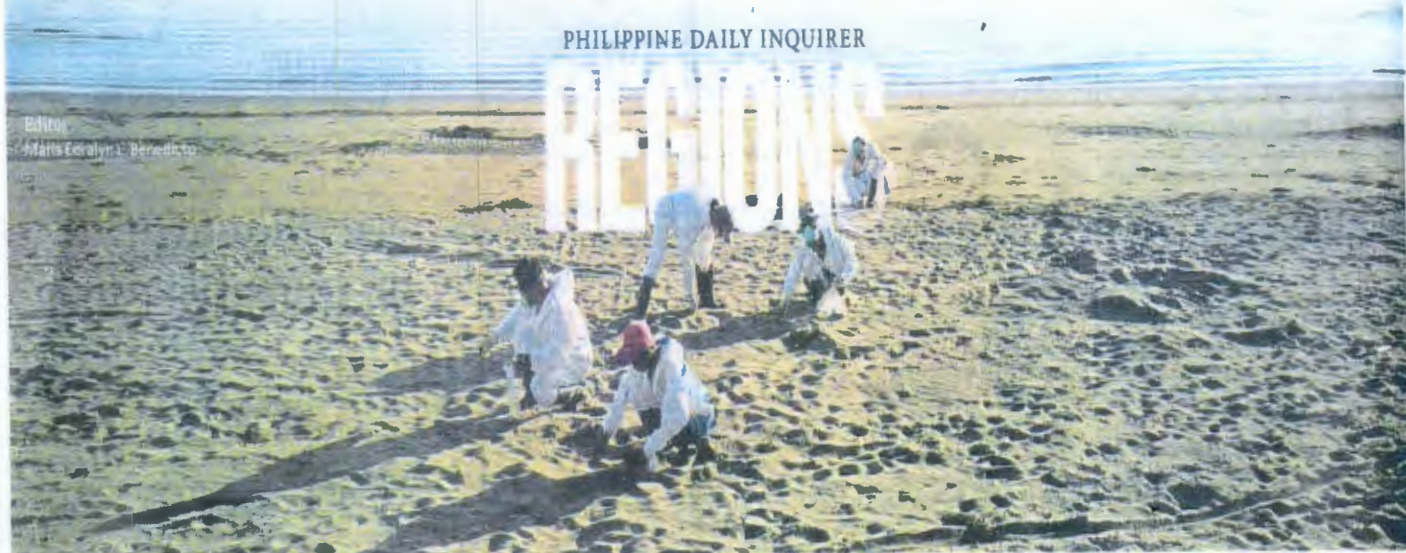
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CASH-FOR-WORK Wearing protective gear, fishermen in Pola, Oriental Mindoro, who lost their livelihood to the Feb. 28 oil spill from a sunken fuel tanker, sign up for the government's cash-for-work program as they help clear the town's shores of sludge in this photo taken last month. —PHOTO COURTESY OF PROTECT VERDE ISLAND PASSAGE



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AI as an aid to cleaning up the oceans

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Pros
and cons
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ligence (AI) have been the burning news for the past months. Anything that seems to simulate human reasoning — from Frankenstein's resurrection to the present AI — is bound

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to cause controversy. John McCarthy invented the term "artificial intelligence" in 1950.

He said: "Every aspect of learning or any other feature of intelligence can in principle be so precisely described that a machine can be made to simulate it. An attempt will be made to find how to make machines use language, form abstractions, and concepts, solve the kinds of problems now reserved for humans, and improve themselves."

What are the advantages of AI?

One, it reduces human error, since decisions are done from previously gathered information applying a certain set of algorithms. So, errors are reduced and the chance of reaching accuracy with a greater degree of precision is a possibility.

Two, it takes risks instead of human beings. We can overcome risks by developing an AI robot which can do the dangerous things for us. Examples include defusing a bomb,

exploring the deepest oceans, and mining for coal and oil.

Three, they are available 24/7. People work for four, six hours a day, excluding the breaks. Outside of that time-frame, they need to rest, refresh themselves, and take a nap. They also don't get bored, which Jean-Paul Sartre said is one of the worst things we can inflict on a human being.

Four, they help doing repetitive jobs. These include sending a thank you mail or ensuring that documents are free of errors. AI can automate these boring tasks, leaving us with more creative things to do, and can even remove "boring" tasks for humans and free them up to be increasingly creative.

Five, they can provide digital assistance, which saves the need for human resources. They also lead to faster decisions.

Using AI can make machines take decisions faster than a human being and carry out actions quicker. In mak-

ing a decision, a human will analyze many factors, both emotionally and practically, but an AI-powered machine works on what it is programmed and deliver the results in a faster way.

And lastly, AI is also powering many inventions which will help humans solve the majority of complex problems.

What is the dark side of the moon?

First, the high cost of creation, since it needs to be constantly updated. Second, it will make human beings lazier than they already are. This can then lead to unemployment, since the AI is replacing many repetitive tasks and other works with robots.

Moreover, AI works without emotions. There is no human connection that cements relationships in a team. It also lacks creativity, since it will never think outside the box.

Writing for *Asia Sentinel*, journalist Purple Romero writes about the work being done by environmental scientists



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AI as an aid to cleaning up the oceans

in the Philippines, with grants from the Japan Science and Technology Agency, the UK Research and Innovation agency, and local funding. They are using AI to gather baseline data for plastic waste that has made the Philippines "the world's third largest contributor of plastic oceanic pollution, according to a 2021 World Bank study."

Some researchers have made the appalling prediction that by 2050, the oceans would have more plastic than fish. AI, there could be more plastic than fish in the oceans. Quickly, AI can catalogue the variety of plastic waste clogging the oceans.

The baseline data will guide in the mapping of policies to regulate the manufacture, disposal and distribution of plastic waste.

PlastiCount Pilipinas, an initiative led by microbial oceanographer Deo Onda from the UP Marine Science Institute and math professor Paul Samuel Ignacio, is "fusing AI with

volunteerism to identify images of plastic waste and classify them with the proper labels, such as plastic bottles, straw, styrofoam, etc. Inputs from volunteers are critical because the AI may improperly label pollution types, resulting in unreliable data." This shows that the critical faculty of humans are still needed in an AI endeavor.

"We still have a few data points. Hence, a toothbrush could still be identified as a cigarette butt," said research assistant Ric Alindayu. This is where citizen science plays an important role. PlastiCount Pilipinas has trained 15 people from the Coast Guard and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in plastic monitoring.

"The overall goal of the citizen science component is, a regular person will take a photo of the plastic waste. It's already geotagged, so it can be added to the map already, it will identify the types of plastic seen in the image and add it to

the overall count, which is the overall goal of the PlastiCount. In a way, it's like also ChatGPT," Alindayu said.

Work is faster, since plastic is no longer counted manually. From the usual beach cleanups, the counting of plastic and the determining the baseline data could give a more nuanced approach to understanding the country's waste profile.

"Data collection provides the solid foundation to make data-driven solutions. For example, Palawan versus Metro Manila, they have different waste profiles. When you go to Manila, the plastic waste is more consumer-based, plastic wraps, bottles, those that came from the food industry. But when you go to Palawan, you see more waste from the fishing industry, ropes, nets, hooks, fishing lines," Alindayu elaborated.

It's important for decisions to be data-driven and evidence-based. The brave, new world of AI seems to be giving that to the world.



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DENR turns over small-water impounding system to LGUs

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA
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TO promote soil and water conservation, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has recently turned over P16 million worth of infrastructure projects to the local government units (LGUs) of Maddela and Nagtipunan in Quirino Province.

The infrastructure projects are expected to boost soil and water conservation efforts in the said areas.

The DENR announced that the two facilities turned over in Maddela include the small-water impounding system, or "Swis," and gabion wall with a maximum capacity of 50 cubic meters (m3) and 3,000 m3, respectively.

In Nagtipunan town, a Swis with a 100-m3 capacity was turned over to Barangay Disimungal.

Constructed for soil and water conservation, the facilities will provide water supply for a total of 660 hectares of plantations established from 2014 to 2021 within the said municipalities.

"These facilities that are constructed to store and conserve water will be of great help to agriculture and our agroforestry areas, thus, uplifting the socio-economic condition of local communities," DENR Cagayan Valley Regional Executive Director Gwendolyn C. Bambalan was quoted in a statement as saying.

During the turnover ceremony, a Tripartite Memorandum of Agreement was signed by officials of the DENR,

municipal and barangay LGUs to define the responsibilities of the parties in sustaining the said infrastructure projects.

"These projects are of great help to the LGU since our current budget cannot cater to all the needs of our constituents," Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator Lemuel Rey O. Marañon was quoted in the same statement as saying.

In a separate activity, the P13.8 million worth of the newly-constructed building of the Community DENR Office in Nagtipunan was also inaugurated last April 14.

Following the inauguration, Bambalan urged the personnel of said office "to serve clients with the highest degree of professionalism and integrity."



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MANILA'S BORA People cool off at the Dolomite Beach in Manila on Wednesday, April 26, 2023, as the heat index reached 39 degrees Celsius in the city. PHOTO BY J. GERARD SEGUIA



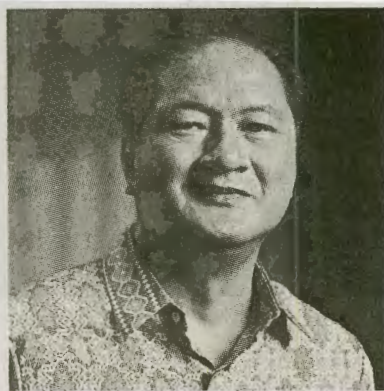
Insurers told to innovate, adapt under 'new normal'

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA
@jonlmayuga

CLIMATE change-triggered events like super typhoons, massive flooding, or landslides can no longer be considered a "force majeure" or an act of God. Hence, insurance companies must learn to adapt and innovate to enhance insurance products and coverages to help people adapt to, and mitigate climate change.

This was stressed by Dean Antonio G. M. La Vina, Associate Director for Climate Policy and International Relations at the Manila Observa-

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DEAN Antonio G. M. La Vina, Associate Director for Climate Policy and International Relations at the Manila Observatory

Insurers...

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tory, during his keynote speech at the 16th Philippine Insurance Summit at the Dusit Thani Hotel in Makati City on Wednesday, April 26.

Organized by the Insurance Institute for Asia and the Pacific Inc. with the Insurance Philippines, the event gathered 320 participants representing different insurance firms. It aims to provide a platform to discuss insights, policies, programs, and initiatives designed to help address climate change.

With the summit's theme: "Climate change—A deadly Threat to Mankind: Taking the Lead Towards Sustainability and Resilience" through the discussion and cooperation among the private sector, government and regulatory bodies, and insurance organizations, organizers of the event hoped to boost the industry's resilience against climate change-induced calamities and other related risks.

A climate expert and environmentalist, La Vina talked about the climate crisis: the 1.5 limit and the implications of crossing it for the insurance industry.

"Climate change is not an Act of God. It is not force majeure. It is predictable," La Vina stressed, as he discussed the latest updates from the 6th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC).

Interviewed by BusinessMirror, La Vina said the insurance industry, hence, must learn to adapt and to innovate. Massive flooding that causes enormous damage to properties, for instance, is not an act of God as they are now the new normal because of climate change. Hence, he said insurance companies should be able to adapt and innovate to help people cope with the challenges posed by climate change-triggered events.

"The innovation here is that they know that it is predictable and it is going to happen; hence, the premiums should be high enough to cover all the damage. You cannot sell a product if you cannot cover it," he said.

"It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean, and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere, and biosphere have occurred," he said.

According to La Vina, global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius and 2 degrees Celsius will be exceeded during the 21st century without a deep reduction in carbon dioxide (CO2) and other greenhouse gas emissions in the coming decades.

"If global warming transiently exceeds 1.5 degrees Celsius in the coming decades or later, then many human and natural systems will face additional severe risks compared to remaining below 1.5 degrees Celsius tipping points," he said.

The impacts of human-induced climate change, including more frequent and intense extreme events, have already caused widespread adverse impacts on nature and people, beyond natural climate variability, he added.

According to La Vina, the most vulnerable people and systems are disproportionately affected and poor countries, and poor people, in all countries, impacted.

The impact on public health may mean more pandemics, dengue, and malaria.

With climate change, he said zoonotic diseases or animal diseases are likely to affect humans.

Meanwhile, the rise in weather and climate extremes will lead to irreversible impacts as natural and human systems are pushed beyond the ability to adapt, he added.

On a positive note, there is space and time to address the climate crisis with a whole-of-society approach.

Government, private sector, and other stakeholders, he said, should work together to a just transition from coal and other dirty fuel-based energy to a more environment-friendly option in renewable energy systems.

He said the insurance industry should consider the impacts of climate change as a pervasive risk that requires new responses.

It is imperative, hence for the industry to revise its business models and help support its customers, do stress-test total exposure against projected climate hazards, build resilience and rebalance portfolios, help organizations mitigate climate risk, create innovative products to address climate-related risks, and revise their investment strategies.



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Pagasa: El Niño may start in 2 to 3 months

State weather officials are warning of the possible onset of El Niño within the next two to three months, with stronger typhoons expected as a result of the climate event.

"There is a big possibility that the El Niño will start within two or three months," Ana Solis, chief of the Climate Monitoring and Predictions Section of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), said

in a radio interview yesterday.

But apart from the long dry spell associated with El Niño, Solis said that the typhoons affecting the country during this time could also be stronger.

"Historically, the southwest monsoon season is enhanced by the onset of the El Niño," she said, adding that extreme rainfall events can also be expected in the western section of Luzon.

On the other hand, there are places in the country that will experience the opposite.

"Below normal rains will be experienced in the Visayas and Mindanao. The dry spell will be severe in these areas," Solis said.

She also warned of possible grass fires in the country during the long dry spell.

"Here, it is usually grass fires although other countries like Indonesia are prone to forest fires," Solis said.

She recalled how El Niño in Indonesia caused such a big forest fire that the haze reached other Southeast Asian

countries, including the Philippines.

Solis warned that the climate event could bring the water in the dams to critical levels, particularly in the last quarter of 2023 until the first half of 2024.

"In case there will be prolonged El Niño, the effect on the dams will be felt until the first quarter of the following year. As early as now, the water levels of the dams are already dropping," she said.

As of 6 a.m. yesterday, the water level of Angat Dam dropped to 196.18 meters from its previous level of 196.40 m or a reduction of 22 centimeters.

The level of Angat Dam is still 9.25 m above its minimum rule curve elevation of 186.93 m, the level at which the dam is able to fulfill its functions.

Four other dams also suffered further reduction in water level: Ipo Dam in Bulacan at 98.86 m compared to its previous level of 98.87 m (1 cm less); La Mesa Dam in Quezon City, at 77.13 m, down by 2 cm from previous 77.15 m; San Roque Dam in Pangasinan, at 235.09 m, from its previous level of 235.36 m or 27 cm less and Caliraya Dam in Laguna, at 286.75 m, lower by 27 cm from its previous level of 287.02 m.

Meanwhile, the highest heat index last Tuesday was recorded in Dipolog City, Zamboanga del Norte at 43 degrees Celsius.

Davao City, Legazpi City and Zamboanga City all recorded a heat index of 42 degrees Celsius, while Maasin, Southern Leyte felt the heat at 41 degrees Celsius.

Rice buffer

As Filipinos brace for the ill effects of El Niño, Sen. Risa Hontiveros called on the government to ensure that programs to support and protect families at risk of losing

livelihoods and experiencing hunger during the dry spell are in place.

Hontiveros recalled that El Niño in 2016 was one of the factors in the violence that happened in Kidapawan City in Mindanao that left two farmers dead and dozens wounded.

"Maybe the economic managers should more rigorously justify why raising the stock of rice in National Food Authority (NFA) warehouses makes more sense than other programs that could protect families that might experience loss of livelihoods and hunger," Hontiveros said.

"We must first make sure that there is dedicated aid for our poor countrymen. During the El Niño of 2016, the NFA warehouses were full, but the problem was that the poor had nothing to buy. The violence that happened in Kidapawan should not be repeated because the warehouses do not want to be opened for the hungry," she added.

The senator said there are reports that sanitary and phytosanitary clearances have already been issued for more than three million metric tons of rice to be imported by the private sector and nearly one-third of this has arrived.
- Pia Lee-Brago, Cecille Suerte Felipe



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Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte looks at a mural at the Elliptical Road underpass following an unvelling ceremony yesterday. The mural, titled 'Under-paradisso: Bigyang-Daan ang Kalkasan,' showcases endangered species of the Philippines.

ERNIE PEÑAREDONDO