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Task force formed to contain Oriental Mindoro oil spill; PBBM vows assistance

By MARTIN SADONGDONG
and ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

An inter-agency task force at the national government level has been created to unify efforts in containing the oil spill in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro and other affected areas following the sinking of motor tanker (MT) Princess Empress.

The creation of the task force came

amid the revelation of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) on Saturday, March 4, that the oil spill already reached the coastal waters of three areas in Caluya, Antique—approximately 70 nautical miles or 129 kilometers from the spillage area in Naujan town.

A report from the PCG District Western Visayas said the oil spill was detected in the coastlines of Sitio Sabang in Barangay ▶ 7

Tinogboc (one km), Liwagao Island in Barangay Sibolo (two kms), and Sitio Tambak in Barangay Semirara (two kms), all in Caluya town.

There are around 600 residents or 150 families affected by the oil spill in Liwagao Island, the PCG said. The estimated number of affected residents in other areas is yet to be confirmed.

The creation of the inter-agency task force was ordered by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) "to address the impact of the oil spill, monitor developments, implement measures that would contain the spread of the oil spill, recover the spilled fuel, and conduct emergency response activities to the areas that may be affected by the incident."

The task force will be led by the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) in Mimaropa (Region 4B) under the supervision of Director Eugene Cabrera. The member-agencies include the Mimaropa offices of the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and Department of Health (DOH).

Also included are the regional offices and responders of the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), Philippine National Police (PNP), PCG Southern Tagalog District, Armed Forces of the Philippines-Southern Luzon Command (AFP-SolCom), and local government units (LGUs).

In a press briefing, the PCG District Western Visayas said it has created an incident command system (ICS) to coordinate the oil spill containment efforts in Antique with the NDRRMC task force.

"Our personnel on the ground in Caluya, Antique has verified and posi-

tively confirmed that there is an impact of oil in the shorelines of Semirara and Caluya Group of Islands," said Commander Jansen Benjamin, public information officer and chief of staff of Coast Guard District Western Visayas. "Oil is hydrocarbon, it's a component and mineral of the earth. It was extracted from underground. The problem is if it emits too much volume in an instant, it will really cause problems. It is really an alarming situation because of the sheer volume. We can say that, yes, it's alarming."

Commander Jonie Belarmino, chief of PCG District Western Visayas Planning Section and commander of Marine Environmental Protection Force-Western Visayas, supported Benjamin's concerns.

"We saw black oil on the shoreline, it has impacted the shoreline. We can see also some oil on the surface," he said. "We treat this as alarming because it can damage our environment, it can damage the livelihood of the people in the area. Yes, it's alarming but it's controllable."

The PCG District Western Visayas said 10 segments of oil spill boom, oil skimmer, and 15 responders trained on oil spill containment operations were deployed to Antique to prevent the spillage from spreading to other areas. Caluya is approximately 80 nautical miles from the world famous Boracay Island in Malay, Aklan.

Assistance vowed

Meanwhile, President Marcos assured families and individuals affected by the oil spill that the government is ready to assist them, particularly the fisherfolk in the area.

In a series of tweets, the President ensured that assistance was ready for those who might have been affected by the spillage of diesel fuel.

He added that the Palace was in close coordination with the PCG, which is leading efforts to address the oil spill.

"The government, through the DSWD, is prepared to provide various forms of assistance to families and individuals affected by the oil spill caused by the submerged MT Princess Empress in Oriental Mindoro," Marcos said. "We are closely monitoring the situation with the [PCG] as the lead agency. Special attention will be given to the affected fisherfolks who will be losing their source of livelihood because of the oil spill."

According to the President, the DENR is already working with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the DILG.

"[They] are ready to provide support to the local government and determine their specific needs," he said.

Marcos likewise thanked private corporations, like Petron and Shell, which have offered their help by lending the government the needed equipment to mitigate the oil spill's impact.

The DSWD, through its field office in Mimaropa (Oriental Mindoro, Occidental Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, Palawan) will provide assistance to families affected by the oil spill.

Based on the initial report, affected families from six municipalities, namely Naujan, Pola, Pinamalayan, Bongabong, Gloria, and Bansud will receive family food packs.

The DSWD-Mimaropa has prepositioned over ₱78.9 million worth of standby and stockpile funds consisting of approximately 42,400 family food packs and standby funds worth ₱7.2 million, which can be tapped to supplement the assistance to the affected municipalities in Oriental Mindoro. (With a report from Ellalyn de Vera-Ruiz)



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Tablas Strait oil spill reaches Antique

By Joey Marzan,
Connie Fernandez-Brojan
and Madonna T. Virola
@inquirervisayas

ILOILO CITY—The oil spill from the tanker MT Empress Princess that sunk off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, on Feb. 28 has already reached the island town of Caluya, between Mindoro and Panay, only about 18 nautical miles west of Boracay Island in Aklan.

According to Com. Jansen Benjamin, public information officer of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Western Visayas District, the PCG was still consolidating actual figures.

But he said the PCG station in Semirara, one of the five islands of Caluya, reported that the oil spill has so far affected at least a five-kilometer stretch of coastline covering three villages in the island.

The situation in Caluya town, which is part of Antique province in Panay, was the same as that in several coastal towns of Oriental Mindoro, where officials have already declared states of calamity.

The location of the sunken Empress Princess was not yet known at press time, but it is believed to be 91 NM (about 170 kilometers) away, in the Tablas Strait



OILY WATERS A crew of the Philippine Coast Guard collects water samples from an oil spill in the waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro. —PHOTO COURTESY OF PCG

The tanker was bound for Iloilo from Bataan, carrying 800,000 liters (about 5,000 barrels) of industrial oil, when it sank past 8 a.m. of Feb. 28.

Oil spill cleanup

Benjamin said shoreline cleanup started immediately and at least three Coast Guard vessels were dispatched to the area along with oil spill boom defense, oil skimmer and oil absorbent materials, plus 15 responders.

The coast guard has also coordinated with private companies, like Semirara Mining and Power Corp., which volun-

teered assistance.

Benjamin said the PCG had sufficient experience in oil spill cleanups and the Western Visayas unit was the most experienced because of the number of oil spills that have occurred in the region.

The biggest was in 2006 when 2.1 million liters of bunker fuel spilled in the waters off Guimaras Island following the sinking of MT Solar 1.

The Marine Science Institute of the University of the Philippines released on Friday a bulletin about the spill and reported the oil slick to be around

25 km long and between 300 and 500 meters wide.

Gov't relief

The institute also warned other coastal towns of Oriental Mindoro as well as Cuyo Island in Palawan to prepare for the slick reaching their shores.

In Mindoro's capital of Calapan City, around 10,000 affected families began receiving government relief, consisting of food packs and cash-for-work grants, Social Welfare Secretary Rex Gatchalian said on Saturday.

Gatchalian arrived in the city at the behest of Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerfiro Dolor who appealed for families in the towns of Naujan, Pola, Bongabong, Pinamalayan and Bulalacao.

Aside from the calamity relief, President Marcos said "special attention will be given to the affected fisherfolk who will be losing their source of livelihood because of the oil spill."

The President said he was monitoring the situation and had already tasked the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to work with the International Maritime Organization and the Department of the Interior and Local Government to support officials. —WITH A REPORT FROM NESTOR CORRALES INQ



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Mindoro oil spill reaches 3 barangays in Antique

By ROBERTZON RAMIREZ and JENNIFER RENDON

Three barangays in Caluya town in Antique have been affected by the oil spill from the motor tanker *MT Princess Empress* that sank off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) reported yesterday that coastal cleanup drives were conducted in Sitio Sabang in Barangay Tinogboc, Barangay Sibolo in Liwagao Island and Sitio Tambak in Barangay Semirara.

Around 150 families or 600 residents of Liwagao Island were affected by the oil spill, the PCG said.

As of yesterday, the volume of oil that had reached Sitio Sabang was around 10 drums and "light or minimal" in Sitio Tambak, according to the Marine Environmental Protection Command of the PCG office in Western Visayas.

Jonie Belarmino, PCG-Western Visayas Marine Environmental Protection Force commander, said the oil spill could not be contained using spill booms because of big waves.

"Oil spill booms are applicable only if the waves' height is .5 meters or less. Since the reported waves were three to four meters, oil spill booms are of no use. They cannot stop or redirect the movement of oil," Belarmino said.

The motor tanker was loaded with 800,000 liters of industrial fuel when it sank.

Jansen Benjamin, PCG-Western Visayas spokesperson, said the wind condition and direction of the current have spared Boracay Island from the possible havoc of the oil spill.

Benjamin said the oil spill does not also present any threat to Iloilo and Negros Occidental.

20,000 hectares of coral reefs at risk

PCG spokesman Rear Admiral Armand Balilo said the agency is focusing on saving marine protected areas in Naujan and Pola in Oriental Mindoro.

About 20,000 hectares of coral reefs, 9,900 hectares of mangroves and 6,000

hectares of seagrass may be affected by the oil slick, the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) said in a statement issued yesterday.

The UP-MSI said coral reefs in Coron and Culion in Palawan as well as in 13 municipalities in Oriental Mindoro, two towns in Occidental Mindoro and Caluya in Antique are at risk.

Environmental group Oceana said the owner of the *MT Princess Empress* should pay for the damage caused by the oil spill and fund the rehabilitation of protected areas.

Oceana Philippines vice president Gloria Ramos said aquatic pollution is punishable under the Fisheries Code, Clean Water Act and Oil Pollution Law.

She said concerned local government units can file criminal and civil charges against the vessel owner.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources said the sunken *MT Princess Empress* is owned by RDC Reield Marine Services Inc.

Supplemental budget, DSWD aid

Meanwhile, the House of Representatives is prepared to approve a supplemental budget to help mitigate the impact of the oil spill, House committee on ways and means chairman and Albay Rep. Joey Salceda said.

"This is an event that could have devastating consequences to fish supply and tourism and will definitely affect hundreds of thousands of families if it gets out of hand," Salceda said.

Department of Social Welfare and Development Secretary Rex Gatchalian started yesterday the distribution of aid under the DSWD's Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations and cash-for-work programs to affected families.

Gatchalian said more than 7,000 families in Naujan, Pola, Pinamalayan, Bongabong, Gloria and Bansud have received food packs since March 3. — With Janvic Mateo, Sheila Crisostomo, Jose Rodel Clapano



Petron extends help in containing Mindoro oil spill

While qualifying that it is not in any way involved in the oil spill incident in Oriental Mindoro, leading oil firm Petron Corporation heeded the call of the Department of Energy (DOE) for a concerted effort between the government and oil industry players to help contain the impact of that mishap. We wish to clarify that the vessel was not carrying products from the Petron Batangas refinery nor does Petron own the fuel oil cargo the tanker was carrying at the time of the incident," the oil firm stressed. Petron further narrated that it stopped producing fuel oil since 2016 – and that had been in keeping with the upgrading of its refinery to a more complex state, and that was also completed within that timeframe. Notably, it was reported last February 28 that oil tanker MT Princess Empress capsized in Oriental Mindoro, and that the resulting oil spill is now causing massive headaches to the local government leaders in the area – not just due to the encompassing environmental hazards that this may bring, but also on the adverse impact it has precipitated on the source of livelihood for people in the area – which is generally fishing. One of the probabilities being prevented is the wider spread of the spilled petroleum commodity – that in turn may adversely affect not just marine ecosystems, but also tourism resources of the country. The company is one with the industry in extending assistance in the oil spill incident, heeding the call of DOE Secretary Raphael Lotilla," Petron stated. The oil firm emphasized that through Waterborne Industry Oil Spill Equipment (WISE) Philippines, whose members comprise of oil companies in the country, Petron facilitated the deployment of oil spill equipment needed to contain the product." (Myra M. Velasco)



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Environmental disaster

Last Friday as its beaches and surrounding waters turned black, with dead fish washing ashore, the town of Pola in Oriental Mindoro declared a state of calamity. Neighboring towns are considering a similar move as their fisherfolk confronted the possible loss of their livelihood over a prolonged period while the government tries to contain a growing oil spill from a sunken tanker. Tourism has also suffered in the areas dotted with beach resorts.

As of Friday, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources estimated the area of the oil slick at 25 kilometers, concentrated so far along a narrow band of 300 to 500 meters. The DENR said the oil spill initially threatened 21 locally managed marine protected areas in Calapan City and the towns of Naujan, Pola, Pinalayanan and Gloria in Oriental Mindoro as well as Gasan town in Marinduque. Mindoro officials have said the affected areas continue to increase.

Apart from destroying fishing in the affected areas, the sunken vessel is within the vicinity of the Verde Island Passage, the globally recognized "center of the center of marine shore fish biodiversity." The DENR reported that within the 40-kilometer radius of the oil slick, "approximately 591 hectares of coral reefs, 1,626 hectares of mangroves and 362 hectares of sea grass/seaweeds can be potentially affected."

Images from Pola town, the worst hit by the oil slick, showed displaced fishermen

manually scooping up the thick, black oil from the sand and water. The *MT Princess Empress* sank on Feb. 28, together with a cargo of 800,000 liters of industrial oil that it was transporting from Bataan to Iloilo. This was apart from the tanker's diesel fuel that initially spilled into the waters. Another ship rescued the tanker's 20 crew members.

RDC Reield Marines Services Inc., operator of the *Princess Empress*, has issued a public apology for the accident, and promised to deploy its resources to help contain the environmental damage. Beyond the apology, however, authorities must determine if negligence played a role in the accident.

The Philippine Coast Guard reported that the tanker's engine apparently overheated. Rough seas supposedly caused the distressed tanker to drift toward Balingawan Point in Mindoro as it began sinking. But there was no typhoon or even a low-pressure area on Feb. 28. Could better maintenance before the tanker set sail have prevented the engine trouble?

Like other motorized vehicles, regular proper maintenance can reduce the risks of malfunctioning parts such as engines and brakes. Poor vehicle maintenance has been blamed for the numerous fatal road accidents attributed to malfunctioning brakes. Accidents happen, but authorities will have to determine if something could have been done to avert this environmental disaster.



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DSWD tasked to assist oil spill-affected Mindoro towns

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Friday pledged to provide assistance to those affected by the oil spillage in waters off Naujan town in Oriental Mindoro province following the sinking of M/T Princess Empress on Feb. 28.

Pola town in Oriental Mindoro has been placed under a state of calamity as the seawater and shoreline have turned black and various species of fish have died, according to a statement of Mayor Jennifer Cruz.

Marcos said the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) will lead the distribution of assistance to affected families and individuals.

Affected fisherfolk would be given "special attention", according to the President.

"The government, through the Department of Social [Welfare]

and Development, is prepared to provide various forms of assistance to families and individuals affected by the oil spill caused by the submerged M/T Princess Empress in Oriental Mindoro," Marcos said in a statement.

M/T Princess Empress was reported to be loaded with 800,000 liters of industrial fuel prior to the incident.

Reports indicated that the vessel experienced engine trouble brought by overheating while in transit to Iloilo province from Balaan province, causing it to drift towards Balingawan Point in Naujan.

It then partially sank due to rough sea conditions until it fully submerged on Wednesday.

Twenty crew members of M/T Princess Empress were rescued.

Marcos said the government,

with the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) serving as the lead agency, is closely monitoring the developments.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is likewise working with the International Maritime Organization and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) to provide support and determine specific needs.

"We also thank the private corporations like Petron and Shell, who have offered their help by lending us the needed equipment to mitigate the impact of the oil spill," Marcos said.

Earlier Friday, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council ordered the creation of a task force that will monitor the impact of the oil spill.

Task force member agencies include the Mimaropa offices of the DENR, DILG, DSWD, Department of Health (DOH), Bureau of Fire Protection, Philippine National Police, PCC-Southern Tagalog District, Armed Forces of the Philippines Southern Luzon Command and Mimaropa local government units.

To date, shoreline assessments and containment of the spill are being done by PQC teams.

The spill had reached the coastal areas of the municipalities of Pola, Pinamalayan, Naujan, and Bongabong in Oriental Mindoro, according to latest reports.

In a statement on Friday, DENR Secretary Toni Yulo-Loyzaga said it is crucial to locate the vessel and model the potential flow of oil in order to



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Bautista nganga, oil spill pinahihigop sa Japan

HINDI kakayanin ng Department of Transportation (DOTr) na makontrol ang oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro kaya magpapasakulo sila sa Japanese government na matanggal ito sa karagatan.

Sinabi ni DOTr Secretary Jaime Bautista na makikipag-ugnayan siya sa Japanese Embassy at Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) sa Lunes upang magpatulong sa paglilinis ng oil spill.

"Siguro hihingi kami ng tulong sa Japanese government dahil nabanggit sa akir kanina ni Senator (Francis) Tolentino na malaki ang kakayahan ng Japanese government na matulungan tayo para hindi masyado kumalat 'yong oil spill sa ating mga islands dito sa Mindoro," wika ni Bautista sa isang news forum nitong Sabado.

Dasal ng kalihim, buwag unabor sa Verde Island Passage sa Batangas ang oil spill dahil isa itong protected area.

Uniyak naman ng DOTr secretary na ginagawa ng Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) ang kanilang trabaho para masigurong ligtas ang lahat ng bumibiyaheng pampasahero at cargo vessel.

"Meron, merong mga gamung tanker na malanda na pero may requirement na pinapatupad ang Marina na dapat magkaroon ng mas matibay na ilalim," ani Bautista.

Noong nakaraang Martes ay lumabog sa karagatan ng Naujan, Oriental Mindoro ang MF Princess Empress na kay lalangang 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel oil.



PH eyes Japan's help to contain Mindoro oil spill

THE Philippine government is looking at tapping Japan to help contain a rapidly spreading oil spill in Oriental Mindoro, a result of the tanker MT Princess Empress capsizing off the coast of Naujan town on February 28.

Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Jaime Bautista on Saturday said the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) is working with relevant agencies to contain and recover the slick, but the spill has already reached another area in the province.

A PCG report also said the oil leak was starting to affect three villages in Caluya, Antique.

"Yung Coast Guard nandoon. Imitignan nila kang papaano pigilan pa yong pagkalat ng langis. Sana ay huwag umabot sa Verde Island dahil ito ay protected area natin," Bautista said at the Saturday News Forum in Quezon City.

Verde Island is located between Batangas province and Puerto Galera in Oriental Mindoro.

"Siguro ay hiling kami ng tulong sa Japanese government dahil nabanggit sa akin

na malaki ang kakayahan ng Japanese government na magdugang tayo para hindi masyadong kumalat ang oil spill na ito sa ating islands sa Mindoro," he added.

Bautista, meanwhile, said an investigation is underway on the sunken tanker, which was carrying about 800,000 liters of fuel oil, and which reportedly capsized due to engine trouble.

"Ang sinasabi napa-kalakas daw ng alon. Mabuh at yong mga crew ay nasagip ng dumadaang sasakyan. Iyon ay mumb-estigahan pa ng MARINA



The PCG-6 (Western Visayas) shared this photo of its oil spill monitoring in Caluya, Antique, on Saturday. Photo courtesy of PCG-WW [Maritime Industry Authority], he said.

Mindoro and Palawan are home to world-famous divesites known for their rich marine biodiversity, coral reefs, and sea creatures. PNA



Mindoro oil spill kumalat na sa Antique

UMABOT na hanggang sa Caluya, Antique ang oil spill mula sa lumubog na tanker sa Oriental Mindoro, ayon sa Philippine Coast Guard.

Ayon sa PCG District Western Visayas, ang oil spill ay na-monitor na sa shorelines sa Caluya, Sitio Sa-

bang, Brgy. Tinogbo (1km); Liwagao Island, Brgy. Sibolo (2km); and Sitio Tambak, Brgy. Semirara (2km).

Nitong Martes lumubog ang MT Princess Empress na kargado ng 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel sa bahagi ng Nau-

jan, Oriental Mindoro. Sinabi ng Marine experts na 24,000 ektarya ng coral reef area sa Mindoro provinces ay "at risk from the oil spill."



ANTIQUE

Nabatid namang inatasan na ni Pangulong Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr. ang mga ahensya ng pamahalaan

na sakilehan ang mga spektadong pamilya at indibidwal sa oil spill.

"Special attention will be given to the affected fisherfolk who will be losing their source of livelihood because of the oil spill," sinabi nito. (Catherine Reyes)



Oil spill reaches Antique

ILOILO CITY - The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) confirmed yesterday that the oil spill from a tanker that sank off the coast off Oriental Mindoro has reached Antique.

The PCG Western Visayas District Office said that bunker fuel was seen in Caluya, a town composed of island barangays off the coast of the northwestern part of Antique province.

Commander Jansen Benjamin, PCG regional information officer, said in a virtual press conference on Saturday that thick bunker fuel reached the island-barangays of Semirara, Sibolo,

and Tambak. Benjamin said that Caluya is around 129 kilometers from Oriental Mindoro.

Commander Jonie Belarmino, PCG regional marine environment commander, said that the bunker fuel will undergo tests to confirm if it is from M/T Empress.

Eighteen drums of bunker fuel have been collected in the three affected barangays. PCG is installing oil spill booms to prevent its spread.

M/T Princess Empress carrying 800,000 liters of bunker fuel sank off the coast of Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28. (Iara Yap)



PCG: Oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro umabot na sa Caluya, Antique

Umabot na ang tagas ng langis sa karagatang sakop ng Caluya, Antique mula sa lumubog na oil tanker sa Oriental Mindoro.

Ayon sa Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) District Western Visayas kahapon, na-monitor ang oil spill sa mga baybayin ng Sibio Sabang, Brgy. Tinogboe (1km); Liwagao Island, Brgy. Sibolo (2km); at Sibio Tambak, Brgy. Semimara (2km) sa bayon ng Caluya.

Ang MT Princess Empress ay lumubog na may kargang 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel oil habang ito ay naglayag sa maalon na karagatan sa Naujan, Oriental Mindoro noong Mar-tes. Sinabi ng PCG na ang sasakyang pandagat ay maaaring nasa 300 metro sa ilalim ng dagat, ngunit ang mga ekspertong diver ay umabot lamang sa 180 metro ang lalim.

Pinayuhan ng PCG ang mga residente mula sa apat na munisipalidad sa Oriental Mindoro na wasang mangisda malapos sabihin ng marine experts na nasa 24,000 ektarya ng coral reef ang may posibilidad na penguub na dala ng kumalat na langis sa karagatan. *Ludy Bernudo*



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DOTr, papasaklolo na sa Japan

Oil spill sa Mindoro umabot na sa Antique

Kinumpirma nitong Sebadong Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) na umabot na sa Caluya, Antique ang oil spill mula sa lumubog na oil tanker sa Oriental Mindoro.

Ayon sa ulat mula sa PCG District Western Visayas, na-monitor ang oil spill sa mga baybayin ng Sitio Sabang, Brgy. Tinogboc (1km); Liwagao Island, Brgy. Siboko (2km); at Sitio Tambak, Brgy. Semirara (2km) sa bayan ng Caluya.

Ang MT Princess Empress ay lumubog na may kargang 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel oil habang ito ay naglayag sa maalon na karagatan sa Naujan, Oriental Mindoro noong Martes.

Sinabi ng PCG na ang

sasakyang pandagat ay maaaring nasa 300 metro sa ilalim ng dagat, ngunit ang mga ekspertong diver ay umabot lamang sa 180 metro ang lalim.

Pinayuhan ng PCG ang mga residente mula sa apat na munisipalidad sa Oriental Mindoro na iwasang mangisda matapos sabihin ng marine experts na nasa 24,000 ektarya ng coral reef ang may posibilidad na panganib na dala ng kumalat na langis sa karagatan.

Samantala, hihingi ng tulong ang Department of Transportation (DOTr) sa Japanese government upang mapigilan ang pagkakat pa ng oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro.

Ayon kay DOTr Sec-

retary Jaime Bautista, sa Lunes ay makikipag-ugnayan na sila sa Japanese government, sa pamamagitan ng Japanese embassy at ng Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), hinggil dito.

Ani Bautista, malaki ang kakayahang ng Japanese government sa mga ganitong kaganapan.

Umaasa rin si Bautista na hindi na makakaabot pa ang oil spill sa Verde Island sa Batangas, na isang protected area.

Sinabi naman ng mga marine experts na mahigit sa 24,000 hektaryang coral reef area sa lalawigan na lamang ng Mindoro ang maaaring malagay sa panganib dahil sa naturang oil spill. (Ludy Bernudo/Ver Laysan)



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Coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass affected by Or. Mindoro oil spill

AT least 591 hectares of coral reefs, 1,626 hectares of mangroves, and 362 hectares of seagrass/seaweeds were reported to be potentially affected by the oil spill from the MT Princess Empress vessel, which sank in Oriental Mindoro last week.

This was learned from the aerial surveillance and site assessment conducted by Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Antonia Loyzaga of the oil spill caused by the vessel's sinking.

Loyzaga was accompanied by Undersecretary for Integrated Environmental Science Carlos Primo David, Dr. Fernando Siringan of the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI), and members of the DENR Oil Spill Task Force in the surveillance conducted last Friday.

Initial findings estimate the length of the oil slick to be 25 Km, trending NE-SW, and most of the oil is confined in a narrow band of approximately 300-500 meters.

The potential for the oil

to reach northern Palawan was also discussed.

There are also 21 locally managed marine protected areas (LMMPAs) located in the city of Calapan (4), towns of Naujan (3), Pola (7), Pinamalayan (4), and Gloria (2) in Oriental Mindoro Province and the town of Gasan (1) in Marikuduque Province.

The coastal areas of the municipality of Pola are observed to be the "most affected" as of this writing.

Cory Martinez



MINDORO OIL SPILL ALARMS CONGRESS

**By Jester
Manalastas**

A House leader said the Lower Chamber is ready to approve a supplemental budget for immediate action and recovery efforts as fears of widespread spillage in Naujan, Mindoro from a tanker carrying 800,000 liters of oil grow.

Albay Representative Joey Salceda, chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means, said his colleagues will support a proposal to pass a supplemental budget for this purpose.

On February 28, as it sailed into rough seas off Naujan, Mindoro, the Princess Empress sank with its cargo of 800,000 litres (210,000 gallons) of industrial

fuel oil.

"We are prepared to propose and enact a supplemental budget if it comes to that. If the President requests it, we will grant it. This is an event that could have devastating consequences to fish supply and tourism, and it will definitely affect hundreds of thousands of families if it gets out of hand," Salceda said.

Salceda was principal author and chairman of the House appropriations committee during the enactment of House Bill No. 9358, which, among other things, granted at least P5.4 billion in supplemental appropriations to sectors affected by the Guimaras Oil Spill in 2006. "I don't think it will face significant resistance in either cham-

ber," Salceda added.

"What I think should happen is, the President assesses the resources within his disposal, and asks Congress for more if he doesn't have enough in the budget to deal with an event like this. In this particular instance, a supplemental budget would be perfectly understandable, given that no one can really anticipate an oil spill," he added.

Salceda said that among the sectors that will most likely be affected are the tourism sectors of Batangas, Marinduque, and Mindoro.

"This is a crisis waiting to unfold if we don't get to contain it early. That area is very close to the Verde Island Passage, which has been declared

as the Center of the Center of Marine Shorefish Biodiversity. It is extremely critical for national and global fisheries," he stressed.

"The area is even a candidate for UNESCO World Heritage Site. So, it's alarming that there are already signs of a large-scale spill," Salceda added, pointing to accounts of a strong smell coming from the seas, as well as photos from the Philippine Coast Guard indicating some oil in the water's surface.

Salceda said that a potential aid package might involve assistance to affected fishermen, more funds for cleanup, restoration of marine biodiversity, and rehabilitation of affected tourism sites.



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Pandayan



Ramon M. Bernardo

Dapithapon, naglalaho na sa Manila Bay?

MALING sabihin na nawawala na sa kasalukuyan ang dapithapon o takipsilim sa Manila Bay. Hindi naman siyempre aktuwal na nangyayari ito. Matatanaw pa naman dito ang paglubog ng araw pero hindi na mula sa dating mga nakakagawiang lugar tulad ng sa Roxas Boulevard na isang mahabang lansangan sa pagitan ng Maynila at Parañaque.

Makikita rin ito mula sa mga establisimento o gusali na nakatayo sa paligid ng baybayin ng Manila Bay na siyempre ay hindi naman madaling pasukin ng sinuman. Kahit nakatayo ka sa mga dalampasigan ng mga katabing lalawigan ng Bataan at Cavite ay mababansagan pa rin ang paglubog ng araw sa Manila Bay na isa sa magagandang tanawin sa ating bansa na napabantog sa buong mundo.

Tila nga lang nakalulungkot na papalilit nang papalilit habang tumatagal hanggang sa hindi na makita ang tanawin sa Manila Bay lalo na para sa mga tao na nakahiligang mamasyal sa kahabaan ng Roxas Boulevard. Mapapansin ito ng mga naglalakad o nag-eeheisismo o tumatambay sa pader-dagat rito.

Pinakaabangan pa naman nang maraming tao na dumayo sa lugar na ito ang paglubog ng araw bago kumagat ang dilim. Saksi rito ang mga larawan sa mga babasahin at sa internet at mga video at pelikula na nagrehehistro sa kagandahan ng dapithapon sa Manila Bay at ibang mga tanawin dito tulad ng mga alon sa karagatan, nagsasayaw na mga daban ng punong niyog, paglalayag ng mga bangkang pangisda at burko, nagliliparung mga ibon, at iba pa. Malimar pa nga noon na may mga nalitigo rito lalo na sa malapit sa U.S. Embassy.

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Pero, habang tumitipag ang mahabang panahon at pag-unlad ng kabihisnaran, marami nang nagsagawang reclamation o pag-tatabon ng lupa sa karagatan ng Manila Bay kasabay ng pagtatayo ng iba't ibang klase ng mga imprastruktura, gusali, pampubliko o pribadong pasilubal o establisimientong ito.

At patuloy na nacadagdagan habang tumatagal ang mga reclamation at mga imprastruktura na ito. Hindi na nga na malayang matanaw ang paglubog ng araw mula sa likuran ng Rizal Park o Luneta sa hangganan ng Manila Bay maliban na lang kung papasok sa isa sa mga establisimientong nakatayo roon na meron ita namang mga limitasyon. Ang kahabaan ng Roxas Boulevard lalo na sa pader-dagat rito ay hindi na tulad ng dati noon ng araw na makakakita ng mga itaong gusto lang mapag-

isa, mag-isip at maghanap ng kahit sandaling katahimikan.

Nakakatulung naman sa ekonomiya ang mga reclamation na rito at ang mga itinayo doon na mga imprastruktura at establisimientong ito magbibigay ng trabaho sa maraming tao at bagong oportunidad sa panunungkulan. Minsan ngang dumating ang panahon na itinayo sa Roxas Boulevard ang tinawag na Baywalk pero tumagal lang ito ng ilang taon.

Saun rin, nakakatulung ang mga reclamation at ibang unlad na ginagawa sa Manila Bay para maibsan ang polusyon na sumira sa karagatan nito. Pumangit na rin naman ang Roxas Boulevard sa pagdaan ng mahabang panahon kasabay ng tila unti-unting pagkawala ng tanawin habang tumutubog ang araw.

Naging tambayan na ito ng mga taong polahoy o palahi, ang mga dating nakakalat na mga banko roon na palingsatan sana ng mga namamasyal sa lupa ay ginawang baringbarong ng mga walaag maruwan at pinanunungkulan na rin ng ilang mga kriminal.

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CEMEX PUSHES SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: Cemex Philippines executives recently paid a visit to Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Maria Antonia Loyzaga to discuss opportunities for collaboration on sustainable development initiatives. During the visit, the company's global climate action strategy was discussed. It focuses on promoting sustainable operations through various initiatives which include reducing CO2 emissions, increasing the use of renewable energy, promoting eco-friendly products and contributing to a circular economy. In photo are (from left) Cemex Philippines public affairs manager Lysander Castillo, VP Santiago Ortiz, Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Loyzaga, Cemex Philippines president Luis Franco, and DENR Undersecretaries Juan Miguel Cuna and Ignatius Loyola Rodriguez.



In Basilan, 'forever tulips' symbol of war vs plastics

By **Julie S. Alipala**
@alipalajulieINQ

LAMITAN CITY, BASILAN— Amid a landscape of trees and other greenery at Sitio Panansangan in Barangay Ubit, here is a colorful flower garden that has drawn thousands of visitors since it was opened to the public in September 2019.

The flowers are actually fashioned from discarded plastic bottles, which are nonbiodegradable, hence, each is dubbed the "forever tulip."

To Basilan locals and outsiders alike, the rise of the 13-hectare ecological park, with the "forever tulip" garden as its main attraction, adds to the growing indications of the province's departure from a conflict-torn past toward a revving momentum for progress.

In a recent visit, the Inquirer chanced upon couple Nanny and Ashra Manatad enjoying the sight of the plastic tulips. They said they planned to have their pre-nuptial photo shoot here.

"It's beautiful here. We see plastics put to good use and we are also surrounded by fruit trees and real flowers," said Ashra, a native of nearby Tuburan town.

"We need parks like this, we need ideas like this, so our people will no longer need to travel to enjoy this kind of scenery," Ashra added.

On social media, the garden has been "flexed" or promoted by

influencers, vloggers and digital content creators, generating the curiosity and interest of netizens who promised to see for themselves the unique attraction.

Lamitan's pride

Mayor Roderick Furigay said the ecological park had, indeed, become one of Lamitan's sources of pride.

In the last two years, over 30,000 people had logged to have visited the park, mostly drawn into the Forever Tulip Garden which, with a Dutch windmill erected near it, has a European ambience.

The park also features a museum promoting Yakan culture and history.

Visits to the park slowed down during the pandemic-induced community lockdowns in 2020 and 2021.

Engineer Raquel Hibionada, head of the local government's General Service Office, recalled that the park was established in 2016 as part of Lamitan's comprehensive waste disposal management program that sought to institutionalize garbage segregation at source to make it easy to identify the materials that can still be recycled or upcycled.

"Our nature here is still untapped and if we allow people to become irresponsible in their waste disposal, we might end up with bigger problems in the future," Hibionada said.

Through its Brigada Basura

program, the local government embarked on a massive information drive among households, commercial establishments, offices and schools across 45 villages to ensure that garbage segregation becomes a norm among the city's 100,150 residents (2020 census), who generate about 8 tons of waste monthly.

Of the 13-ha. area, which is located some 9 kilometers from the city center, 4 ha are devoted to solid waste management activities such as vermicomposting for collected agricultural and food waste, recovery of materials for recycling or upcycling, and containment of residual waste.

The rest of the park is planted with assorted fruit-bearing trees like miracle fruit, pomelo and guava and a number of flowering plants.

"Nothing is wasted here," Furigay said of how the facility processes the materials brought there.

Consumption habit

Ignacio Samihon, 53, a park worker assigned to handle residual waste and materials for upcycling, said that through a detailed analysis of trash that end up in the facility, "we noticed that we have been collecting more [plastic] bottles daily," the big bulk of which are from bottled water.

Other collected plastic bottles were for vinegar, soy sauce and soda.

The trend had local officials



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of war vs plastics



MAIN ATTRACTION The garden of faux flowers (top photo) is the central attraction of the Lamitan City Ecological Park which has become a favorite leisure getaway for locals since it opened in 2019. —PHOTOS BY JULIE ALIPALA AND LAMITAN CITY GOVERNMENT

worrying as city residents were not known as heavy consumers of bottled water because sources of water, especially from a host of springs, are available.

Inspired by what she saw in her travels abroad, the late former Mayor Rose Furigay decided to put into good use every plastic bottle collected while also vowing to keep locals constantly reminded of the need to change their consumption behavior, Samihon said.

This thinking shaped the Forever Tulip Garden initiative, with the former mayor, fondly called by locals as "Mayor Rose" and who led the local government from 2013 to 2022, intending it to continually drumbeat the long drawn-out war against single-use plastics.

The environmental campaigner Greenpeace ranks the country among the top plastic polluters throughout the world, a big contributor to the surging volume of plastic waste that ends up in the oceans.

When it was opened to the public in 2019, the circular garden had 26,877 flowers from discarded plastic bottles that were cut and painted purple, orange, ivory, yellow, blue, pink and red, and then each is attached to a bamboo stick to make it stand on the ground. At the center of the garden is a heart-shaped patch of red.

Footpaths are also made of plastic scraps that are shredded

and mixed with cement, sand and gravel.

Visitors, who need not pay to enter the park, can rest on benches made of salvaged metal scraps.

Challenge

When the garden was opened, Mayor Rose, issued a challenge to the people: "Let this be a reminder for all to be actively involved in the campaign against single-use plastic. Let us all be part of this campaign and say no to plastic now."

She had hoped that the garden's size would just stay that way.

But Hibionada revealed that three years since it was established, the garden had grown to almost 50,000 flowers, indicating an increasing use of plastic bottles in the city, and pointing to the need to work more to change people's habits as consumers.

But local officials remain steadfast in continually giving life to Mayor Rose's "Abante Lamitan, Atras Basura" battle cry, hopeful that in the longer run, through persistent campaigning, people will choose what is best for ecological sustainability.

"Unless we do something about it, this garden will become the largest tulip garden in the country and will continue to do so in the next century," reads a signage that greets every visitor to the seeming garden of conscience, and



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SMC extracts 90,000 tons of waste from San Juan River

By JAMES A. LOYOLA

San Miguel Corporation (SMC) reported that its cleanup of the 15-kilometer San Juan River, a main tributary of the Pasig River, is well underway, with over 90,000 metric tons of silt and solid waste already extracted.

In a press statement, SMC President and CEO Ramon S. Ang said the effort, which is part of SMC's much larger Pasig River



cleanup initiative, has successfully removed waste that have been choking different sections of the river that spans the cities of Manila, Mandaluyong, San Juan, and Quezon city.

Since work commenced last October, Ang said that SMC's crews have cleaned up a total of 3.1 kilometers, covering sections of the river from Sta. Mesa to Sta. Ana, San Juan to Mandaluyong, and from Dona Imelda to Tatalon in Quezon City.

From just 0.5 to 1.5 meters, dredged areas now have depths of 2.5 to four meters, enabling improved water flow and the carriage of a higher volume of floodwaters.

The effort has also resulted in the widening of portions of the river that were partially blocked by stockpiled materials from construction activities.

Ang said that its San Juan River cleanup, which it is undertaking with the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and local government units (LGU), is crucial to maintaining the gains that SMC has already made in cleaning up the Pasig River.

This is not the first time that SMC has cleaned up the San Juan River. In previous years, even before the company launched its major river rehabilitation advocacy, SMC had funded the reconstruction of the San Juan River bridge or Pinaglabanan Bridge and cleanup of the San Juan River, as part of its Skyway Stage 3 project.

The company also extended the scope of that initial effort to cover the Tatalon and Talayan areas in Quezon City, which was prone to flooding during heavy rain.

In 2021, SMC also extracted some 11,850 tons of waste from the mouth of the San Juan River, when its Pasig River rehab effort reached the San Juan junction.

The initiative is part of SMC's ongoing effort to clean up the Pasig River, in partnership with the national and local governments, to help mitigate flooding in major Metro Manila cities and improve the water quality and navigability of the historic but long-polluted river.

From July 2021 to February 2023, Ang said that SMC has already removed over one million metric tons of silt and waste from various sections of the Pasig River that have become too shallow, following years of silt and solid waste buildup.

These include the mouth of the river in Manila Bay, the Laguna Lake area, and the junctions of the Marikina and San Juan rivers.

From depths of just 1 to 3 meters at the start of the project, critical sections of the Pasig River now measure five to six-meters deep, allowing for the improved flow of more floodwaters out to the Manila Bay during the rainy season.

SMC's first massive river rehabilitation and flood mitigation initiative was launched in 2020, and was targeted at cleaning up the Tullahan River. The project was completed in 2022 and removed over 1.12 million tons of silt and solid waste from an 11-kilometer expanse.

The initiative has resulted in better flood mitigation in flood-prone areas in Navotas, Malabon, Valenzuela, and Caloocan.

Recently, SMC together with the DENR and the provincial and local governments of Bulacan, also started cleanup efforts for major river systems in the province, which is also known to be prone to flood.



SMC orangkada na paghalukay sa San Juan River

Sinimulan na rin ng San Miguel Corporation (SMC) ang paglilinis sa San Juan River na nasa 15 kilometro ang haba at isa sa mga pangunahing daluyan ng Pasig River.

Inihayag ng SMC na mahigit 90,000 tonelada na ng mga burak at solid waste ang nahalukay sa isinasagawang paglilinis sa nasabing ilog.

Ayon kay SMC president at CEO Ramon S. Ang, bahagi ito

ng mas malaking Pasig River cleanup initiative ng kompanya kung saan matagumpay nilang nahalukay ang mga bumarang basura mula sa ibat ibang lugar na dinadaluyan ng ilog sa Maynila, Mandaluyong, San Juan at sa Quezon City.

Sinimulan aniya ang paglilinis noong Oktubre at ngayon ay nasa 3.1 kilometro na ang nahalukay.

Nabatid na hindi ito ang unang pagkakataon na nilinis ng SMC ang San Juan River.

Sa mga nakaraang taon, sabi ni Ang, ay naglunsad na rin ang SMC ng major river rehabilitation advocacy at pinondohan ang pagpapanyos ng San Juan River Bridge o Pinaglabanan Bridge gayundin ang paglilinis sa ilog nito bilang bahagi ng Skyway Stage 3 project.