

06 March 2023, Monday



DENR

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



Oil spill-hit areas receive medical supplies

By **MAYEN JAYMALIN**

Mindoro.

The Department of Health (DOH) yesterday distributed medi-

DOH officer-in-charge Maria Rosario Vergere visited the province and led the

9 Mindoro towns affected by oil spill. See Page 9.

cines and other health commodities to residents of oil spill-affected communities in Oriental

turnover of health commodities to local government units (LGUs).

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of the Philippines.

"I condemn the ruthless killing of Negros Oriental Governor Roel Degamo. This is truly a sad day for all of us. I pray for justice to be served the soonest. To the bereaved family, my sincere condolences. We are with you in this difficult time," he said.

'Heartbreaking and senseless'

Meanwhile, Dumaguete Bishop Julito Cortes condemned the "heartbreaking and senseless act of murder" of Degamo and five others, and asked the police and the military to work to bring those accountable to justice.

In a statement dated March 4, Cortes said, "I strongly condemn this heartbreaking and senseless act of murder in Negros Oriental! How can we ever attain lasting peace if this culture of violence continues to torment us? When will this cycle of killings ever stop? We pray, then, that the perpetrators behind this bloodshed will be brought to justice soon."

To the perpetrators the Bishop sent this message from Isaiah 1:16-17: "To those whose hands are full of blood, heed the words of the Prophet Isaiah: 'Wash yourselves clean! Put away your misdeeds from before God's eyes; cease doing evil and learn to do good.'"

He also called for justice for the victims of the attack. "I urge all government agencies, national and local, especially the police and the military, to work closely together for the speedy resolution of these cases, and thus, help us attain peace and justice in our island." - With **Delon Porcalla, Artemio Dumlaog, Evelyn Macairan**



Health officer-in-charge Maria Rosario Vergere inspects a part of a beach affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro. Vergere visited the area during the distribution of health commodities in the province.

Oil From Page 1

"The DOH is ready to help in the medical needs of the province of Oriental Mindoro that is affected by the oil spill," Vergere said in Filipino. "This incident calls for a whole-of-government approach, and with the environment being a major determinant of the health of our people."

Last week, the *MT Princess Empress* tanker, carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil, sank off the coast of Oriental Mindoro.

There were reports of locals experiencing minor health reactions due to the spill.

The DOH noted that oil spill poses potential risks not only to the environment but also to the health of people from affected communities.

"Despite an oil spill not being a common occurrence, it may lead to the destruction of sea life and the

health of people exposed to it," the DOH said in Filipino.

Thus, the DOH advised residents of affected communities to temporarily evacuate their homes if possible until the situation has been resolved.

According to Vergere, the DOH is working closely with other concerned national government agencies and LGUs to mitigate the effects of the oil spill in the communities of Oriental Mindoro.

Aside from medicines, the DOH turned over to the LGUs face masks, nebulizers, oxygen concentrators as well as other medical supplies culled from different hospitals in Metro Manila.

DOH toxicology experts are also on standby to support the primary care providers onsite.

The health official assured residents of affected communities that they will have clean water and protective gear through close coordination with the provincial government and LGUs.



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Oil spill

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By ED AMOROSO

CAMP VICENTE LIM, Laguna - Nine of the 13 towns in Oriental Mindoro have been affected by the oil spill from the sunken motor tanker *MT Princess Empress*.

Based on the monitoring report of the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO), these are Naujan, Pola, Pinamalayan, Gloria, Basud, Bongabong, Roxas, Mansalay and Bulacacao.

In Pola, 11 of the 23 barangays were most affected. The town had earlier been placed under a state of calamity due to the oil spill.

Two barangays in Naujan, nine in Pinamalayan, seven in Gloria, four in Bansud, eight in Bongabong, five in Roxas, eight in Mansalay and seven in Bulacacao were affected by the oil spill.

The PDRRMO said 10,362 families or 48,885 people were affected.

The Philippine Coast Guard had earlier said the oil spill reached Caluya town in Antique.

The coastlines of Sitio Sabang in Barangay Tinogbok, Liwagao Island in Barangay Sibolo and Sitio Tambak in Barangay Semirara were affected.

NAMRIA ship searches for sunken vessel

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said the *BRP Hydrographer Ventura* of the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority arrived in Oriental Mindoro on Saturday night to help locate the sunken vessel.

The DENR said it is conducting disaster forensics with the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute to protect mangroves, seagrass and over 36,000 hectares of coral reefs in Bulacacao, Oriental Mindoro and Caluya,

Antique that can be potentially affected by the oil slick.

The DENR Environmental Management Bureau-Mimaropa office continues its cleanup operations using locally available oil-absorbent materials.

The agency is also coordinating with Semirara Mining and Power Corp. to help and assist in the cleanup operations in Caluya, Antique.



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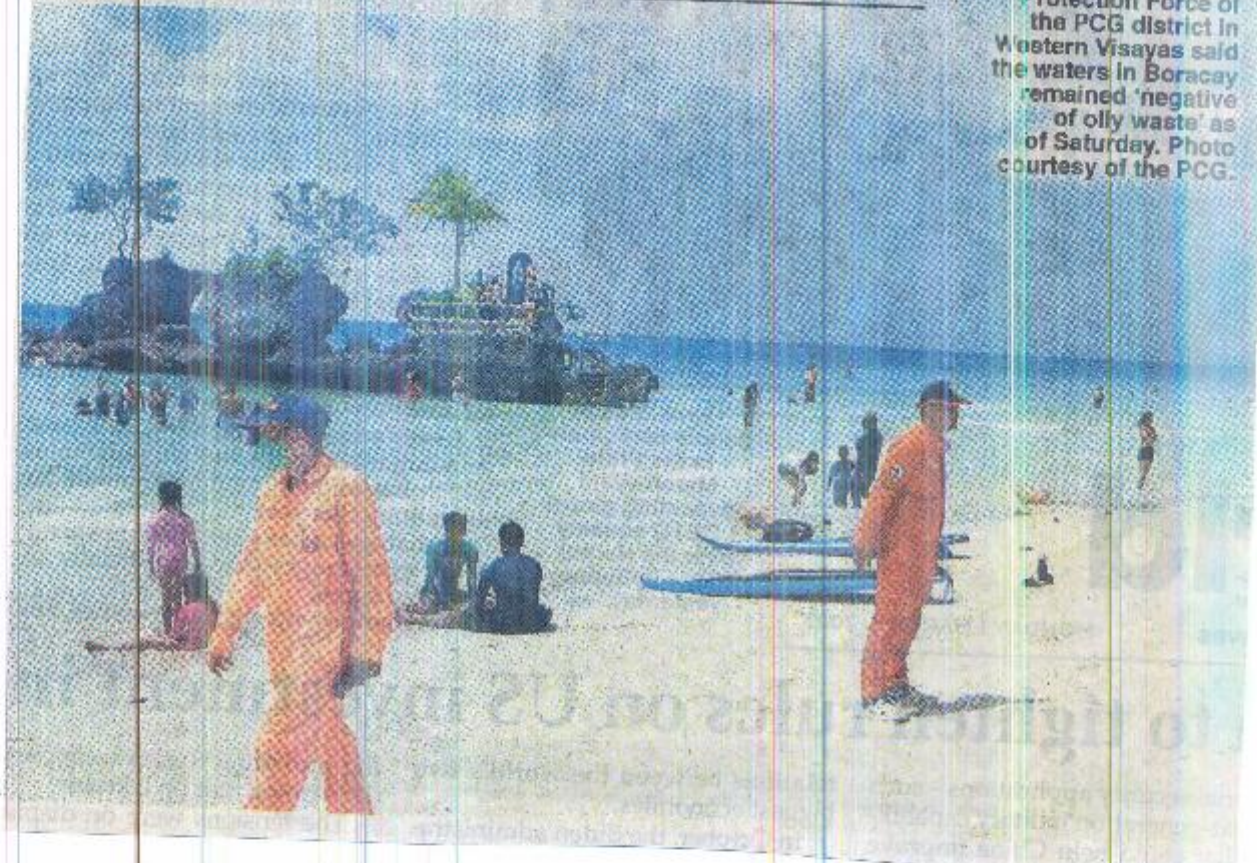
THE PHILIPPINE STAR

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EDITOR: TERESA B. COROS

MONDAY | MARCH 6, 2023



Philippine Coast Guard personnel check the coastline in Boracay following an oil spill from a sunken motor tanker in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro. The Marine Environmental Protection Force of the PCG district in Western Visayas said the waters in Boracay remained 'negative of oily waste' as of Saturday. Photo courtesy of the PCG.



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NEWS

Oil spill could reach Palawan, other areas

Five days after the tanker MT Princess Empress sank off Mindoro, authorities have begun assessing its potential damage on fishing towns along the coasts of the Tablas Strait where a 25-kilometer-long oil slick was moving with wind and current. The sunken tanker remains missing while there have been no significant updates yet on the areas affected by the spill. —STORY BY KRIXIA SUBINGSUBING AND JANE BAUTISTA

Oil spill assessment starts

By Krixia Subingsubing
and Jane Bautista
@Team_Inquirer

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), along with the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UPMSI), have begun disaster forensics of the oil spill from the tanker MT Princess Empress that sunk off Naujan, Mindoro, on Feb. 28.

Marine scientists continued to monitor the oil spill, which produced a slick initially estimated to be 25 kilometers long and 300 to 500 meters wide, but there were no reports of oil spills found in the coasts of Marinduque, east of Mindoro, and Romblon, in the southeast, as of Sunday.

However, there was also no word from the Philippine Coast Guard whether the sunken tanker had already been found to determine whether it was still spewing the 800,000 liters of oil it was carrying when it sunk on the morning of Feb. 28.

According to oil spill trajectory models, the UPMSI feared for the 36,000 hectares of coral reefs in Bulalacao, Oriental Mindoro and Caluya, Antique, that could be affected by the spill.

On Saturday, oil was found in one of the islands of Caluya, Antique, which is in the Tablas Strait separating Mindoro, the Romblon islands and Panay, only 18 nautical miles from the tourist island of Boracay in Aklan.

But the FCG in the Western Visayas region noted that there were no indications of an oil spill in Boracay as of Sunday.

The spill has so far moved in a southern direction, then southwest to Caluya and possibly west to the Cuyo islands in Palawan.

However, the spill has already affected many towns in the eastern seaboard of Mindoro facing the Tablas Strait and marine scientists were concerned over the potential effect on hectares of coral reefs in Bulalacao and Caluya.

In separate bulletins issued over the weekend, UPMSI esti-



FILE: Oil Spill

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ON ALERT Philippine Coast Guard personnel are on guard in the resort island of Boracay for any sign of the oil spill which has spread from Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, to Caluya, Antique.

—PHOTO FROM PCG FACEBOOK PAGE

mate that over 20,000 hectares of coral reefs, 9,900 of mangroves and 6,000 hectares of seagrass may be affected.

Of this, at least 11,000 hectares are found in the Cuyo Islands, less than 60 nautical miles from the Caluya Islands.

Protected reefs

Critical are the protected reefs in Bulalacao, which cover 1,100 hectares; as well as the seagrass beds in the coastal barangays of Pola, Mansalay and Bulalacao.

The Caluya islands, which has a high possibility of being affected based on the oil spill trajectory model, also has significant areas of coral reefs (2,900 hectares), mangroves (350 hectares) and seagrass meadows (850 hectares), they said.

Environment Undersecretary Jonas Leones and the DENR Task Force MT Princess Empress, led by Undersecretary Malu Erri, arrived in Calapan, Oriental Mindoro, on Sunday to confer with local officials on a plan of action.

The undersecretaries said the DENR was coordinating the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of the Interior and Local Government and Department of Labor and Employment to finalize arrangements aid to local communities.

Serious impact on fishing

Oceana, an ocean conservation group, aquatic pollution could have a serious impact on fishing which would affect food prices.

Aquatic pollution is punishable under several laws, including the Fisheries Code (Republic Act No. 8550 as amended by RA 10654), Clean Water Act (RA 9275), and the Oil Pollution Law (RA 9483) and Oceana urged local governments to file charges against the vessel owner.

Philippine laws impose fines ranging from P600,000 to P1 million, and P30,000 per day; imprisonment of six years and one day to 12 years. The administrative fine is only half of the criminal fines. **INQ**



Residents hit by oil spill told to evacuate

By AMALOU DE VERA and TARA YAP

The Department of Health on Sunday, March 5, urged residents affected by the oil spill in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro and other areas to temporarily evacuate.

Department of Health officer-in-charge Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire made the statement following the oil spill caused by the cap-sized motor tanker (MT) Princess Empress in the province of Oriental Mindoro. The oil slick is spreading to more areas.

"Pinapaalalahanan ng Kagawaran ng Kalusugan ang mga mamamayan ng kung ang lugar ng oil spill ay malapit sa inyong tirahan, mas mainam kung tayo ay humanap ng pansamantalang matitirahan habang ito ay hindi pa nakakalap (The Department of Health is reminding citizens that if the oil spill is near your residence, it would be better if you seek temporary shelter while it is not yet contained)," said Vergeire in a statement.

If the affected residents are not able to evacuate, they should observe the necessary precautions, said the Health official.

"Huwag lumangoy sa mga lugar na apektado ng langis. Iwasang madikit sa sediment, buhangin, lupa, o mga bagay na kontaminado ng langis (Do not swim in affected areas. Avoid contact with sediment, sand, soil, or other oil-contaminated objects)," she said.

"Huwag gumamit ng tubig na kontaminado ng langis para sa pagkonsumo ng mga tao o hayop. At huwag kumain ng isda, molusko, at iba pang pagkaing-dagat na nahuli sa lugar malapit sa oil spill (People and animals should avoid consumption of oil-contaminated water. Do not eat fish, seashells, and other seafood caught in the area near the oil spill)," she added.

The DOH also reminded responders, volunteers, and cleanup workers that they should wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as protective suits, safety glasses, and gloves during their operations. They should also clean the PPE after use.

Vergeire and other DOH officials

visited oil-spill affected areas in Oriental Mindoro on Sunday to provide assistance.

Medicines, face masks, nebulizers, oxygen concentrators, and other supplies were turned over to the provincial government of Oriental Mindoro, the DOH said.

Vergeire assured that the Health department is closely coordinating with other concerned agencies to mitigate the effects of the oil spill.

"This incident calls for a whole-of-government approach, and with the environment being a major determinant of the health of our people," said Vergeire. "Over the last few days, we have been extending support to ensure that the immediate needs of the affected communities are properly," she added.

Assistance

ILOILO CITY — The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Antique provincial government are sending relief assistance to residents of three island-barangays in Caluya town in Antique affected by the oil slick.

"DSWD will always support them to ensure immediate relief and recovery of those affected," said DSWD-6 (Western Visayas) Director Carmelo Nochetti in a statement.

"What we can do now is distributed 1,000 food packs," added Antique Gov. Rhodora Cadiao in a separate statement.

DSWD-6 has dispatched P541,000 worth of family food packs composed of 1,000 boxes for affected families.

More or less 1,000 persons in Barangays Semirara, Sibolo, and Tambak are affected after oil slick from the sunken M/T Empress reached the coastal areas of Caluya on Friday, March 3.

The DSWD-6 and the provincial government of Antique have to coordinate with the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and the local government of Caluya in distribution as the three are isolated island barangays and far from the mainland.

Caluya Mayor Rigil Kent Lim has issued an executive order suspending all fishing activities in the areas where the oil slick was found.



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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1900
MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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BUNKER fuel from a sunken tanker has reached the shores of a coastal barangay in Caluya town, Antique province. (Philippine Coast Guard Western Visayas)



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BusinessMirror

Alamang Negosyo



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Govt steps up efforts to curb impact of Mindoro's oil spill

By JONATILAN I. MAYUGA [@jonimayuga](#)
& LENIT LECTURA [@lectura](#)

THE government is stepping up efforts to reduce the risk of disaster brought about by an oil spill from a sunken vessel in Oriental Mindoro on February 28.

With the sinking of MT Princess Empress which was carrying 800,000 liters of oil, scientists said around 20,000 hectares of coral reefs, 9,900 hectares of mangroves, and 6,000 hectares of seagrass may be affected by the oil slick.

"Using the modeled oil spill trajectories [Bulleting #02] and looking at higher resolution data, we approximate that 20,000 ha of coral reef, 9,900 ha of mangroves, and 6,000 ha of seagrass may be affected by the oil slick in the following municipalities. More than half of potentially affected reefs [11,000 ha] are found in the Cuyo group of islands," the UP Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) said in

a statement.

Among the coastal sites that may be at risk are several marine protected areas (MPAs) including but not limited to the reefs in Bulalacao, Oriental Mindoro, involving some 1,100 ha of coral reefs.

Also, the UPMSI said significant seagrass beds are present in several areas, including the coastal barangays of Pola, Mansalay, Bulalacao in Oriental Mindoro.

Caluya Island in Northwestern Antique, which has a high possibility of being affected based on the oil spill trajectory model, also has significant areas of coral reefs (2,900 ha), mangroves (350 ha), and seagrass meadows (850 ha).



Residents affected by oil spill told to temporarily evacuate

BY GERARD NAVAL
and VICTOR REYES

CITING threats to public health, the Department of Health (DOH) yesterday advised residents affected by the oil spill in the coastal areas of Oriental Mindoro and nearby provinces to temporarily evacuate.

In a statement, Health Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergere said: "If your residence is near the area of the oil spill, it would be better if you find an alternative place to stay while it has not yet been resolved."

As of yesterday, the Department of Social Welfare and Development said 52 barangays from Region IV-B (Mimaropa) and VI (Western Visayas) have been affected by the oil spill, majority of them from the municipalities of Naujan, Pola, Pinamalayan, Bongabong, Gloria, and Bansud in Oriental Mindoro.

Industrial fuel oil has leaked from the cargo hold of the M/T Princess Empress, which sank off the coast of Naujan last February 28, threatening marine ecosystem and the

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livelihood of local folks. The ship, carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil, was on its way to Iloilo from Bataan when its engines overheated and later drifted towards Balingawan Point in Naujan before sinking.

As of last Saturday, the Philippine Coast Guard said the oil spill has reached Caluya, Antique, which is about 70 nautical miles from Naujan.

The PCG said it has recovered about eight drums of "oily waste" at the shoreline of Barangay Tinoghoc in Caluya but the collection was later terminated "to ensure the health of the response team."

In a phone interview yesterday, PCG spokesman Rear Adm. Armand Balilo said: "There is no significant update, other than our continuing scooping efforts...It (oil spill) has reached Caluya."

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources is conducting disaster forensic testing, along with the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute, intended to protect mangroves, seagrass and over 36,000 hectares of coral reefs in Bulalacao, Oriental Mindoro and Caluya, Antique that can be potentially affected by oil slick.

The DENR added its attached agency, the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority, is using a multibeam survey to locate

the sunken MT Princess Empress, which is owned by RDC Reield Marine Services Inc.

Balilo said they have to identify the exact location of the sunken vessel. He said authorities tried to deploy a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) to determine the area but were prevented from doing so by rough seas.

The DENR's Environmental Management Bureau in Mimaropa is continuing its cleanup operations using locally available oil-absorbent materials and provisional spill booms made of cogon and sawali to prevent the oil spill from reaching the beach and mangrove areas of Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

The agency added it is also coordinating with Semirara Mining and Power Corp. to help and assist in the cleanup operations in Caluya, Antique.

Oceana, the international environment group, called on the government to immediately implement mechanisms and actions to stop further damage on the marine environment, fisheries resources and livelihoods in affected areas.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Vergere said that in case evacuation is not an option, residents should observe safety precautions — not swimming in affected areas and avoiding contact with sediments, sand, soil, or other things contaminated by oil.

Vergere said the public must also avoid consuming water contaminated by oil and avoid eating fish, seashells, and other resources caught in areas near the oil spill.

The DOH has deployed immediate medical assistance and commodities to affected communities, supplying affected families with adequate emergency inhalation, first aid kits, and protective equipment and hazmat suits.

Stocks of medicines, face masks, nebulizers, oxygen concentrators, and other supplies have also been turned over to local governments affected by the oil spill.

"The DOH is working closely together with other concerned national government agencies and local government units to mitigate the effects of the oil spill to the affected communities," Vergere.

EMERGENCY EMPLOYMENT

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLe) said it is looking to provide emergency employment assistance to workers adversely affected by the oil spill.

"We are in discussion with the DENR Secretary (Maria Antonia Yulo) Loyzaga to determine how the DOLE can help affected workers," said Labor Secretary Binvenido Laguesma. "We are looking at an emergency employment program for our initial assistance and intervention."

He said they have yet to determine how many workers have been affected by the oil spill.

"We have yet to conduct profiling through our DOLE Regional Office in coordination with the DENR," said Laguesma.

The DSWD has distributed P175,700 worth of assistance to 8,633 families or 37,706 persons affected by the oil spill.

Family food packs have also been distributed to almost 1,000 affected families in Barangays Misong, Tagumpay, and Zone 2 in the Municipality of Pola in Oriental Mindoro last Saturday.

The DSWD, through its Mimaropa Field Office, has a prepositioned P78.9 million worth of standby and stockpile funds — composed of 42,400 family food packs P7.2 million standby funds — that can be tapped.

DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian and Oriental Mindoro Gov. Bonz Dolor have visited affected families in Pola and inspected the coastline of the affected areas.

Gatchalian said the DSWD will provide around 10,000 family food packs every four days to affected families.

He said a cash-for-work program, such as a clean-up drive, would also be implemented by next week to help the affected residents, mostly fishermen and vendors, earn temporary living. — *With Jocelyn Montemayor and Jed Macapagal*



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Loyzaga: Important thing is to find where MT Princess Empress sunk

By JOJO CESAR MAGSOMBOL

ORIENTAL Mindoro — Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga visited the incident Command Post in Barangay Estrella, Naujan on March 3 and checked on the oil spill incident caused by the sinking of the MT Princess Empress oil tanker in the municipal waters of the town of Naujan recently.

"We are here now to see how we can help in relation to the incident. Right now the important thing is to find where the vessel actually sunk to see where if (oil spill) could spread and affect the marine habitat and livelihood of the fishermen in Oriental Mindoro," she added.

Loyzaga added that the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA) will deploy a vessel capable of locating the sunken oil tanker.

Meanwhile, Provincial Administrator MD Hubbert



DENR Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga (encircled).
Photo courtesy of Or. Mindoro PIO

Christopher A. Dolor, representative of Governor Humelito "Bonz" A. Dolor, requested Loyzaga through the DENR office to order various national agencies to assist the province in helping prevent the oil spill affect the coastal areas of Oriental Mindoro.

Dolor also announced the plan to declare a State of Calamity Oriental Mindoro.



Gov't urged to go after owners of stricken tanker

By Jester Manalastas

OWNERS of a tanker carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel that sank off Oriental Mindoro and caused an oil spill should be held accountable.

This is according to AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee adding that it damaged the country's vital resources.

"Kailangang mapanagot ang mga mayari ng MT Princess Empress, Mahahalagang protected area ang nasa panganiib dahil sa oil spill, kaya't kailangang maghabol ang pam-

ahalaan para sa containment, cleanup, at rehabilitation ng mga maaapektuhang area," Lee said in a statement.

According to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the oil spill, which already spans several kilometers, could affect 21 marine protected areas. The agency's Biodiversity Management Bureau mapped out potential risk areas, which include seagrass beds, mangroves, and dispersion pathways for spawned fish larvae.

The DENR also reported that they have created a task force to respond to the oil spill.

Concerns have also been raised that the oil spill could threaten the important and already fragile Verde Island Passage, which scientists consider as the center of marine biodiversity in the world.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Coast Guard, which leads response operations in the affected area, said it will install spill booms to protect important areas.

The PCG similarly formed a task force and conducted water sampling in the towns of Naujan, Pola, and Pinamalayan.

Lee said that besides its adverse impact on the environ-

ment, the oil spill would affect the livelihood of fishermen working on the contaminated areas.

"Manganganib ang kabuhayan ng maraming mangang-isda sa Mindoro at sa iba pang lalawigan na nakapalibot sa kontaminadong dagat. Sa panahon na pahirap nang pahitap ang buhay, gutom ang aabutin ng pamilya ng mga ito kung hindi sila makakapagtrabaho," Lee said.

The lawmaker also appealed to the government to provide aid and temporary employment to fishermen who would be forced to cease work by the oil spill.



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Mindoro town to sue operator over oil spill

CALAPAN CITY, Oriental Mindoro: Mayor Jennifer "Ina Alegre" Cruz of Pola, Oriental Mindoro, on Saturday said they will sue the operator of an oil tanker over the sinking of the vessel, causing an oil spill off the town.

The incident happened at the height of the northeast monsoon or "amihan" last week.

In a post on her social media page, Cruz said she had waited for a response from the owner or any staff of *MT Princess Empress*, but it has been five days since Feb. 28, 2023 that the municipal administrator tried to communicate with

the management to no avail.

"Paano ka po ang ating mangingisda, our marine protected areas at ang ating bagong lumalago naming na tourism (With the oil spill, what will happen to our fishermen, our protected areas, our recovering tourism here)?" the mayor also said in her post.

In an interview with *The Manila Times* on Sunday, Cruz said she is coordinating with the office of First District Rep. Arnan Panaligan on their plan to file a case against RDC Reield Marine Services Inc., operator of the oil tanker.

Panaligan said his office is extending assistance to the legal battle of the Pola local government.

He added that possible violation of the Oil Pollution Compensation Act and other related environmental laws would be filed against the shipping company.

Cruz declared a state of calamity in her town after a temporary freeze order on cleaning up of the oil spill upon issuance of a directive from the Department of Health and the provincial and municipal health offices mandating the use of personal protective equipment in

the wake of the incident.

Meanwhile, volunteers from independent power producers DMCI and Power One Inc. assisted in the cleanup in the coastal villages of Misong, Tagumpay, Bayanan 2, Calima and Buhay na Tubig in Pola town.

Edgard Thomas John Geronimo, DMCI community development specialist, said the cleanup could take a month because the villages are hard to reach, apart from alleged failure of government agencies to prevent the spread of the slick. **IRE JOE V.C. LAURENTE**



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May-ari ng lumubog na barko singilin sa oil spill

Dapat umanong managot ang mga may-ari ng lumubog na tanker na pinanggagalingan ng oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro.

Ayon kay AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee hindi biro ang dulor ng paglubog ng MT Princess Empress na nakaapekto hindi lamang sa kalikasan kundi maging sa kabuhayan ng mga mangingisda.

"Kailangang mapanagot ang mga may-ari ng MT Princess Empress. Mahahalagang protected area ang nasa panganib dahil sa oil spill, kaya't kailangang maghsbol ang pamahalaan para sa containment, cleanup, at rehabilitation ng mga maapektuhang area,"

sabi ni Lee.

Ayon sa Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) inaasahang makakaapekto ang oil spill sa 21 marine protected areas.

Kasama umano sa maaaring maapektuhan ang Verde Island Passage na ikinokonsidera ng mga siyentipiko na sentro ng marine biodiversity sa mundo.

"Manganganib ang kabuhayan ng maraming mangingisda sa Mindoro at sa iba pang lalawigan na nakapalibot sa kumtaminadong dagat," sabi ni Lee. "Sa panahon na pahirap nang pahirap ang buhay, gutom ang aabutin ng pamilya ng mga ito kung hindi sila makakapagtrabaho."

(Billy Begas)



'Bayanihan' namayan, task force binuo 9 bayan sa Mindoro, apektado ng oil spill

CAMP VICENTE LIM, Laguna – Siyam mula sa 13 munisipalidad sa Oriental Mindoro ang apektado ng oil spill dahil sa paglubog ng motor tanker MT Princess Empress sa karagatang sakop ng lalawigan.

Base sa monitoring report ng Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office, ang mga apektadong bayan ay ang Naujan, Pola, Pinamalayan, Gloria, Basud, Bongabong, Roxas, Mansalay at Bulalacao.

Sa Pola, ang third class municipality na binubuo ng 23 barangays, 11 dito na kinabibilangan ng Brgy. Miso, Calima, Batuhan, Zone 1, Zone 2, Bayanan, Tagumpay, Buhay na tubig, Bacawan, Tiguisan at baybayin ng Puting Cacao ang pinakanaapektuhan ng oil spill.

Apektado rin ang dalawang barangay at karagatan ng Masaguing sa Naujan, 9 barangay sa Pinamalayan, pito sa Gloria, apat sa Bansud, walo sa Bongabong, lima sa Roxas, walo sa Mansalay at pito sa Bulalacao.

Nasa kabuuang 10,362 pamilya at 48,885 indibidwal ang naitalang naapektuhan ng kasalukuyang sitwasyon bunsod ng malawakang pagtagas ng langis kabilang ang kanilang pangkabuhayan at sa industriya ng pangisdaan.

Ayon sa Philippine Coast Guard, ang oil spill ay umabot na rin sa munisipalidad ng Caluya sa Antique kabilang ang apat na lugar sa Sitio Sabang ng Barangay Tinogbok, Liwagao Island ng Brgy. Sibclo, Sitio Tambak ng Brgy. Semirara.

Samantala, dahil sa nararahasang krisis, umani ang "bayanihan spirit" sa bayan ng Pola na nasa ilalim ng "state of calamity" dahil sa epekto ng oil spill sa kanilang kalikasan at kanilang pangkabuhayan.

Sinabi ni Pola Mayor Jennifer Cruz, ang oil spill sa kanilang marine area at coastal water ay nagbunsod para mabilis na umakseyon at magtulungan ang mga lokal na mangingsida, concerned government agencies at lokal na opisyal upang mapigilan ang pagkalat pa ng polusyon sa kanilang katubigan.

Aniya, mabilis silang naglagay ng tuyong dahon ng niyog sa may baybayin na nagsisilbing "booms" upang maharang ang oil spill at makolekta rin ang malagkit na tim na langis na dumikit at nakalutang sa lugar.

Bumuo rin ng task force upang mag-monitor sa impact ng oil spill, at sa kaganapan nito at magpatupad ng mga hakbang upang mapigil ang magkalat ng langis.

Ang task force ay binubuo ng mga personnel ng Mimaropa mula sa Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Health (DOH), Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), Philippine National Police (PNP), Philippine Coast Guard (PCG)-Southern Tagalog District, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Southern Luzon Command, at Mimaropa local government units. (Ed Amaraso)



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Marcos orders cleanup of oil spill in Or. Mindoro

By **CORY MARTINEZ**

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered concerned government agencies to mobilize expeditiously in their efforts to clean up the oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress in Oriental Mindoro.

Marcos issued the order after Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Antonia Loyzaga briefed him on the situation and the plan of action of the DENR Task Force in cooperation with the Philippine Coast Guard and National Disaster Risk Reduction Council (NDRRMC) upon arrival from her inspection in the area.

Loyzaga met with Naujan Mayor Henry Joel Teves

and representatives from the Provincial Governor's Office, Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, and the Philippine Coast Guard last Friday to assess the extent and potential impacts of the oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress.

The BRP Hydrographer Ventura of the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA), an attached agency of DENR, on the other hand, departed from Subic at approximately 7:30 am last Saturday and is expected to arrive in the evening. It will use a multi-beam survey to locate the sunken vessel.

The DENR is performing disaster forensics in collaboration with the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP-

MSI) to assess immediate actions to protect mangroves, seagrass, and over 36,000 hectares of coral reefs in Bulalacao, Oriental Mindoro, and Caluya, Antique that can be potentially affected by the oil slick.

Loyzaga disclosed that she is now conferring with the Secretaries of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), and Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) to finalize arrangements on the augmentation for the cash-for-work scheme for the clean-up teams in the local communities.

DENR Task Force Commander Undersecretary Marilon Eru has convened an emergency coordination meeting and briefing which was attended by the Na-

tional Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), Department of Health (DOH). Each agency provided updates on its individual operations on site and the joint efforts on shoreline clean-up operations, site assessments, surveillance to determine the exact location of the sunken tanker, and protection of marine ecosystems among others.

The DENR Environmental Management Bureau MIMAROPA, on the other hand, continues its clean-up operations using locally available oil absorbent materials. EMB is currently installing provisional spill booms made of cogon and sawali. These barriers are precautionary measures to prevent the oil spill from reaching the beach and mangrove areas of Pola, Oriental Mindoro.



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Pinas magpapasaklolo sa Japan vs Mindoro oil spill

TINITINGNAN ng gobyerno ng Pilipinas na humingi ng tulong sa Japan para mapigil ang mabibis na pagkalat ng langis sa karagatang bahagi ng Naujan, Oriental Mindoro kasunod na rin ng paglubog ng isang oil tanker na may kargang 800,000 litrong industrial oil sa Balingawan Point kamakalitan.

Sinabi ni Transportation Secretary Jaime Bautista, na kikipaglutungan at ugnayan na ang Philippine Coast Guard sa ilang ahensya ng pamahalaan para mapigil ang pagkalat ng langis na umabot na sa ibang lugar ng nasabing lalawigan.

Sa pahayag ng Philippine Coast Guard, kitang-kita ang lawak ng naapektuhan ng oil spill sa isinagawang aerial surveillance sa karagatang sakop ng Naujan nitong Miyerkules, Marso 1.

Bukod sa airbus helicopter, ipinadala rin sa lugar ang BRP Melchora Aquino upang lumulong sa surveillance operation. Ang Verde Island ay matatagpuan sa pagitan ng Batangas province at Puerto Galera sa Oriental Mindoro.

Matatandaang palungo na sana sa Iloilo ang MT Princess Empress na galing sa Bataan, sakay ang 20 muntarinang maganap ang insidente.

Bigla umarong nag-overheat ang makina ng barko dakong 2:00 ng madaling araw ng nasabing petsa.

Napadpad ang barko sa Balingawan Point kung saan ito lumubog dulot na rin ng matalaking alon.

Kaugnay nito, bumuo na ng crisis management committee ang PCG upang magtagapang ng imbestigasyon at magrekomenda ng aksyon hinggil sa insidente.

Samantala, sinabi ni Bautista na isinasagawa na ang imbestigasyon sa lumubog na oil tanker. KRIS JOSE



Gov't sets cash-for-work plan to stop oil spill further spread

By Rio N. Araja

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources is performing disaster forensics in the areas threatened by the oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress as it finalizes arrangements for a cash-for-work scheme for cleanup

teams in the local communities.

Environment chief Antonia Loyzaga said the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) is helping assess immediate actions to protect mangroves, seagrass, and over 36,000 hectares of coral reefs in

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Gov't...

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Bulalacao, Oriental Mindoro and Caluya, Antique that can be potentially affected by the oil slick.

The ship BRP Hydrographer Ventura of the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority, an attached agency of DENR, has also been dispatched to use a multibeam survey to locate the sunken vessel carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel.

The local DENR Environmental Management Bureau is continuing its cleanup operations using locally available oil-absorbent materials and installing provisional spill booms made of cogon and sawali as precautionary measures to prevent the oil spill from reaching the beach and mangrove areas of Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

The Environment department is likewise coordinating with Semirara Mining and Power Corporation to help and assist in the cleanup operations in Caluya, Antique.

Loyzaga said she is also in talks with her counterparts in the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Interior and Local Government and Department of Labor and Employment for the cash-for-work setup.

Meanwhile, AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee demanded that the owners

of the tankers be held accountable for damaging the country's vital resources.

"The owners of MT Princess Empress must answer for this. Very crucial protected areas are now under threat because of the oil spill, so the government should do everything to hold them accountable for the containment, cleanup, and rehabilitation of the affected areas," Lee said.

The oil spill, which already spans several kilometers, is feared to affect 21 marine protected areas.

Concerns have also been raised that the oil spill could threaten the important and already fragile Verde Island Passage, which scientists consider as the center of marine biodiversity in the world.

The lawmaker also appealed to the government to provide aid and temporary employment to fisherfolk who would be forced to cease work by the oil spill.

Albay Rep. Joey Salceda, for his part, expressed confidence that his fellow lawmakers will support a supplemental budget for immediate action and recovery efforts for the sunken tanker.

"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," he said.



Tulong sa mga apektado ng oil spill

DOH nagpadala ng medical supplies sa Mindoro

Nagpadala na ng mga kinakailangang medical supplies at equipment ang Department of Health (DOH) sa mga apektadong lugar sa Oriental Mindoro upang maiwasan ang pagkakasakit ng publiko dulot ng oil spill buhat sa lumubog na oil tanker.

Kabilang sa mga ipinadala ng DOH ay ang mga kinakailangang gamot, face masks, nebulizers, oxygen concentrators at iba pa na nasa kustodya na ng Pamahalaang Pantlalawigan ng Oriental Mindoro.

Ito ay mula sa pagpon ng mga suplay mula sa Jose Reyes Memorial Medical Center, Las Piñas General Hospital and Satellite Trauma Center, Tondo Medical Center, Valenzuela Medical Center,

National Children's Hospital at National Kidney and Transplant Institute.

Ayon kay DOH officer-in-charge Maria Rosario Vergeire, na ang nangyaring oil spill ay nangangailangan ng buong pagtulong ng lahat ng ahensya ng pamahalaan. Pangunahin aniyang tungkulin ng DOH ay labanan ang masamang epekto ng oil spill sa kalusugan ng mga nanirahan sa mga komunidad na apektado nito at matugunan ang kanilang agarang pangangailangan sa kalusugan.

Nitong Marso 3, una nang nagpadala ang DOH ng suplay sa mga apektadong pamilya tu-

lad ng emergency intubation, first aid, at protective equipments. Nagpadala rin ang ahensya ng hazmat suits para sa mga tauhan ng pamahalaan na nagsasagawa ng emergency response.

Nagtungo si Vergeire sa Oriental Mindoro at pinangunahan nito kahapon ang inspeksiyon sa mga healthcared at evacuation centers sa lalawigan at nagbigay ng agarang medical assistance at suplay sa mga apektadong komunidad.

Pinayuhan niya ang mga mamamayan na kung ang lugar nila ay nasa senador ng oil spill at malapit sa kanilang tirahan ay mas mainam na maghanap muna ng pansamantalang maliit na habang hindi pa nalilinis ang langis sa dagat at dalampasigan.

"Sa pagkakataong tayong ay hindi nakatikas; huwag tumangoy sa mga lugar na apektado ng langis; iwasang madikit sa sediment, buhangin, lupa, o mga bagay na kontaminado ng langis; huwag gumamit ng tubig na kontaktado ng langis para sa pagkonsumo ng mga tao o hayop; at huwag kumain ng isda, molusko, at iba pang pagkain-dagat na nahuli sa lugar malapit sa oil spill," paalala ni Vergeire. (Danilo Garcia)



Ininspeksyon ni DOH-OIC Maria Rosario Vergeire ang ilang lugar na tinamaan ng oil spill matapos ang pamamahagi nito ng medical supplies para sa mga apektadong residente sa Oriental Mindoro, kahapon. (DOH-FB)



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Barber shop call: Save our shores, donate your hair

WANT to help get rid of the oil spill off Oriental Mindoro? Donate your spare hair.

A local barbershop in the provincial capital, Calapan City, is doing just that, collecting cut hair to help clean up the oil hitting the province's shores.

"Hair, surprisingly, turns (out) to be a potent weapon against oil spills because of its remarkable ability to absorb five times its weight in oil," Bruskos Barber Shop said in a Facebook post.

"[Your] hair shall be used in cleaning

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Barber...

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the oil spill," it added, noting its initiative will run until April 4.

It's not the first time a local business is rallying to clean up an oil slick.

In 2006, beauty salons and barbershops from different parts of the country collected hair and sent them to responders in Guimaras, after an oil tanker spilled over two million liters of bunker fuel in the Island.

Approximately 20,000 hectares of coral reefs, 9,900 hectares of mangroves, and 6,000 hectares of seagrass were affected by that oil spill, according to marine experts (see related story on A1 - Editors).

"The spill from an oil tanker near Naujan, Oriental Mindoro is spreading to more areas and had already reached the municipal shores of Pola, Pinamalayan, Gloria, and Bongabong," the barbershop noted.

It also said that 10 percent of its gross sales will be donated directly to the affected families.

The oil spill has also reached the shorelines of towns in Oriental Mindoro, Occidental Mindoro, and Palawan.

The Philippine Coast Guard also confirmed the presence of an oil spill in Antique.

This was after the MT Princess Empress ship, carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil, sank in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28.



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DOH warns vs eating seafood from oil spill areas

The Department of Health (DOH) warned the public yesterday against eating fish and other seafood from areas affected by the oil spill.

In an advisory, the DOH said residents of Oriental Mindoro should avoid swimming in oil spill-affected waters.

The DOH said the oil spill may pose a risk not only to the environment but also to public health.

DOH officer-in-charge Maria Rosario Vergeire inspected healthcare centers in Oriental Mindoro and provided medical assistance to affected communities.

Medicine, face masks and other medical supplies were turned over to the provincial government.

Vergeire gave assurance that concerned government agencies are working to mitigate the impact of the oil spill.

The DOH reminded residents of Oriental Mindoro to avoid contact with contaminated sediments, soil and sand. Oil spill-affected skin must be thoroughly washed with soap and water.

Contaminated clothes should be washed, but strong detergents and chemicals must be avoided.

Meanwhile, the Department of Labor and Employment promised emergency employment and other assistance to workers affected by the oil spill.

- Mayen Jaymalin



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NOW SAFE FROM COLIFORM CONTAMINATION

SWIMMING BAN ON MACTAN ISLAND'S CORDOVA TOWN LIFTED

CEBU CITY—Swimming in the sea of Cordova town on Mactan Island in Cebu province is back.

Mayor Cesar Suan has lifted the ban on swimming in the municipality following a drop in the level of coliform bacteria in the town's seas.

"Swimming is now allowed because the sea is already clean," according to Cordova Councilor Lemuel Pogoy, chair of the council's committee on environment, in an interview over radio dyHP on March 3.

Recent results of a water

quality check conducted by the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) showed that the fecal coliform level in the sea of Cordova has decreased to 0.8 most probable number (mpn) per 100 milliliters (ml), he said.

For coastal water to be safe for swimming, the coliform levels should not be higher than 100 mpn per 100 ml, the EMB earlier said.

In August last year, the coliform level in the sea off Cordova was 2,400 mpn per 100 ml, which was believed to have

been caused by septic waste from numerous floating restaurants in the area, which were tourist drawers for the town.

Enjoy 'our seas'

Cordova, the only other local government unit on the island, is positioning itself as a tourist destination to match the progress of its wealthy neighbor, Lapu-Lapu City, which hosts Mactan-Cebu International Airport, the busiest air gateway outside of the national capital; Mactan Export Processing Zone, home to some of the

country's biggest export manufacturing firms; and a number of world-renown resorts and hotels.

Pogoy said Suan decided to reopen their seas for swimming even as they were still waiting for the result of the second test conducted by the EMB, which was expected to be released within this month.

But since the first test showed that the coliform level "was already very low, people could [now] swim in our seas," Pogoy said. —REPORTS FROM NESTLE SEMILLA AND ADOR VINCENT MAYOL INQ



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From top source of ocean wastes, PH must lead in zero waste

MARCH 30 is the first annual United Nations International Day of Zero Waste. Unlike the International Zero Waste Month celebrated in the Philippines and other Asian countries last January and which highlights the need to reduce plastic use and plastic waste, the International Day of Zero Waste should be seen in the broader context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The day is expected to raise awareness and spur action that addresses "all forms of waste, including food loss and waste, natural resource extraction and electronic waste," according to the International Day of Zero Waste website. We need to take better care of our natural resources, our environment, minimize pollution, in order to ensure a decent quality



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of life for future generations, for all people and not just a few.

Aside from shining attention on sustainable "zero waste" lifestyles in general, the Day of Zero Waste is also a reminder of the much anticipated Global Plastics Treaty, expected to be ready by next year. A year has passed since the UN Environment Assembly voted to work toward such a legally binding instrument. The treaty will start a global process of pushing back plastic production. From a matter of stopping "ocean plastic waste" or "plastic waste leakage," the treaty will address plastic pro-

►Stinus-CabugonA6



■ The world will celebrate the first annual United Nations International Day of Zero Waste on March 30, 2023. We must adopt less wasteful, less toxic lifestyles in order for mankind to survive and thrive. GAIA/ZERO WASTE EUROPE

duction, the source of the problem.

Do I sound like a broken record? Well, plastic pollution is a never-ending issue and concern. Last February 17, online news site Visual Capitalist published an image and a short article on ocean plastic pollution. The data was lifted from a 2021 report titled "More than 1,000 rivers account for 80 percent of global riverine plastic emissions into the ocean," by Lourens J. J. Meijer and colleagues. It may be recalled that this report identified the Philippines as the world's undisputed No. 1 source of ocean plastic waste. An estimated 35 percent of discarded plastic that finds its way into the ocean emanates from 466 rivers in the Philippines. The authors partly attributed this to the fact that the Philippines — and some of the other top polluting nations — has a "relatively small land surface area compared to the length

of [its] coastline."

Commenting on Visual Capitalist's story — visualized with an "ocean plastic waste pie" — a Danish Twitter user noted that while he is sorting his garbage, people in Asia are dumping tons of plastic into the oceans. Others, however, pointed out that the Global North is exporting plastic (and other types of) waste to developing countries. How much of waste that ends up in the oceans might have originated in the north? they asked. The matter of waste trade was barely touched in Visual Capitalist's very short article accompanying the numbers. An official of the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) Asia Pacific told me that the article failed to appreciate some other facts about plastic waste. For instance, according to a Break Free from Plastics 2022 brand audit of plastic waste, Coca-Cola remains



Boracay water, wastewater services set for upgrade

MANILA Water Philippine Ventures subsidiary Boracay Water said it will continue to intensify water and wastewater service improvement in Boracay Island amid the recovery of tourism from the impact of the pandemic.

The company allotted P1.1 billion for its 2021-2025 service improvement plan that is also meant to help ensure compliance to regulatory service obligations especially that tourist arrivals in the island increased by 434 percent to 1,759,100 tourists in 2022 from 330,622 in 2021.

Boracay Water said for the next three years, it will upgrade and rehabilitate Nabaoy and Caticlan pumping stations, the Caticlan water treatment plant and its water network to ensure the distribution and availability of water 24/7 even in the event of a natural calamity, such as typhoons and earthquakes.

Under its social flagship program Tubig Para sa Barangay that aims to provide sustainable water to low income households, the company also started last January a water pipelaying project in Barangay Yapak costing P1.2 million which will benefit 160 households.

On wastewater management, Boracay Water is upgrading its sewage treatment plants in Barangay Balabag and Manocmanoc to comply with the re-

quirements of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in updating general effluent standards.

The company also provides support to the Environmental Management Bureau and the local government unit of Malay in implementing the Clean Water Act, allotting P108 million to provide free mandatory sewer connection to 1,810 households residing within 100 meters from the available sewer network starting this year.

Boracay Water said the program ensures wastewater will be treated before being discharged to the water bodies in Boracay. The program also encourages establishments that are within 100 meters to connect to the available sewer network of the company to ensure sustainability and protection of the island's beaches.

The company added part of the fund allotment will be used for the protection of the environment through its Highland to Ocean program to protect the Nabaoy river and watershed which is the lone source of water of Boracay Island.

Boracay Water said to date, 40 hectares of land comprising the watershed have been adopted for appropriate management and 33,320 trees have been committed for planting in the next five years.

- Jed Macapagal



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NEWS

No agreement yet on Masungi plan

The private caretaker of the Masungi Georeserve in Rizal province has denied conceding to the plan of the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) to develop 270 hectares of the 400-ha protected area as the new site for its headquarters. The foundation said it "stands firm and continues to urge the government to reconsider plans to build [BuCor] facilities inside the georeserve." —STORY BY **A2**
DEXTER CABALZA AND DEMPSEY REYES

WE STAND BY OUR POSITION

MASUNGI CARETAKERS DENY AGREEING TO BUCOR PLAN TO DEVELOP AREA

The private caretaker of the Masungi Georeserve in Rizal province has denied conceding to the plan of the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) to develop 270 hectares of the 400-ha protected area as the new site for its headquarters.

In a statement on Saturday, BuCor said the Masungi Georeserve Foundation had agreed to its five-year development plan after a "fruitful" meeting on Wednesday between BuCor acting Director General Gregorio Catapang Jr. and Foundation trustees Ann and her sister Billie Dumaliang, together with their lawyers and officials of the Department of Justice and the Land Registration Authority (LRA), among others.

The Masungi Georeserve Foundation Inc. acknowledged

and recognized that the subject land belongs to the BuCor," the statement said, adding that the foundation "came to a mutual agreement and understanding [with the agency] that BuCor and Masungi Georeserve adheres [sic] to safeguarding the land's biodiversity and geological structures which led to a fruitful discussion of creating linkages toward environment protection."

The foundation, however, denied BuCor's claim. In its statement on its Facebook page posted on Saturday, the foundation said it "stands firm and continues to urge the government to reconsider plans to build Bureau of Corrections facilities inside the georeserve."

In a text message to the Inquirer, Ann Dumaliang said "It

was a good first touch base and we are happy we finally met the BuCor leadership—but no such conclusions were agreed on."

"We stand by our position and that of other environmental groups that BuCor should not build in this area," she said.

Proclamations

According to the BuCor statement, lawyer Teodoro Bonifacio Jr. of the LRA "enlightened [the Masungi caretakers about] the history of the claimants and clearly emphasized that the 270 hectares [are] solely owned by BuCor, [which] has all the right to develop any activities in accordance with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) guidelines [on] preserving [the] environment."



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BuCor said it acquired the right to the 270-ha portion of the conservation site when President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo issued Proclamation No. 1158 on Sept. 9, 2006, reserving that area as a new site for the bureau.

That portion was designated as "Lot 10," the same area where armed men had set up camp in September last year, reviving public attention to the endangered conservation site.

But Arroyo's proclamation makes no reference to Proclamation No. 1636 of 1977 and Proclamation No. 573 of 1969, issued by then President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. reserving the Masungi area as a national park and wildlife sanctuary.

Another statute before Arroyo's order is the National

Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 1992 (Republic Act No. 7586), which further establishes the legal mechanism for the preservation of protected areas.

In 2009, then Environment Secretary Lito Alienza issued a memorandum ordering his agency's Calabarzon office to present an alternative relocation site for BuCor.

In 2017, the foundation entered into an agreement with DENR (then on the watch of Environment Secretary Gina Lopez) regarding Masungi's preservation and maintenance.

BuCor's visit

It was only in September last year that BuCor was able to receive the transfer of certificate title of the property.

Catapang had said earlier that "BuCor will always protect and continue to support the advocacy of environmental preservation."

But he also has other plans, saying that he is considering the area as a potential site for its Corrections National Training Institute as well as for the housing of the bureau's current and retired officials, among other purposes.

He and other BuCor officials are scheduled to visit Masungi on March 12, Ann Dumaliang said.

She said she hoped that BuCor would realize "that it would not be fiscally sound or feasible to implement their plans without destroying the environment." —REPORTS FROM DEXTER

CABALZA AND DEMPSEY REYES INQ.



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BuCor, Masungi move to resolve dispute

The Bureau of Corrections and the Masungi Georeserve Foundation moved to resolve the gridlock over BuCor's plan to build its headquarters in the environmental reserve in Tanay, Rizal.

BuCor officials led by director general Gregorio Pio Catapang Jr. and representatives of the foundation met on Wednesday.

In a statement issued yesterday, the BuCor said the Masungi Georeserve acknowledged that the agency is the owner of 270 hectares of land in the conservation area.

The BuCor said both sides resolved to adhere to safeguarding the land's biodiversity and geological structures.

Catapang gave assurance that development plans in the area would undergo further studies.

"In the utilization of its 270-hectare land, BuCor will always protect and continue to support the advocacy on environmental preservation," he said.

Ann Dumaliang, Masungi Georeserve Foundation co-founder, discussed the history and advocacy of their group in land preservation. —Emmanuel Tupas



Villar encourages public to participate in protecting PH biodiversity

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

SEN. Cynthia A. Villar, chairperson of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, is encouraging everyone to protect the country's wildlife, noting that citizens will be adversely affected by its damage or loss.

"We owe it to the future generation to conserve and protect our wildlife resources. It is part of our duty to leave this world better than we found it," Villar said, during the celebration of World Wildlife Day 2023 in the Philippines led by Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary

Toni Loyzaga.

"Let us not act harshly in ways that will threaten the delicate balance that sustains all life on earth. Let us make sure that the future generations will still encounter and co-exist with an abundance of plants and animals, and not just see them in old pictures," she

further said.

Villar said every March 3, World Wildlife Day is celebrated and to raise awareness on the country's amazing biodiversity. The country has a wide variety of wildlife and plants, and this biodiversity contributes to people's lives and the earth.



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Nations secure UN global high seas biodiversity pact

NEGOTIATORS from more than 100 countries completed a UN treaty to protect the high seas on Saturday, a long-awaited step that environmental groups say will help reverse marine biodiversity losses and ensure sustainable development.

The legally binding pact to conserve and ensure the sustainable use of ocean biodiversity, under discussion for 15 years, was finally agreed after five rounds of protracted UN-led negotiations that ended in New York on Saturday, a day after the original deadline.

"The ship has reached the shore," the UN conference president, Rena Lee, said after a marathon final day of talks.

The treaty is seen as a crucial component in global efforts to bring 30% of the world's land and sea under protection by the end of the decade, a target known as "30 by 30" agreed in Montreal in December.

Economic interests were a major sticking point throughout the latest round of negotiations, which began on Feb. 20, with developing countries calling for a greater

share of the spoils from the "blue economy," including the transfer of technology.

An agreement to share the benefits of "marine genetic resources" used in industries like biotechnology also remained an area of contention until the end, dragging out talks.

Greenpeace says 11 million square km (4.2 million square miles) of ocean needs to be put under protection every year until 2030 to meet the target.

Very little of the high seas is

subject to any protection, with pollution, acidification and overfishing posing a growing threat.

"Countries must formally adopt the treaty and ratify it as quickly as possible to bring it into force, and then deliver the fully protected ocean sanctuaries our planet needs," said Laura Mellor, a Greenpeace oceans campaigner who attended the talks.

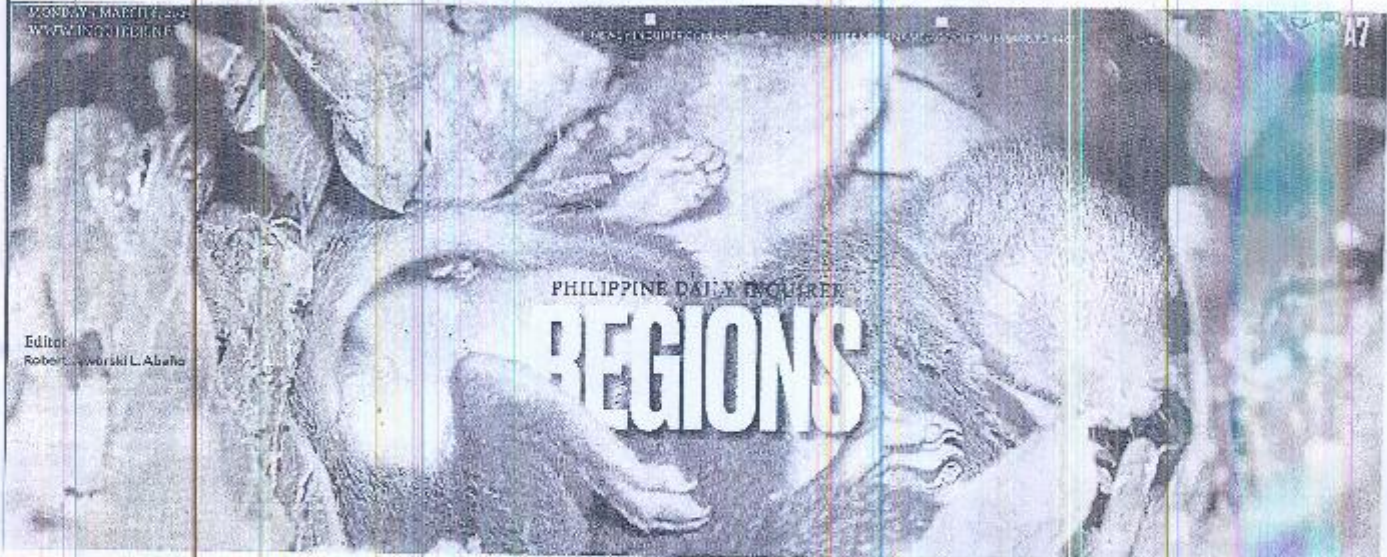
"The clock is still ticking to deliver 30 by 30. We have half a decade left, and we can't be complacent." - Reuters



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NEWBORN A pair of newborn Mindanao treeshrews (*Tupaia everetti*) is discovered by two Filipino biologists in July 2022 in a nest within the Mounts Kambinliw-Redondo key biodiversity area on Dinagat Islands. —PHOTO COURTESY OF TRISTAN LUAP SENARILLOS

ENDEMIC SPECIES' BEHAVIOR DOCUMENTED

AFTER 70 YEARS, MINDANAO TREESHREW NEST REDISCOVERED ON DINAGAT ISLANDS

By Bong S. Sarmiento
@InqNational

KORONADAL CITY—For the first time after at least 70 years, two Filipino biologists were able to document the behavior of a pair of newborn Mindanao treeshrews (*Tupaia everetti*)—a mammal resembling a chipmunk—on Dinagat Islands.

Tristan Luap Senarillos and Jayson Ibañez, both conservationists of the Philippine Eagle Foundation, said they discovered the nest site of the treeshrews within the Mounts Kambinliw-Redondo key biodiversity area in Dinagat while they were carrying out a rapid faunal assessment in the aftermath of Typhoon "Odette" (international name: Rai) that devastated the island in December 2021.

"This nest discovery is a valuable contribution to the minimal existing literature about this poorly studied species, which may be increasingly threatened by anthropogenic impacts," the two biologists wrote in the study, "Notes on the Nest Architecture and Nest Site Characteristics of Mindanao Treeshrew (*Tupaia everetti* Thomas, 1892) from Dinagat Islands, Philippines," published on March 1 this year in the *Philippine Journal of Science*.

mal eaters) and found in areas associated with forests," he said, adding: "They're so difficult to find in the field, unless they're trapped for study purposes."

The Mindanao treeshrew is one of only two endemic treeshrews in the Philippines after that of the Palawan treeshrew (*Tupaia palawanensis*).

'Species of least concern'

According to the study, the Mindanao treeshrew is an enigmatic nonflying mammal found only in the mountainous areas of mainland Mindanao and in smaller nearby islands, including Dinagat and Siargao. It is classified as a species of "least concern" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species.

It lives in dense vegetation near streams in lowland evergreen forests (below 500 meters above sea level or masl), up in the mossy forests (>250 masl) and is sometimes found in varying densities in disturbed forest habitats, according to the study.

In the wild, the Mindanao treeshrews use ground hollows as nests and hiding places, as noted in the 1950 study, "Notes on the Philippine Treeshrew," published by Charles Wharton

Anthropogenic impact refers to changes to biophysical environments and to ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources caused directly or indirectly by humans.

In July 2022, the biologists found the Mindanao treeshrew nest built inside a cavity of a dead pandan tree on the ground surrounded by natural vegetation. But they did not see the attending parents during the encounter.

They were in Barangay General Aguinaldo in Libjo town to document birds, amphibians and reptiles, and nonvolant (incapable of flying) mammals after the ravages of Odette when they accidentally found the nest of the treeshrews.

"[They are] secretive. They have adapted to or specialized in climbing," Senarillos told the *Inquirer* on Sunday.

"So far, what we know [about treeshrews] is that they are diurnal (daytime) animals, are omnivores (plant and ani-

n the *Journal of Mammalogy*.

With regard to breeding, females in captivity are reported to produce two offspring after a gestation period of 54 to 56 days, the study by Ibañez and Senarillos noted.

Senarillos said there was little information about treeshrew species in the Philippines but based on studies with their relatives in peninsular Borneo, the *Tupaia* species are believed to be seed dispersers, helping to regenerate fruiting trees in the forests they inhabit.

The juvenile Mindanao treeshrews found in the nest were both males. "They slept in a curled, tight ball position, with the top of the head located very close to the belly, or in a ventral position with the tail resting on top of the belly," the study said. "Whenever the nest was disturbed, the juveniles became active and made an explosive snort and quick scratching motions, probably a form of territorial defense to deter predators and other nest intruders," the study noted. *INQ*



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CEMEX'S COMMITMENT. CEMEX Philippines executives led by president and chief executive Luis Franco (fourth from left) pay a courtesy visit to Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Maria Antonia Leyzaga (third from left) and other officials to discuss opportunities for collaboration on sustainable development initiatives. With them are (from left) CEMEX public affairs manager Lysander Castillo, vice president for cement operations and technical Santiago Ortiz. DENR Undersecretary Juan Miguel Cuna and Undersecretary Ignatius Loyola Rodriguez. CEMEX also discussed during the visit the company's global climate action strategy called Future in Action.



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Court stops P401-M levy on mining firm

BY JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

COTABATO CITY: Ethnic B'laan were elated with the censure by a local court of a municipal government for attempting to charge a mining firm P401 million for a business permit despite the company not even having operated yet.

Domingo Collado, Indigenous People's mandatory representative to the Sangguniang Bayan (Town Council) of Tampakan in South Cotabato province, told reporters on Saturday that the Court of Tax Appeals (CTA) had ordered their local government unit (LGU) to refrain from collecting P401 million from Sagittarius Mines Inc. (SMI) for a business permit essential to its planned operation in the municipality soon.

The B'laan in Tampakan had long

issued a free and prior consent, via the National Commission on Indigenous People, to the SMI's planned exploration starting this year of some \$200 billion worth of copper deposits in their ancestral domain.

Tampakan is about 16 kilometers from Koronadal City, South Cotabato's provincial capital.

Media outfits here and in the cities of Koronadal, Kidapawan, Tacurong and General Santos received late Friday via email copies of the court

ruling dated Feb. 10, 2023.

Dalena Samling, a B'laan leader in Tampakan, told reporters also on Saturday that they are supporting the SMI's legal efforts against their LGU's attempt to levy the firm P401 million for a business permit needed for its operation this year in the municipality.

Samling and Collado separately said also on Saturday the SMI shall operate in Tampakan based on a mining permit issued by the national

government, not any LGU.

The Tampakan LGU had ordered the SMI to pay P401 million for its business permit for 2023 that the firm contested via the CTA, the specific court for litigation of tax issues.

The CTA's February 10 decision said the Tampakan municipal government should not impose such a huge amount for SMI's business permit while resolution of the tax controversy is still underway.



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the No. 1 source of plastic waste in the Philippines. Coca-Cola is a partner of Ocean Cleanup whose "supporters ... made the realization of [the 2021] study possible" (Meijer et al.). The Ocean Cleanup, in its own words, "develop[s] and scale[s] technologies to rid the world's oceans of plastic" (www.theoceancleanup.com).

This focus on technologies reminded me of the 2015 report "Stemming the Tide." The report, published by the Ocean Conservancy and the McKinsey Center for Business and Environment, identified China, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines as heavy emitters of plastics into the ocean, accounting for up to 65 percent of all of what the report called "plastic waste leakage." The report went on to recommend technological solutions, primary among them waste-to-energy incineration.

The Ocean Conservancy, after some soul searching, in July 2022 officially retracted the report and apologized for its failure to appreciate the problem of global plastic waste pollution in a wider perspective.

The plastic and other toxic — yes, plastic is toxic — waste that ends up in the ocean is a real problem. It kills. It must be removed. Removing trash from the ocean is a good deed. But it isn't enough. Neither is so-called proper disposal. The source of the problem is the plastic itself. Our love affair with this versatile and in-so-many-ways useful material is also suicidal. From production to disposal, plastic pollutes. Visual Capitalist's article depicting the Philippines as the world's No. 1 source of ocean plastic may not have told the whole story, but it has reminded us that we are still consuming far too much plastic and it's both unhealthy and unsustainable.



DBM hopeful Congress will approve rightsizing plan within the year

THE BUDGET department is confident that Congress will approve the government's rightsizing program within the year.

"Hopefully this year (it will be passed). I think next week it will be passed in the House of Representatives, then we'll try to push it in the Senate," Department of Budget and Management (DBM) Secretary Amenuah F. Pangandaman told reporters on Thursday.

The National Government Rightsizing Act, which is one of the Marcos administration's priority measures, is currently pending at the committee level in the House of Representatives.

It seeks to "minimize, if not eliminate, redundancies, overlaps, and duplications in its operations and simplify its rules and regulations, and systems and processes, while protecting the welfare of civil servants and other government workers."

Analysts said that the government should ensure that its rightsizing program focuses on ramping up productivity and efficiency and not just scrapping workers.

"The conventional wisdom that the government bureaucracy is somehow too big and should be rightsized or reduced is actually inaccurate. If anything, our public

sector is actually among the smallest in the world and correspondingly doesn't provide as much of the government services that it could and should," Sonny A. Africa, executive director of think tank Ibon Foundation said in a Viber message.

The DBM earlier said that slashing the government workforce by 5% would result in P14.8 billion in savings.

"It's always useful to eliminate redundancy, overlaps and duplication and to promote efficiency and economy — but doing this does not necessarily make the government more effective. Trimming fat is necessary but, with the considerable development challenges facing the country, it's actually more important to build muscle," Mr. Africa said.

Based on latest data from the DBM, the total number of permanent positions for fiscal year 2023 is at around 1.94 million, not including ex-officio positions. Of this, about 1.77 million positions are filled and the remaining 170,668 are unfilled.

Leonardo A. Lanzona, who teaches economics at the Ateneo de Manila University, said the government should not rightsize "just for the sake of saving costs or reducing the redundancies."

Rightsizing, S1/2

"Ultimately, the redundancies and overlaps while keeping the welfare of government workers depend on what the government is intent on doing. For instance, are we keeping the highly centralized type of management or are we going to devolve more functions to the local government? The answer to this basic question will then determine whether we have properly rightsized the government or not," he said in an e-mail.

Meanwhile, De La Salle University law and business professor Antonio A. Ligon said that the government should perform a "comprehensive and thorough study" of what jobs will be eliminated.

"Evaluation and review of whatever consolidation or merging shall be done periodically if it will redound to faster service to our people. If not implemented

properly, then it might just create confusion in government personnel and hence negatively affect the desired services to our people," he said in a Viber message.

Mr. Africa said there may even be a need to add government jobs to boost public services and social protection.

"The rightsizing thrust is misguided in assuming that trimming the government workforce and reducing personnel services expenses will make the government more effective. On the contrary, the demands on the state to manage social and economic development are not just growing but also growing more complex," he said.

However, he noted the government should also ensure its workforce will be better, more efficient, competent, transparent and less corrupt. — **Luisa Maria C. Jacson**



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KAPATID ANGAT LAHAT AGRI PROGRAM

"The **Kapatid Angat Lahat Agri Program** sits at the intersection of job creation, MSMEs, public-private partnership and agriculture. It is the platform where we hope to employ as many Filipinos as possible, and in the sector where our efforts can have the most impact. When President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. gave me the task of creating jobs as part of the Private Sector Advisory Council, I applied what we at Go Negosyo have, for 17 years now, promoted: that **entrepreneurs must have access to money, markets and mentorship**. With KALAP and with the big companies helping our small farmers become agripreneurs, we can achieve sustainable, inclusive growth, and create jobs and prosperity for all." — **JOEY CONCEPCION**, Private Sector Advisory Council Jobs Lead and Go Negosyo Founder

"BIG BROTHERS", GOVERNMENT AGENCIES & LGUs

CONVERGE



FARMERS, FISHERFOLKS & AGRI COOPERATIVES



FARM PRODUCE



CUSTOMERS (MARKET)

MONEY



Christian Mollis, Agripreneur; Written by: [Name]; Mike Tan; Remy Eric Ben Lioy; James Engaro; Rob Malinao; Simon Baker; Rando Capangpan; Teresita Chen

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