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Oil spill spreads to tourist spots

DOH urges residents in affected areas to evacuate

By JEL SANTOS and ANALOU DE VERA

Tourist destinations in Oriental Mindoro and nearby provinces are now affected by the oil spill caused by the sinking of motor tanker (MT) Princess Empress, the Department of Tourism (DOT) disclosed on Monday, March 6.

Based on the information gathered by the agency, the oil spill has affected several marine protected areas in the Mu- ▶ 8



SERIOUS THREAT — Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) personnel contend with thick oil slick that has washed up on the shore of Caluya island in Antique in this PCG photo taken on March 4, 2023. Thousands of fishermen in the area have been ordered to stay ashore as authorities continued to struggle with containing an oil spill from a sunken tanker that is threatening the region's rich marine life and economy. (Philippine Coast Guard handout photo / AFP)



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municipality of Pola in Oriental Mindoro. These are:

- Kingfisher Reserve
- St. John the Baptist Marine Sanctuary
- Song of the Sea Fish Sanctuary
- Stella Maris Fish Sanctuary
- Bacawan Fish Sanctuary
- St. Peter the Rock Fish Sanctuary
- San Isidro Labrador Fish Sanctuary

Also affected are the following beach resorts in Oriental Mindoro:

- Bihya Beach
- Cottage
- Long Beach XI
- Aguada Beach Resort
- Orooco Beach Resort
- Munting Buhangin Tagumpay Beach Resort
- Bubay na Tubig White Beach Resort

To address this problem, coastal clean-up is now being done in the affected areas as an immediate solution to prevent further damage.

"The DOT notes with seriousness the oil spill incident and its grave impact on the tourism industry, including disruptions in the livelihood of the affected communities, tourism-dependent businesses, and recreational activities," Tourism Secretary Christina G. Frasco said. "Scuba diving, beach, and cruise tourism depend on the region's coastal resources, and are also its major tourism products. If unmitigated, the oil spill can have adverse impacts on three of the world-class dive destinations in the Philippines, specifically the Verde Island Passage and Apo Reef in Mindoro, and Corom's World War II Wrecks and Philippine Dugong."

The DOT noted that none of the tourist attractions in the municipali-

ties of Naujan, Victoria, and Pinamalayan in Oriental Mindoro have been affected by the oil spill, as of press time. The Naujan Lake, a major tourist attraction, has no connection with the ocean and will not be affected by the oil spill.

But the effects of the oil spill have reached the Municipality of Caluya in Antique, particularly the shorelines of Sitio Sabang, Barangay Tinogbo, Liwagan Island, Barangay Sibolo, and Sitio Tambak in Barangay Semirara, which affected the fishing communities. At present, none of the tourist attractions in these areas have been affected. But the local government units (LGUs), together with the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), have been conducting clean-ups, with support from the private sector who provided personal protective equipment.

The island town of Caluya was placed under a state of calamity by the Sangguniang Bayan which approved Resolution No. 3023-21 in a special session on Monday, March 6.

Around 25,733 residents (7,198 families) from the coastal of Barangays Alegria, Semirara, Sibolo, and Tinogbo have already been affected by the oil spill.

Caluya Mayor Rigel Kent Lim ordered the suspension of all fishing activities in areas affected by the oil spill since the weekend.

Boracay braces for oil spill

The Boracay Island in Malay, Aklan is preparing, as well, for the possibility that the oil spill will spread to the world-famous tourist spot. The PCG and the Malay Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office are continuously conducting moving and monitoring along the coasts of Boracay, and have prepositioned oil slick

booms in strategic areas around the island in anticipation of the oil spills.

"The DOT is also in close coordination with officers of the Tubbatuba Management Office who are monitoring the situation in Tubbatuba Reef, which is along the Municipality of Cagayancillo in Palawan. Based on the latest update, there are no reported effects yet of the oil spill in the area."

The DOT-Western Visayas Office is also actively coordinating with the LGUs of Malay in terms of extending possible assistance to tourists in Boracay in case the spillage reaches the island's coastal area. It has likewise issued advisories on the areas affected by the oil spill.

Frasco added that cruise tourism in the region may also be affected as 34 cruise ships are expected to make a call in Mindoro, Romblon, Marinduque, and Palawan this year.

"The DOT, in coordination with its regional offices, commits to continuously coordinate with agencies such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Environmental Management Bureau (EMB), PCG, and concerned LGUs on any update concerning the oil spill, and in searching for urgent mitigating measures to address the harmful effects of the incident to marine life, world-class dive sites, and tourist attractions," Frasco said.

It was recalled that immediately after the PCG reported the oil spill on Feb. 28, Frasco ordered the DOT Regional Offices in Mindanao and Western Visayas to closely monitor the situation and coordinate with the DENR, EMB, PCG, and concerned LGUs.

DOH urges evacuation

While the oil spill has not yet been contained, Department of Health

(DOH) officer-in-charge Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergelte urged residents of Naujan town and other affected areas to evacuate for their safety.

"The Department of Health is reminding residents to seek temporary shelter if the oil spill is near their communities," Vergelte said in a statement.

She said that if affected residents cannot evacuate, they should observe necessary precautions.

"People and animals should avoid using oil-contaminated water. Do not eat fish, seashells, and other seafood caught in areas near the oil spill," she said.

In a separate advisory, the DOH reminded responders, volunteers, and cleanup workers to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as protective suits, safety glasses, and gloves during their operations. They should also clean the PPEs after use.

On Sunday, Vergelte and other DOH officials visited the oil spill-affected areas in Oriental Mindoro to provide medicines, face masks, nebulizers, oxygen concentrators, and other supplies.

Vergelte assured that the DOH is closely coordinating with other concerned agencies to mitigate the effects of the oil spill.

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

Focus on containment

Meanwhile, Senator Francis Tolentino has raised alarm over the oil spill which threatens the ecosystem.

"While we are seeking accountability, our efforts in the meantime should be focused on the containment

of the oil spill to prevent it from causing further irreversible damage to our marine ecosystem. Next should be the recovery," Tolentino said in Monday night's Senate plenary session. "It has already affected more than 10,000 families."

"The current oil spill trajectory model by marine experts projected that approximately 20,000 hectares of coral reef, 9,900 hectares of mangroves, 6,000 hectares of seagrass may be affected and the oil spill may also potentially reach as far as the shores of Palawan," Tolentino said in a privilege speech.

He stressed that the Maritime Industry Authority is mandated to undertake the safety regulatory functions pertaining to vessel operations, while the PCG is mandated to enforce all maritime laws.

"Today, 18,000 fishermen lost their livelihood. If we fail to contain the oil spill, it will affect thousands more. But just as we have done again and again, we will rise as a nation and face this tragedy as one," he added.

Subsidy for affected fishermen

Meanwhile, the Pambansang Lakas ng Pilosopang Mamamalakayan ng Pilipinas (Pamalakayan) called on the government to provide economic subsidy and livelihood support to fishers and their families who have been affected by the oil spill.

"The livelihood of fishers in areas devastated by the oil spill, including Semirara Island, has been affected for a week now. They need immediate financial assistance for their daily subsistence," Pamalakayan chairperson Fernando Hicap said in BPSpin. "We are calling on government agencies to exert a concerted effort to clean up the spilled oil and provide assistance to affected fishermen and their families." (With reports from Tara Yap and Mario Casayuran)



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Regional Updates

Congress to probe Mindoro oil spill

LAWMAKERS in both chambers of Congress have called for separate inquiries to assess the impact of an 800,000-liter oil spill incident in Mindoro that threatens livelihood, marine biodiversity and tourism.

Senator Francis N. Tolentino, in a statement on Tuesday, noted that the oil coming from the sunken tanker *MT Princess Empress* has reached major fishing areas and continues to spread to coastal communities.

"Today, 18,000 fishermen lost their livelihood. If we fail to contain the oil spill, it will affect thousands more," he said.

The vessel sank near the Verde Island Passage, considered a global center of marine shore fish biodiversity, and marine experts estimate that up to 20,000 hectares of coral reefs, 9,900 hectares of mangroves, and 6,000 hectares of seagrass may be affected.

The oil spill could also reach tourism areas in Western Visayas, which covers popular island destination Boracay, and Palawan.

Tourism Secretary Maria Esperanza Christina G. Frasco on Monday warned of the potential impact on the industry.

"The DoT (Department of Tourism) notes with seriousness the oil spill incident and its grave impact on the tourism industry, including disruptions in

the livelihood of the affected communities, tourism-dependent businesses, and recreational activities," she said.

As of Tuesday 77 coastal villages across nine towns in Oriental Mindoro have been placed under a state of calamity, based on a provincial resolution.

At the House of Representatives, Cavite Rep. Elpidio F. Barzaga Jr., chair of the natural resources committee, filed House Resolution No. 829 to investigate the incident.

"We'll find out during the investigation if the evidence will warrant the filing of appropriate charges," Mr. Barzaga said in a viber chat.

The tanker was ferrying industrial fuel from Lamay, Batangas in the north to Iloilo in western-central Philippines.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources announced on Monday that efforts are underway to confirm the location of the sunken vessel off the coast of Pola town in Oriental Mindoro.

Once located, experts will be able to map out the spill's potential movement and draw up a mitigation plan.

Meanwhile, multi-agency response measures are continuing to clean up the oil spill, reduce its impact, and assist affected communities. — **Alyssa Nicole O. Tan and Beatriz Marie D. Cruz**



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Mindoro fishers bear brunt of oil spill

Group seeks aid for fishing communities; DOH urges villagers in affected areas to wear industrial face masks, stay away from dirty water

By the Inquirer Staff
@Team_Inquirer

CITY OF CALAPAN—Neresa Macalalad, a community organizer in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, laments that from earnings of up to P2,000 for every fishing trip, families in her village of San Antonio now get "zero" after the oil spill from a sunken tanker started to spread in their shores.

"Kinakaya pa, pero hanggang kailan (We're struggling to cope, but until when?)" said Macalalad, 55, a member of Samahan ng Maliliit na Mangingisda ng San Antonio.

She said that about 50 fishing boats under their group could not sail out to sea because of a ban and the town's declaration of state of calamity.

"It has been one week since the oil spill. The affected area used to be our rich fishing grounds. Our small savings are running out. Most children here are schooling and we have to spend for transportation, 'baon' (pocket money) every day and other needs of our



CLEANUP Volunteers from DMCI Power Corp. pick out, scrape and shovel industrial oil stuck to rocks in the shores of Barangay Misong in Pola, Oriental Mindoro, on March 3. —DMCI POWER CORP. VOLUNTEERS PHOTO

students," she said. "What stresses us most is the uncertainty of what lies ahead."

MT Princess Empress, which carried 800,000 liters of industrial oil, capsized in the waters off Naujan town in Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28 and sank the following day after experiencing engine trouble.

Affected areas

Authorities issued advisories to stay off waters affected by the oil spill for safety, which includes a fishing ban.

Of the 14 towns in the province, only three (Baco, San Teodoro and

Puerto Galera towns) and Calapan City are not covered by the state of calamity resolution passed by provincial board on Monday.

The vessel's sinking resulted in the spillage of emulsified black and thick industrial oil, which posed health hazards to residents and disrupted the livelihood of more than 15,000 fishermen, resorts and other establishments, the resolution stated.

The oil spill also caused "serious damage" to marine protected areas in the province, it added.

In Antique province, the municipality of Caluya has been

declared under a state of the calamity after about 8 kilometers of its shoreline covering the villages Semuirara, Tinoghoc and Sibolo were affected by the spill.

Coastal cleanup is ongoing but has been hampered by strong winds and waves due to the northeast monsoon.

The fisherfolk group Famaalākaya urged the government to immediately provide economic subsidy and livelihood support to fishing families affected by the spill on Mindoro and Panay islands.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, in a statement, said that it set aside an initial P4 million for livelihood assistance to affected fisherfolk.

The Department of Health asked residents of coastal areas in Oriental Mindoro affected by the spill to take health measures, such as wearing of industrial masks and to avoid drinking water from contaminated sources, to prevent the risk of developing illnesses.

—REPORTS FROM MADONNA T. VIOLA, DELFIN T. MALLARI JR., JORDEENE B. LAGARE, KATHLEEN DE VILLA AND CONNIE FERNANDEZ-BROJAN ENO



Swift action to limit catastrophic Mindoro oil spill damage pressed

BY BUTCH FERNANDEZ [@butchBM](#)
JOVEE MARIE N.
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CONCERNED government agencies were pressed anew by Sen. Francis Tolentino to step up efforts to effectively contain the potentially catastrophic Mindoro oil spill that may have placed diverse marine ecosystem and people's lives in jeopardy.

Taking the floor at the Senate session early this week, Tolentino raised the alarm over the recent maritime incident threatening the local ecosystem caused by the MT Princess Empress that sank off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro last February 28 amid inclement weather and an overheated engine while carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil.

Expected to spread to over 24 square kilometers, the senator did not rule out that the spill might likely even reach the world-renowned Boracay Island, noting reports that it has already affected more than 10,000 families.

He cited the current oil spill trajectory model by marine experts, who projected that approximately 20,000 hectares of coral reefs, 9,900 hectares of mangroves, 6,000 hectares of seagrass, "may be affected and the oil spill may also potentially reach as far as the shores of Palawan."

In his privilege speech, Tolentino also reminded that the Maritime Industry Authority is mandated to undertake the safety regulatory functions pertaining to vessel operations, while the Philippine Coast Guard is mandated to enforce all maritime laws.

House probe

THE chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources has filed a resolution urging his fellow lawmakers to look into the sinking of MT Princess Empress.

Cavite Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr. filed House Resolution 829 on Monday so the committee can investigate, in aid of legislation, the oil spill, which has so far affected 10 municipalities in Oriental Mindoro.

On February 28, as it sailed into rough seas off Naujan, Mindoro, the Princess Empress sank with its fuel cargo.

"...The oil spill might affect 20,000 hectares of coral reef, 9,900 hectares of mangroves, and 6,000 hectares of seagrass and could possibly coat the marine habitats and animals...which can clog the gills of fish and marine invertebrates... damage the feathers of bird and fur of marine mammals," the resolution read.

Subsidy grant

THE Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya), meanwhile, has added its voice for immediate government

action in connection with the oil spill. In a statement, Pamalakaya called for the grant of subsidy and livelihood support to affected fishing families caused by the sinking.

Based on the partial data reported by Pamalakaya-Panay, the oil spill, which already reached the province of Antique, has affected around 1,200 fisherfolk and coastal residents in at least three coastal villages in the Semirara Island in the town of Caluya.

"For a week now, the livelihood of fishermen in the area was affected by the oil spill. This includes the island of Semirara. The people there need immediate support for their day-to-day needs. We call on concerned government agencies for immediate action, to clean the oil spill and provide support to the affected fisherman and their families," Fernando Hicap, Pamalakaya national chairperson said.

'Stop further damage'

THE House resolution said the oil spill, which has already caused severe damage in Oriental Mindoro, could also reach other coastal islands including Palawan, Antique and Romblon.

The vessel MT Princess Empress is an oil products tanker, which is only a year old, it was revealed.

Oceana, an international environment group, earlier called on the government "to immediately implement mechanisms and actions to stop further damage on the marine



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Mindoro Oil Spill damage pressed

environment, fisheries resources and livelihood in the affected Verde Island Passage which is the center of marine biodiversity in the world."

It also asked the government to "start the investigation and testing on the extent of contamination... immediate assistance of the local fisherfolk dependent on the affected body of water."

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has already announced last Monday that it has found the possible site of the capsized vessel, which is about 1,200 feet below the sea a few days after the DENR deployed the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA) BRP Hydrographer Ventura within the area of the oil spill site.

The DENR said the ill-fated vessel is located about northeast of Pola, Oriental Mindoro but it is "believed to have moved southeast from its last known position where it completely submerged."

The environment department however said it still needs to verify the location by deploying a remotely-operated vehicle (ROV) "which will allow us complete visualization should the currents and weather permit."

"We are now preparing to access an ROV in order to fully determine where the vessel actually is and to completely model the way the oil will be spilling from the vessel," the DENR said in a statement.

Supplemental budget

EARLIER, House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Al-bay Rep. Joey Sarte Salceda expressed confidence that his colleagues will support a proposal for a supplemental budget for immediate action and recovery efforts as fears of widespread spillage from the sunken vessel may further spread.

"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 chamber," 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," the lawmaker added.

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

Salceda said he is also "deeply concerned for the biodiversity and fisheries impacts of the oil spill."

"This is a crisis waiting to unfold if we don't get to contain it this 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," Salceda said.

"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 fisherfolk, more funds for cleanup, restoration of marine biodiversity, and rehabilitation of affected tourism sites.

"We'll see what PBBM asks for, if he does. But for now, better treat it as a potential national emergency. If it proves to be not as bad as we fear, that's good news."



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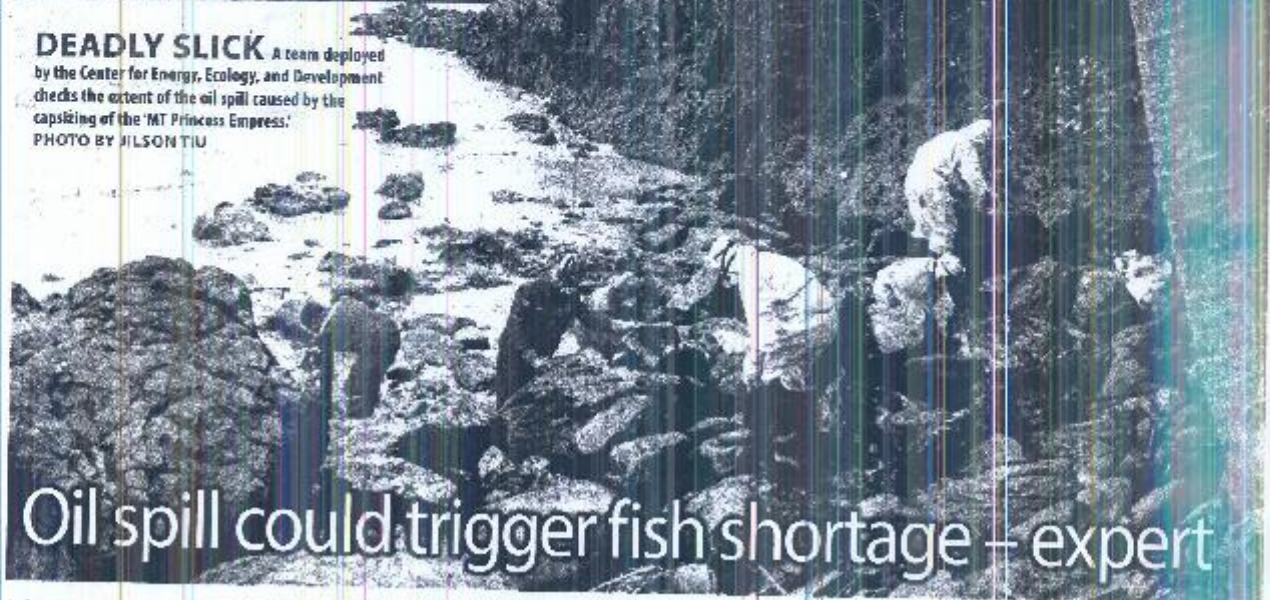
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DEADLY SLICK A team deployed by the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development checks the extent of the oil spill caused by the capsizing of the 'MT Princess Empress'.

PHOTO BY JILSON TIU



Oil spill could trigger fish shortage - expert

AN expert on Tuesday warned of possible fish shortage as an oil spill from a sunken vessel off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, reached Palawan, threatening other coastal areas in the country.

In a radio interview, Dr. Irene Rodriguez, associate professor at the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI), said the oil spill is worse than the incident in 2006 in Guimaras.

"Before the accident, the worst oil spill was in 2006 in Guimaras. The vessel that caused the spill was carrying 500,000 liters of oil. This time around, *MT Princess Empress* is carrying 800,000 liters of

industrial oil. In terms of volume of oil, if it spreads to the bodies of water, it is worse compared to the 2006 [oil spill]," Rodriguez added.

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Expert

She said the food chain can also be affected as the oil slick has reached the surface of the water.

"Immediately, this has impact on photosynthetic organisms in the water column. We know that photosynthetic organisms are the base of the food chain, immediately it will affect the source of our fish and other organisms we use for food," Rodriguez added.

According to her, all the organisms will die because of the oil spill.

"If the oil slick reaches the coast, the beaches, the mangroves, the effect will be worse. It will cause the death of organisms or loss of movements in some marine organisms and it will change the ecology. If there is death in the important parts of ecosystems, it will have cascading effects down the line to other organisms in other ecosystems," Rodriguez said.

It is thus very important that all stakeholders be involved in the cleanup to address the oil spill.

hectares of mangroves, coral reefs and seagrasses will potentially be affected, with reports showing that oil from the vessel has already reached the province of Antique.

"We are gravely concerned for impacted communities," Gatiguez said.

He added that at least 18,000 fishermen in the province alone have been robbed of their livelihood.

Gatiguez said residents were also robbed of their seafood supply, a heavy blow for a province where over 50 percent of households already suffer various levels of food insecurity.

The tourism sector, which raked in P3.5 billion for the province of Oriental Mindoro alone in 2019, is also faced with severe disruption, Gatiguez said.

Local tourism workers and provincial revenue are bound to suffer billions in losses with the oil spill occurring just as summer, when tourist arrivals often peak, approaches, he added.

Gatiguez argued it is injustice suffered by communities from the "terrible incident" is further amplified by the health impacts they are likely to experience.

Rodriguez said the area damaged by the spill is bigger than Quezon City.

"Unfortunately, because of the prevailing wind condition brought by the *amihan* (monsoon), the oil slick continues to spread. From Pola (in Oriental Mindoro), it reached other islands, other areas covered by Palawan. It will continue to follow this trajectory if the prevailing winds will continue in the next days," she added.

Rodriguez said the owner of the *MT Princess Empress* has tapped the services of other firms to help in the recovery of the oil from the sunken vessel.

"The location of *MT Princess* was finally determined. The owner of the vessel has already coordinated with two commercial private companies to do the cleanup. This is a good move from the owner of the vessel. Hopefully, it (oil slick) will be treated near the point source, to prevent the oil slick to reach the coastal environment. For the coastal communities, please be aware that there is potential that you will be affected, so necessary preparation is needed," she added.

The UP-MSI has said 20,000 hectares of coral reefs, 9,000 hectares of mangroves and 6,000 hectares of seagrasses may be affected by the oil slick.

More than half of potentially affected reefs or 11,000 hectares are found in the Cuyo group of islands.

"Due to the toxicity of oil, spills in the past had been known to cause severe health problems such as respiratory problems, heart damage, stunted growth, immune system effects and even death among exposed communities," he said.

Oriental Mindoro Gov.umerlito Dolor has declared a state of calamity in the affected coastal villages of Naujan, Pola, Pitamalayan, Gloria, Bansud, Bongabong Roxas, Mansalag and Bulalacao.

In a social media post, Dolor said that the owner of the *MT Princess Empress* will be held accountable and liable, particularly in removing the oil spill in the province.

He said he had tapped the Department of Tourism, Philippine Coast Guard and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources to assess the oil spill.

The affected residents were provided with gallons of mineral drinking water, both water and financial aid.

Save Antique Movement (SAM) said local government units (LGUs) affected should hold RDC Reclaim Marines Services Inc. liable for the damage it had caused.


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'Ecological nightmare'

Caritas Philippines has called on the government to "immediately contain" the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro, along with assessing its severity of damage and prioritizing the welfare of impacted communities.

Fr. Edwin Cariguez, the lead convenor of Protect the Verde Island Passage (VIP), is demanding accountability from the owner of *MT Princess Empress* and RDC Reelid Marine Services Inc.

"Protect VIP vehemently decries the devastation that the oil spill from *MT Princess Empress* has [brought] and will continue to bring to waters within and beyond the Verde Island Passage, the biodiversity hotspot known to have the highest concentration of marine species in the world," Cariguez said in a statement on Monday evening.

The group estimated that over 35,000

SAM called on "pro bono" lawyers to help the affected fishermen in filing cases against the oil tanker for violation of the "Oil Pollution Law" known as Republic Act (RA) 9483, "Clean Water Act" or RA 9275 and "Fisheries Code" or RA 8550 as amended by RA 10654.

Verde Island Passage is a strait that separates the islands of Luzon and Mindoro, connecting South China Sea with the Tayabas Bay and the Sibuyan Sea beyond.

Marine ecosystem experts say oil spills can be very harmful to marine birds, sea turtles, mammals, fish and shellfish.

United States-based National Ocean Service Oil said oil spills destroy the insulating ability of fur-bearing mammals, such as sea otters, and the water-repelling abilities of a bird's feathers, exposing them to harsh elements.

SAM recalled that in December 2005, an oil barge of the National Power Corp. sank off the shore of Semirara in Antique, spilling almost 200,000 liters of oil and contaminating about 40 square kilometers of water off Semirara.

The PCC estimated that a subsequent cleanup cost P80 million.

**BELLA CARIASO AND
CHRISTIAN CROW MAGHANOY**



State of calamity declared in 77 Mindoro barangays

Oil spill affects nearly 50K individuals

BY VICTOR REYES

SEVENTY-SEVEN coastal barangays of nine Oriental Mindoro towns affected by the massive oil spill caused by the sinking of an oil tanker off Naujan town last February 28 have been placed under a state of calamity.

A resolution passed by the provincial council last Monday said the 77 coastal barangays are in the towns of Naujan, Pola, Pinamalayan, Gloria, Bansud, Bongabong, Roxas, Mansalay and Bulalacao.

Gov. Humerlito Dolor, who

chairs the provincial disaster risk reduction and management council, approved the resolution.

In a statement, the provincial information office "confirmed" the oil spill has reached the coastal barangays, affecting some 10,362 families or 48,885 individuals. It said biodiversity and ecology in 15 marine protected areas involving 763.53 hectares in four towns are also at risk.

The oil spill has so far reached the town of Caluya in Antique.

The Caluya town council also passed a resolution last Monday

placing the town under a state of calamity. The town is about 70 nautical miles from where the M/T Princess Empress sank.

Authorities, meanwhile, continued to exert efforts to prevent the oil spill from further spreading.

The MT Princess Empress, on its way to Iloilo from Bataan, sank after encountering engine trouble due to overheating, according to the Philippine Coast Guard.

The vessel was transporting about 800,000 liters of industrial oil and 10,000 more liters of operational oil when it figured in the

mishap.

Eight days after the tanker sank, some residents of coastal communities affected by the oil spill are now starting to suffer from dizziness and difficulty in breathing, according to the Department of Health.

In a press briefing, Health Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire said they have received reports of people experiencing difficulties in breathing as well as dizziness.

"We have recorded in Oriental

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Mindoro cases of difficulty of breathing, while one aggravated (his/her) asthma. This required the patient to be brought to the hospital," said Vergeire. "There are also residents along the shoreline that experienced headaches and dizziness. All of these are, however, short term symptoms."

Vergeire added they expect reports of vomiting, stomach ache, and diarrhea in the coming days.

"The symptoms the public can have will depend on their mode of exposure (to the oil spill)," she said and reiterated the agency's call for vulnerable residents to temporarily evacuate.

"Those living within 100 meters from the affected areas cannot wear simple masks but rather industrial masks. We also need to relocate the elderly and those with respiratory ailments to areas farther from the oil spill," she said, adding: "Those within 500 meters from the affected areas cannot drink their water. They have to be supplied with safe water by the local governments."

HOUSE PROBE

The chair of the House committee on natural resources filed a resolution urging the House of Representatives to look into the sinking of MT Princess Empress that caused a massive oil spill off Oriental Mindoro and nearby provinces.

Cavite Rep. Pidi Barzaga, in House Resolution No. 829, said the oil spill has affected 10 municipalities in Oriental Mindoro and could also reach other coastal areas, including Palawan, Antique and Romblon.

"Additionally, the oil spill might affect 20,000 hectares of coral reef, 9,900 hectares of mangroves, and 6,000 hectares of seagrass and could possibly coat the marine habitats and animals... which can clog the gills of fish and marine invertebrates... damage the feathers of bird and fur of marine mammals," the resolution said.

The resolution cited the statement of the international environment group Oceana which earlier called on the government "to immediately implement mechanisms and actions to stop further damage on the marine environment, fisheries resources and livelihood in the affected Verde Island Passage which is the center of the center of marine biodiversity in the world."

Last Monday, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) announced that it has found the possible site of the capsized vessel which is about 1,200 feet below sea level, a few days after the DENR deployed the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA) BRP Hydrographer Ventura within the area of the oil spill site.

The DENR said the ship is located northeast of Pola, Oriental Mindoro but it is "believed to have moved southeast from its last known position where it completely

submerged."

DSWD HELP

More than P3.1 million worth of family food packs have been provided by the Department of Social Welfare and Development to communities in Oriental Mindoro and Antique affected by the oil spill.

This is on top of the P1.5 million worth of food and non-food items that were provided by the DSWD, local government units and some private partners to affected residents of Oriental Mindoro, Antique and Palawan, and the Cash for Work (CFW) assistance that would start next week in three provinces.

The CFW will be implemented in Bansud, Bongabong, Bulalacao, Gloria, Naujan, Pinamalayan, Pola and Roxas in Oriental Mindoro; Caluya in Antique; and Agutaya in Palawan.

"So, these two areas (Antique and Palawan), we are now working hard on making sure na may makakain iyong mga nakatira doon, whether it's food packs or emergency cash transfers (So, these two areas (Antique and Palawan), we are now working hard on making sure that the people there have food to eat, whether it's food packs or emergency cash transfers)," DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian said.

The DSWD Disaster Response Operations Monitoring and Information Center (DROMIC) said a total of 15,861 families or 68,485 persons are affected in 96 barangays in Oriental Mindoro, Palawan



OIL

and Antique.

Gatchalian said the C/W program will last for about 15 days, with the beneficiaries set to receive wages based on the current regional daily minimum wage rate.

He said the department will continue to coordinate with concerned agencies and localities to ensure the needs of the residents affected by the oil spill will be sufficiently met.

ECONOMIC SUBSIDY

The fisherfolk group Pamansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) is seeking an immediate economic subsidy and livelihood support to fishing families affected by the oil spill.

"The effects of oil spill in fishing grounds are very grave. This will surely cause a drop in fish catch because of the destruction of coral reefs and mangroves that serve as home for fish. Both the local and national government should also prepare for a possible fish kill due to the contamination of water," Fernando Hicap, Pamalakaya national chairperson, said in a statement.

Hicap added they are coordinating with members in Panay for damage and impact assessment of the oil spill to marine resources and coastal communities that will be submitted to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and the DENR.

Pamalakaya also urged the government to order the owner of MT Princess Em-

press — RDC Reifield Marine Services Inc. to provide compensatory damages and shoulder the cleanup costs of the massive oil spill.

The BFAR said it has committed an initial allotment of P4 million to implement immediate and alternative livelihood assistance for fisherfolk while the provincial government enforces a fishing ban in affected areas.

In addition, BFAR, in partnership with the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority, will also put into operation Kadiwa Oplan Isda, an existing project which supports fisherfolk by providing market linkages.

COLLISION

A landing craft and a motor tanker collided at the port of Amilan, Negros Oriental yesterday due to bad weather, the Philippine Coast Guard.

No one was hurt and no oil spill was monitored from the incident.

In a statement, the PCG said the incident occurred while one of the vessels, LCT Bato Twin 1, was maneuvering at the port.

"It hit MT Petro Helen due to strong wind and rough sea conditions," the PCG said.

PCG said the port side railings of LCT Bato Twin 1 was damaged, adding the bow of MT Petro Helen was also damaged. — *With Gerard Naval, Wendell Vigilina, Jocelyn Montemayor, and Jed Macapagal*

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Ilang residente sa Mindoro,

Nagkakasakit na ang ilang residente ng Oriental Mindoro na nakatira malapit sa mga lugar na epektado ng oil spill buhat sa lumubog na oil tanker, ayon sa Department of Health (DOH) kahapon.

Ayon kay DOH officer-in-charge Maria Rosario Vergeire, nakakaranas

ng hirap sa paghinga, pagkahilo at sakit ng ulo ang ilan sa mga residente dahil sa mga tumagas na langis buhat sa oil tanker MT Princess Empress na lumubog sa Oriental Mindoro.

"Ita po ay lahat ay napansin natin na mga short term lamang na mga sin-

tomas. Pagkatapos sila i-manage doon sa kanilang healthcare facility, nawala na rin yung nararanasan," saad ni Vergeire.

Sa mga residenteng nagkasakit, isa ang kinailalang isugod sa ospital nang atakihin ng kaniyang hika. Nakauwi

na rin naman ang pasyente nang malapatan ng lunas.

Dito iginiiit ni Vergeire ang kahalagahan ng pansamantalang relokasyon ng mga naniirahan ng may 100 metro sa baybayin lalo na ang mga bata at matatanda.

Nina DANILO GARCIA at JOY CANTOS

Nanawagan din ang DOH sa mga lokal na opisyal na tiyakin na may sapat na suplay ng malinis na inuming tubig ang mga residente para hindi na kumalat ang sakit.

Samantala, magsasagawa ng imbestigasyon ang Mababang Kapulungan ng Kongreso sa naganap na oil spill sa

5.9 magnitude na lindol, yumanig sa Davao de Oro

nagkakasakit na sa oil spill

Oriental Mindoro noong Pebrero 28 na nakaapekto sa 10 munisipalidad ng lalawigan.

Ayon kay 4th District Cavite Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr., chairman ng House Committee on Natural Resources (DENR), dapat masiyasat at magigilan ang oil spill sa nasabing karagatan dahil isa itong malaking banta sa yamang

dagat at maging sa kabuhayan ng mga manging-isda.

Si Barzaga ay naghain ng House Resolution (HR) 829 na hinihikayat ang Kamara na siyasatin "in aid of legislation" ang paglubog ng motor tanker sa karagatan ng Nuajan, Oriental Mindoro kung saan tumapon ang 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel.



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Oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro 9 bayan apektado

ABOT na sa siyam na bayan sa Oriental Mindoro ang naapektuhan ng oil spill mula sa lumuhog na MV Princess Empress.

Ito ay dahil kumalat na rin ang langis sa 76 na baybayin na sakop ng mga bayan ng Naujan, Gloria, Pinamalayan, Bamsud, Bongabong, Roxas, Mansalay, Bulalacao at Pola na una nang ismailalin sa state of calamity.

Samantala, sinabi ni Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerlito Dolor na may inilagay ng compensation guidelines ang may-ari ng MV Princess Empress kung saan ay babayaran nito ang nagastos nila sa mga nagkasakit na residente ng lalawigan bunsod ng epekto ng oil spill.

Puspusan na rin ang paglilinis sa mga naapektuhang baybayin marapos matagpuan ang lumuhog na tanker may 7.5 nautical miles mula sa Balingawan point na nakaharap sa bayan ng Pola. **(Catherine Reyes)**



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APEKTADO NG OIL SPILL TIMUGUNAN NG DSWD

AGARANG rumesponde ang iba't ibang ahensya ng gobyerno sa mga apektadong pamilya sa pangunguna ng Department of Social Welfare and Development kaugnay sa nangyaring oil spill sa karagatan ng Naujan, Mindoro noong Pebrero 28 makaraang lumubog dito ang MT Princess Empress na karga-do ng industrial na langis.

Mismong si DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian ang namuno sa pamimigay ng ayuda sa ilalim ng Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation at Cash for Work sa mga pamilyang karamihan ay mangingisda na sadyang apektado ng pagkalat ng langis sa

karagatan ng Mindoro na umabot na rin sa ilang bay-baying lugar sa Palawan.

Siniguro rin ni Gatchalian na matapos ang nangyaring oil spill agarang namahagi ng food packs ang kagawaran sa mga residente ng Naujan, Pola, Pinamalayan, Bongabong, Bansud at iba pang bayan sa lalawigan sa pakikipagtulungan ng Gobernador nitong si Bonz Dolor.

Idinagdag pang kalihim na aabot sa 10,000 food packs ang ipamimigay ng DSDW sa mga residente kada apat na araw upang may nakahan-dang pagkain sila at kanilang pamilya habang hindi maka-pangisda sa karagatang pa-



tuloy na nailinis naman ang asayte sa baybaying dagat.

Patuloy naman na nagpa-padala ng karagdagang food packs ang DSWD Central sa Mindoro at Palawan lalo na sa mga isla upang hindi magu-tom ang mga tagaritong Isi-nailalim na sa State of Calamity ni Dolor.

Inaasahang malala ang perhuwisyong oil spill sa kabu-hayan ng mga residente rito ayon sa DENR kung saan 21 na mga protected area o ma-

rine sanctuary ang tatamaan nitong kanlungan at breeding ground ng yaman-dagat na pangunahing pantawid gutom naman ng nakararaming mangingisda rito.

Samantala nagkakahala-ga ng 78.9 milyong piso ang 42,400 na family food packs ang naka stand by sa DSWD-Mimaropa kung saan walang tigil ang pamimigay sa mga naspektuhang pamilya alinsu-not na rin sa kautusan ni PBEM.



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RESOLUSYON PARA IMBESTIGAHAN ANG OIL SPILL - IKINASA

INIHAİN sa Kamara ang resolusyon na naglalayong imbestigahan ng Kongreso ang oil spill na nika ng paglubog ng MT Princess Empress sa Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

graduated age ng compulsory retirements ng opisyal ng militar na nakatakda sa committee report ng Senate national defense panel.

Intensyon ng SB 1849 intends na amendahan ang Republic Act 11709 na nagtatakda ng three-year fixed terms sa kay AFP officials, kabilang ang chief of staff.

Inililisan ng batas na magkaroon ng "revolving door policy" sa AFP na nilagdaan noon ni dating Pangulong Duterte iang buwan bago ito umalis sa puwesto. Ayon kay Defense Secretary Carlito Galvez, Jr. nagresulta ng sigalot sa unintended consequences ng RA 11709 sa loob ng militar. **ERNIE REYES**

Ang House Resolution No. 829 ay inihain ni Cavite Rep. Egidio Barzaga Jr. para imbestigahan ang oil spill na nakaaapekto sa 10 munisipalidad ng Oriental Mindoro.

Binigyang-diin ni Barzaga, chairman ng House committee on natural resources na ang paglayas ng may 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel ay pwedeng makarating at makalikha rin ng damage sa ibang coastal islands gaya ng Palawan, Antique at Romblon.

"Additionally, the oil spill might affect 20,000 hectares of coral reefs, 9,900 hectares of mangroves, and 6,000 hectares of seagrass and could possibly coat the marine habitats and animal, which can clog the gills of fish and marine invertebrates... damage the feathers of bird and fur of marine mammals," banggit sa resolusyon.

Giit ng kongresista na dapat simulan na ng gobyerno



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OIL SPILL PROBE URGED

By Jester Manalastas and Camille P. Balagtas

A House leader has filed a resolution urging the House of Representatives to look into the sinking of motor tanker (MT) Princess Empress last February 28 in the waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, spilling 800,000 liters of industrialized fuel.

In filing House Resolution 829, Cavite Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr. underscored the need to look into this matter as the oil spill is affecting at least 10 municipalities in Oriental Mindoro.

Barzaga, chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources, said the oil spill might affect 20,000 hectares of coral reef, 9,900 hectares of mangroves, and 6,000 hectares of seagrass and could possibly coat the marine habitats and animals, which can clog the gills of fish and marine invertebrates, damage the feathers of bird and fur of marine mammals.

The resolution said the oil spill, which has already caused severe damage in Oriental Min-

doro, could also reach other coastal islands including Palawan, Antique and Romblon.

The vessel MT Princess Empress is an oil products tanker which is only a year old.

Oceana, an international environment group, earlier called on the government "to immediately implement mechanisms and actions to stop further damage on the marine environment, fisheries resources and livelihood in the affected Verde Island Passage which is the 'center of the center of marine biodiversity in the world.'"

Barzaga also asked the government to "start the investigation and testing on the extent of contamination, and immediate assistance of the local fisherfolk dependent on the affected body of water."

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has already announced last Monday that it has found the possible site of the capsized vessel which is about 1,200 feet

below sea level, a few days after the DENR deployed the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA) BRP hydrographer Ventura within the area of the oil spill site.

The DENR said the MT is located about northeast of Pola, Oriental Mindoro but it is "believed to have moved southeast from its last known position where it completely submerged."

However, the Environment department said it still needs to verify the location by deploying a remotely-operated vehicle (ROV) "which will allow us complete visualization should the currents and weather permit."

Meanwhile, Senator Francis Tolentino is likewise seeking an in-depth assessment into the vast damages brought by the oil spill which is now threatening lives of fisherfolk, marine biodiversity and tourism as it heads towards the world-re-

nowned Boracay Island.

In his privilege speech, the senator said the extent of the oil spill has already reached major fishing areas and continues to spread to pristine fishing breeding grounds -- threatening the Verde Island Passage, the world's "Center of the Center of Marine Shorefish Biodiversity," and along Western Visayas where Boracay Island is situated.

"Because the passageway from Mindoro to Romblon via the Verde Island Passage, it would mostly affect Oriental Mindoro and perhaps Boracay. Today, 18,000 fishermen lost their livelihood. If we fail to contain the oil spill, it will affect thousands more," the senator said.

Authorities continue to race against time in containing the 800,000-liter that spilled out from the sunken oil tanker. As of Monday afternoon, 76 coastal barangays across nine towns in Oriental Mindoro have been placed under the state of calamity.



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(Philippine Coast Guard)

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MINDORO OIL SPILL AAPAW SA BORACAY

MINDORO OIL SPILL AAPAW SA BORACAY

Naghahala si Senador Francis Tolentino sa malawak na pinsalang dulot ng oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro na nagbabanta ngayon sa kabuhayan ng mga mangingisda at sa turismo lalo pa't patungo na umano ito sa mga pamosong beach resort sa Boracay Island.

Sa kanyang privilege speech, inalampag ni Tolentino ang mga ahensya ng gobyerno para mag-sagawa ng pagsusuri sa pinsala ng oil spill matapos na lumubog ang MT Princess Empress na kargado ng 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel.

Ayon kay Tolentino, umabot na sa mga pangunahing fishing area at patuloy na kumakalat ang oil spill at naghabanta sa Verde Island Passage na kinukunsiderang "Center of the Center of Marine Shorefish Biodiversity".

"Because the passageway from

Mindoro to Romblon via the Verde Island Passage, it would mostly affect Oriental Mindoro and perhaps Boracay," sabi ni Tolentino.

Sa ngayong aniya, nasa 18,000 mangingisda na ang nawalan ng hanapbuhay ngunit maaaring madagdagan pa ito ng lilo-lilo kapag hindi napigilan ang pagkalat ng oil spill sa karagatan.

Samantala, inamin ni Pola, Oriental Mindoro Mayor Jennifer 'Ina Alegre' Cruz na apektado ng oil spill ang turismo sa kanilang lugar.

"Nagka-cancel na 'yung ibang nagbo-book sa mga resort owners natin," sabi ni Cruz.

Nagpapatid na rin umano sila ng curfew sa kabataan na 21-anyos pababa dahil alam nilang palaging nagpupunta ang mga ito sa tabing-dagat at baka makalunatang may oil spill at mag-swimming pa.

Sa Kamara ay naghain ng resolusyon si House committee on natural resources chairperson at Cavite Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr. upang imbestigahan ang paglubog ng MT Princess Empress sa Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

Inaunsiyo naman ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) nitong Marites na bagsak sa water standard quality ang tubig-dagat sa Oriental Mindoro kung kaya't ipinagbabawal na ang pag-swimming ng mga residente rito.

Ayon kay DENR regional director Lormelyn Claudio, mapanganib sa kalusugan kapag na-expose sa kontaminadong tubig-dagat dahil posibleng magkaroon ng bilka at sakit sa balat ang isang indibidwal. **(Dindo Matining/Catherine Reyes)**



DA-BFAR gives aid to affected fishers in Or. Mindoro oil spill

By **CORY MARTINEZ**

THE Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) has provided livelihood assistance to the affected fisherfolk in the oil spill incident due to the sinking of MT Princess Empress that occurred last week in the coastal waters of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

During his visit to the province Monday, DA-BFAR National Director Demosthenes Escoto committed the initial allotment of P4,000,000, which will be used to implement immediate and alternative livelihood assistance for fisherfolk engaged in capture fishing while the provincial government enforces a fishing ban in the affected areas.

With the initial amount, the DA-BFAR

will provide livelihood assistance through the provision of post-harvest training and equipment, particularly ten units of smokehouses for fish processing. The raw materials for fish processing will be sourced from Occidental Mindoro and other nearby areas not affected by the oil spill.

In addition, the DA-BFAR, in partnership with the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority (PFDA), will operationalize KADIWA OPLAN ISDA, an existing project which supports fisherfolk by providing market linkages.

Fisheries cooperatives from Occidental Mindoro and Oriental Mindoro will be linked for fish trade, while the DA-BFAR provides logistical support such as the utilization of reefer vans.

"The DA-BFAR is determined to help our affected fisherfolk cope with the loss of income due to the fishing ban resulting

from the oil spill. We are implementing these immediate livelihood interventions, which will be coursed through the provincial agriculture office of Oriental Mindoro for a centralized and strategic distribution to our fisherfolk beneficiaries," Escoto said.

Aside from livelihood interventions, the DA-BFAR will also extend technical assistance to the provincial local government unit by conducting laboratory testing of water and fish samples gathered from the affected areas.

The result of the tests will be used in determining and recommending areas that are "safe" for fishing activities.

At present, about 11,000 fisherfolk families in the municipalities of Naujan and Pota, including its neighboring areas, are affected by the oil spill, according to local government reports.



Or. Mindoro oil spill threatens fishers, biodiversity, tourism

By CAMILLE P. BALAGTAS

SENATOR Francis Tolentino is seeking an in-depth assessment that would look into the vast damages brought by an oil spill incident in Mindoro last month and now threatening the lives of fisherfolk, marine biodiversity, and tourism as it heads towards the famous beaches of the world-renowned Boracay Island.

During the period of interpellation following Tolentino's Monday's privilege speech in connection with the February 28 incident in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, the senator disclosed that the extent of the oil spill coming from motor tanker (MT) Princess Empress has already reached major fishing areas, and continues to spread to pristine fishing breeding grounds - threatening the Verde Island Passage, which is considered the world's "Center of the Center of Marine Shorefish Biodiversity" and along

Western Visayas where Boracay Island is situated.

"Because the passage-way from Mindoro to Romblon via the Verde Island Passage, it would mostly affect Oriental Mindoro and perhaps Boracay," said Tolentino.

"Today, 18,000 fishermen lost their livelihood. If we fail to contain the oil spill, it will affect thousands more," the senator added.

Tolentino expressed concern that the Mindoro oil spill incident would be a *déjà vu* or worse than the 2006 tragedy when MT Solar-1 sank off the coast of Guimaras, which carried 2.1 million liters of bunker fuel.

"Ngayon, Mr. President, nangyari na naman po ito. The current oil spill trajectory model by marine experts projected that approximately 20,000 hectares of coral reef, 9,500 hectares of mangroves, (and) 6,000 hectares of seagrass may be affected, and the oil spill may also potentially reach as far as the shores of Palawan. This is more far-reaching than the damage caused by MT Solar 1," the senator

stressed in his privilege speech.

The 2006 Guimaras incident affected 1,500 hectares of the local ecosystem comprised of mangroves, seagrass, and coral reefs, as well as affecting the livelihood of 20,000 fishermen, and required a long period of rehabilitation.

"The projection, Mr. President, right now coming from the local PDRMO of Oriental Mindoro is that more than 10,000 families are already affected by the oil spill alone, but this is an evolving story... as days, as hours pass by, we will have additional reports perhaps of a greater damage, and I think the estimate right now is that it would pass the Guimaras oil spill," he added.

Senate President Pro-Tempore Loren Legarda, Minority Floor Leader Sen. Joe Villanueva, Committee on Environment and Natural Resources chair Sen. Cynthia Villar, and Sen. Pia Cayetano threw their full support over Tolentino's call for an in-depth assessment of the Mindoro oil spill.



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DSWD to provide 'cash for work' for residents affected by oil spill

By RYAN PONCE
PACPACO

THE Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), in coordination with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), is set to provide "Cash for Work" (CFW) assistance to residents in three provinces affected by the oil spill brought by the capsized motor tanker (MT) Princess Empress that submerged in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro last week.

The areas to be given temporary means of livelihood are Bansud, Bong-

abong, Bulalacao, Gloria, Naujan, Pinarialayan, Pola, and Roxas in Oriental Mindoro; Caluya, Antique; and Agutaya in Palawan.

According to DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian, aside from Oriental Mindoro, he received reports that the oil spill has now spread towards Antique and Palawan and that the residents in the area will need government aid.

"So, these two areas (Antique and Palawan), we are now working hard on making sure na trays makakain

iyong mga nakatira doon, whether its food packs or emergency cash transfers," he said during an interview.

Aside from the CFW, the DSWD also plans to implement another program in the form of an Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) program for affected residents in Caluya, Antique, and Agutaya, Palawan.

"Naging agreement namin ng DENR at noong local government nila, ng provincial government, at instruction dinggating Pangulo is to make sure na yung mga locals natin mga

fishertalk na affected ay maging bahagi ng solusyon," the DSWD secretary said.

Catchalian also stated that the CFW program will be launched this week and will last for about 15 days, depending on the consultation with the DENR on their identified areas of work for this program.

Meanwhile, as of March 7, 2023, the DSWD has already provided more than P3.1 million worth of food assistance to affected localities in Oriental Mindoro and Antique.



BuCor defers plan to build HQ in Masungi

By PAOLO ROMERO

The Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) has deferred its plan to transfer the New Bilibid Prisons (NBP) and its headquarters to the Masungi Georeserve in Tanay, Rizal due to environmental concerns.

Questions remain as to why the 270-hectare portion of the conservation area was titled to the bureau.

BuCor Director General Gregorio Catapang Jr. yesterday told the Senate committee on tourism chaired by Sen. Nancy Binay that the plan to build a new NBP and BuCor headquarters "will no longer push through."

"The 270-hectare property awarded to the BuCor pursuant to Presidential Proclamation 1158 as the site of the New Bilibid Prison including the plan to relocate its national headquarters to this site will

be held in abeyance pending further studies," Catapang told the committee.

He said the study would consider the impact on the environment of the construction of the BuCor facilities in Masungi.

The inquiry was prompted by a resolution filed by Sen. Risa Hontiveros, who said there was a need to probe reports that a group of armed men settled along the highway within the vicinity of the Masungi conservation site in September.

Hontiveros cited an incident in 2021 when two Masungi

park rangers were shot and wounded.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) reported to the committee that 13 of its personnel have been killed in the line of duty within the past six years.

"With this in mind, alongside the matter of the BuCor and its plans in Masungi, it would serve us well to be reminded that people and our rich natural environment are our country's invaluable resources," Hontiveros said.

Binay and Hontiveros said the Masungi is part of the Upper Marikina Watershed. They said it helps regulate the flow of water, provides a natural defense against typhoons and prevents catastrophic flooding.

The BuCor is claiming ownership of a 270-hectare portion

of the 400-hectare conservation site, based on Proclamation 1158 issued by then president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo on Sept. 9, 2006.

The proclamation designated the area as the new location of the BuCor headquarters. Recently the BuCor managed to secure a title to the area.

There were no clear answers from the resource persons on Binay's question as to why no concrete action or decision had been made to rescind the title when it was evident that the BuCor's area includes the protected limestone formation.

DENR director for legal affairs Norlito Eneran said the matter could be resolved with a "positive action" from the government to take back the protected land from the BuCor.



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BuCor defers plan to transfer facilities to Masungi Georeserve

BY RAYMOND AFRICA

THE Bureau of Corrections yesterday said it will defer plans to relocate its facilities and headquarters to the Masungi Georeserve in Tanay, Rizal after environmental groups warned that it will damage the biodiversity and natural resources of the Upper Marikina watershed.

BuCor Director General Gregorio Catapang disclosed this as the Senate Committee on Tourism held an inquiry on the planned transfer of BuCor facilities at the georeserve.

"The 270 hectares of land awarded to BuCor pursuant to Presidential Proclamation No. 1158 as the site of the New Bilibid Prison will no longer push through, including the plan to relocate its national headquarters to this site, will be held in abeyance pending

further studies to be undertaken taking into consideration the impact on the environment with the construction of BuCor facilities in the area," Catapang said.

He said it would be better if an urban or environmental planner could conduct a study on the possible environmental impact of putting up the structures at the Masungi Georeserve.

He said if the transfer of the BuCor facilities "is not worth it," they will not push through with the plan.

"What I will do now if this is really not available or not for us, we will just put the forest rangers, we also have our agro-forest team that can help conserve and strengthen the ecosystem in the area," he added.

Catapang said the environmental study will take six months to one year.

Sen. Nancy Binay, panel chair-

man, said while the planned transfer of the BuCor in the area "is reasonable," its possible consequences to the environment should be taken into account.

"It is important to weigh the possible consequences of building its headquarters in an ecotourism site like the Masungi Georeserve which may affect the environment and tourism in the country," Binay said.

Binay earlier filed a resolution calling for an inquiry on the planned relocation of BuCor facilities at the Masungi Georeserve.

In the resolution, Binay disclosed the position of officials of the National Museum of the Philippines, who said that putting up facilities in Masungi will have expensive consequences for the environment.

She also cited a statement from Ann Dumailang, co-founder of Masungi Georeserve, that the

area is home to fragile limestone formations which is included in conservation efforts under the Masungi Georeserve Foundation and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources through a valid and binding Memorandum of Agreement signed by the late former Secretary Gina Lopez in 2017.

Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla earlier said the plan to put up the BuCor facilities in the area is not yet final.

Masungi is located at the foothills of the Sierra Madre and is part of the 26,000-hectare Upper Marikina River Basin Protected Landscape. It is a conservation area known for its lush sceneries and sprawling karst landscape, which is also home to more than 400 species of flora and fauna.

The DENR recently cancelled quarrying permits within the Masungi Geopark Project.



Pagtayo ng BuCor headquarter sa Masungi Georeserve kinansela

IPINAGPALIBAN ng Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) ang planong ilipat ang headquarters sa Masungi Georeserve sa Rizal.

Ito ang ibimangag ni BuCor Officer-in-Charge Gregorio Catapang Jr. sa pagding ng Senate committee on tourism nitong Martes.

"The 270 hectares of land awarded to BuCor pursuant to Presidential Proclamation No. 1158 as the site of the New Bilibid Prison will no longer push through, including the plan to relocate its national headquarters to this site will be held in abeyance pending further studies to be undertaken, taking into consideration the impact on the environment with the construction of BuCor facilities in the area," sabi ni Catapang.

Umaasa ang BuCor na matutuhang sila ng mga urban planner o environmental planner sa pagsagawa ng masusi pang-pag-aaral. Anim na buwan ang kanilang lumihing para pag-aralan ilang mahuri.

Naurang naghain si Senadora Nancy Binay ng isang resolusyon para sa yasa in ang napaulat na plano ng BuCor na magtayo ng bagong headquarters sa Masungi Georeserve.

"Masungi is a symbol of sustainable development and at the forefront of efforts to conserve, restore, and improve the environment in the face of climate change, which must be protected by the government and private sector at all cost," suad ni Binay.



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BUCOR TO DEFER RELOCATION TO MASUNGI GEORESERVE

By HANNAH TORREGOZA

The Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) will defer its plans to relocate its headquarters to the Masungi Georeserve pending review of the possible adverse environmental and ecological impacts in the area.

Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) Director General Gregorio Catapang Jr. confirmed the agency's decision yesterday during the Senate Committee on Tourism's hearing on the land-grabbing, illegal logging and quarrying issues negatively impacting the Masungi Georeserve.

"Most importantly, the 270 hectares of land awarded to BuCor pursuant to Presidential Proclamation No. 1158, as the site of the New Bilibid Prison (NBP), will no longer push through, including the

plan to relocate its national headquarters to this site will be held in abeyance pending further studies to be undertaken taking into consideration the impact on the environment with the construction of BuCor facilities in the area," Catapang said during the hearing.

The BuCor earlier earned flak after it revealed its plans to transfer its headquarters and training institute within the Masungi Georeserve — an award-winning ecotourism and conservation site in the province of Rizal.

The area itself has been a constant concern for peace and order, with Sen. Risa Hontiveros deploring the harassment and attacks on the country's forest rangers who were just carrying out their duties in protecting the

georeserve.

Hontiveros bared that at least 13 Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) personnel have been killed in the earnest pursuit of performing their duties within the last six years.

"Threats to their lives are real. With this in mind, outside the matter of the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) and its plans in the Masungi, it would serve as well to be reminded that people and our rich natural environment are our country's invaluable natural resources," Hontiveros pointed out during the hearing.

"And Masungi, as part of the Upper Marikina watershed, helps in regulating water-flow, provides a natural defense against typhoons, and helps prevent catastrophic flooding," she stressed.



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Water

What we call summer here has just started. We are resigned to having our power situation iffy, at best. But more important than power, will we have enough water?

We have taken water availability for granted in most of the country. Actually, less than half of the country has access to clean water.

Worse, according to Google, "water quality in the Philippines usually does not meet the standards set by the national government, especially in urban areas. The only areas of the Philippines confirmed to provide safe drinking water is the metropolitan area of Manila."

DEMAND AND SUPPLY



BOO CHANCO

The problem of Metro Manila, however, is the source of supply. We are dependent over 90 percent on Angat Dam, which is on top of the West Valley Fault. Can you imagine if the said overdue Big One happens and cracks that dam?

The water in Angat Dam also goes close to critical level during our summer months. But thanks to all the rain we have been having lately, I am told the level is quite healthy for the next few months.

For the long term, we should move faster to secure Mega Manila's water supply... not just Metro Manila, but also for the adjoining provinces too. Administrations come and go, but this is one big

unattended problem.

My friend Arnel Casanova, who used to head BCDA and who designed Clark Green City, posted his concern on Facebook:

"One of the tragic ironies I see in the Philippines is the current water crisis in Metro Manila and the CALABARZON with 30 million people. It is 30 percent of the Philippine population creating approximately 50 percent of the nation's GDP. That is half the economy of the country burdened by shortage of stable water supply."

But as Arnel pointed out, there is an obvious solution in plain

sight and not as contentious as the proposed Kaliwa dam.

"Yet right in the heart of NCR and CALABARZON regions lies the biggest freshwater lake in the country. Laguna Lake has 3.2 billion cubic meters of freshwater. In terms of liters, that is 3.2 TRILLION liters of fresh water!

"According to PIDS, the average Metro Manila resident consumes between 48 to 108 liters of water per day. Assuming it at 100 liters per day, the entire 30 million people will consume only 0.1 percent of the Laguna Lake water.

"To make it even more tragic, the lake is fed with fresh spring water by 187 rivers from the Sierra Madre and the Banahaw-Makiling mountains, which at source is so clean.

"Sadly, this spring water becomes dirty when it reaches the lake because Metro Manila and CALABARZON industries and people treat Laguna Lake as their huge septic tank and garbage dump. And now we have a water crisis!

"We must save and revive one of our country's most precious natural treasures - Laguna Lake - for us to survive and progress as a nation."

Arnel isn't the first one to express this view. The Management Association of the Philippines had sent an appeal, together with a draft EO for former president Rodrigo Duterte, to sign that would have ordered government units to work together to clean up Laguna Lake. It was ignored.

Ed Yap, who heads MAP's infrastructure committee, told me that they also sent the same appeal and the same EO to the office of President Marcos. So far, no response.

There are many, even among the scientific community, who say Laguna Lake cannot be a source of water for purification since its average depth of 2.5 meters is below the global standard of a minimum of 2.8 meters depth for harvesting water for purification.

Manila Water and Maynilad are tapping it anyway, but the process of cleaning up the water is rather expensive.

Indeed, before we can really tap the water of our country's largest lake, we must stop the lake's pollution, whether organic or inorganic, from households, farms, fisheries, and industries. This is not easy to do.

We knew long ago we had to do this anyway, which was why a law was passed creating the Laguna Lake Development



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Authority, which turned out to be totally useless.

As it happens, our lawmakers, mostly lawyers, think they have done their job after they pass a law. Corrupt politicians and their proteges just milked the powers of the authority.

The MAP draft EO declares that the primary use of the lake's water is to provide potable water for Mega Manila.

The MAP also called for a massive reforestation program for the Laguna Lake watershed, implementation of zoning regulations around the lake area, as well as the strict implementation of all environmental laws to address water quality concerns.

Cleaning up the lake requires a reversal of a culture in our society that disregards the common good. We treat lakes, rivers, and seas as open sewers.

But there is now available technology to help clean up rivers and lakes of domestic and industrial pollution. Singapore has successfully used technology to recycle its water.

Indeed, in the condo development where I live, the sanitary treatment plant or STP treats all our sewage to the point that it is clean enough to be used to water plants, wash cars and other domestic uses. I imagine it needs just one more step to make it drinkable.

I get the impression from the Facebook post of Arnel that he is now working on a master plan using biotechnology to clean up and save our lake.

"The masterplan provides doable solutions to the problems besetting Laguna Lake, the poverty that is present in lakeshore communities and the need to create economic opportunities that are more inclusive and sustainable.

"Through PPP models, we are finding partners and technologies to help prevent polluted water and garbage from reaching the lake. Last Monday, I visited a facility that uses one of these viable technologies by employing bacteria to treat water. I found it interesting and scalable in different communities around the lake."

A "Save Laguna Lake, Save our Lives Movement" is needed. We do not have a shortage of water. We simply lack the political will and the good sense not to shit in our own drinking water, literally!

Boo Chanco's email address is bchunco@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter @boochanco



Phi metal production up 32% in 2022

By DANESSA RIVERA

The value of the country's metallic mineral production rose by nearly a third last year on the back of higher nickel prices and robust metal output, supported by government policies.

Latest data from the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) showed metal production increased by 31.73 percent to 238.05 billion last year from P180.71 billion in 2021.

The MGB said the mining industry was boosted by the long overdue passage of policies by the government, such as the lifting of the moratorium on accepting applications for mineral agreements under Department Administrative Order No. 201021 and the lifting of the ban on open pit mining for copper, gold, silver, and complex ores in the country under DAO No. 2021-40.

These policies have "given the much-needed boost to the industry and has communicated positive signals to interested new players to invest in the minerals sector," it said.

The MGB said the upbeat performance was also achieved despite the impact of

the COVID-19 pandemic and the prolonged Russia-Ukraine war.

"We saw the pandemic slow down global economic activities and the Russia-Ukraine war affecting key markets, particularly energy markets such as oil and gas. These unprecedented events have disrupted the supply and demand chain of major commodities," the MGB said.

The nickel group took the lion's share of the total production value with P117.58 billion or 49.39 percent.

Production volume of nickel direct shipping ore slipped 11 percent to 29.27 million dry metric tons (dmt) from 32.95 million dmt due to the production shortfall incurred by most nickel projects.

The decline in output was offset by the high nickel prices, which went up to \$11.86 per pound from \$8.35 per pound.

Gold took the second spot with P90.95 billion or 38.21 percent with production rising by 15 percent to 29,007 kilograms from 25,332 kilograms.

"This strong performance can be attributed largely to the contribution of TVI Resources Development (Philis) Inc. lo-



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cated in Zamboanga del Sur and OGPI in Nueva Vizcaya," MGB said.

The price of gold also inched up to \$1,802.28 per troy ounce from \$1,800.39 per troy ounce.

Copper was in third position, accounting for 10.78 percent.

Production volume rose 21 percent to 258,729 dmt while value jumped 48 percent to P25.67 billion.

Carmen Copper Corp. accounted for 136,759 dry metric tons or 52.86 percent of the total production. While OGPI and Philex Mining Corp. contributed 64,547 dry metric tons and 57,423 dry metric tons, respectively.

Copper prices dropped by five percent to \$4 per pound. The country's copper was shipped to China, Japan, and South Korea.

The collective values of silver, chromite, and iron ore accounted for 1.61 percent at P3.84 billion.

"The projects that made the big change were OceanaGold (Phils) Inc. (OGPI) for its copper, gold, and silver output, TVI Resource Development (Phils) Inc., Balabag Gold-Silver Project for its gold and silver, and Taganito HPAI Nickel Corp. with its MNCS, scandium oxalate and chromite plant output. In addition, a new entrant to nickel

production was Vista Buena Mining Corp. located on Dinagat Island in July 2022. It is important to note that in CY 2021 TVI Resources and OGPI only started production in September and November, respectively," MGB said.

In terms of prices, silver went down by 14.52 percent.

The recorded price of silver declined to \$21.76 per troy ounce from \$23.45 per troy ounce year-on-year.

MGB said the country's mining industry is seen to benefit from "the anticipated recovery of the global economy and the continued strength in the demand, particularly for gold and nickel direct ship-

ping ore."

"The recent lifting of China's 'zero COVID policy,' which slowed down the Philippines' export of nickel last year due to stringent lockdowns in China, is a highly welcome development considering that China is the Philippines' most significant market in terms of nickel and copper exports," it said.

Last Dec. 9, China shifted from a COVID Zero policy to a full-on economic reopening.

"The push for a global transition to the electrification of vehicles (EV) will feed the demand for nickel, which is required for producing lithium-ion batteries," the MGB said.



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Metals output hits P238B, up 32%

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE country's metallic mineral production value rose by 31.73 percent in 2022 to P238.05 billion from P180.71 billion in 2021, according to the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB).

In a report, MGB said this was achieved despite the lingering effects of the pandemic as well as the prolonged Russia and Ukraine war that slowed down global economic activities and disrupted supply and demand chains.

Nickel ore together with its nickel by-products, mixed nickel-cobalt sulfide and scandium oxalate continued to have the largest share at P117.58 billion or

49.39 percent.

It was followed by gold at P90.95 billion or 38.21 percent and copper, P25.67 billion or 10.78 percent.

The combined mine value of silver, chromite and iron ore accounted for P3.84 billion or 1.61 percent.

In terms of production, direct shipping ore nickel was the only component whose production fell, down by 11 percent to 29.27 million dmt from 32.93 million dmt. Other metallic mines improved: gold by 15 percent to 29,007 kilograms (kg); silver, 82 percent to 56,227 kg

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Mineral production

2022 vs 2021

Mineral	Unit	2022	2021	% Change	2022	2021	% Change
Gold	kg	29,007	25,332	15.29	72,245,375,840	15	26
Silver	kg	56,227	30,856	82.11	1,200,129,554	62	78
Copper Concentrate	dmt	258,729	214,684	20.54	17,094,104,371	21	48
Nickel Direct Shipping Ore	dmt	29,269,864	32,933,340	(11.13)	56,329,334,816	(11)	9
Mixed Nickel-Cobalt Sulfide	dmt	60,941	78,400	(21.79)	32,907,756,198	7	99
Scandium Oxalate	dykg	20,148	19,008	6.02	408,816,129	23	10
Chromite	dmt	147,492	30,721	380.14	201,960,270	200	663
Iron Ore	dmt	75,771	68,191	11.13	487,595,000	11	24
Total		238,051,128,910	180,711,775,775	31.73			

Source: MGB

from 30,856 kg; copper, 21 percent to 258,729 dry metric tons (dmt) from 214,684 dmt; chromite, 380 percent to 147,492 dmt from 30,721 dmt; and iron ore, 11 percent to 75,771 dmt from 68,191 dmt.

Average price of nick-

el ore rose 42.01 percent to \$11.86 per lb from \$8.35 per lb, while gold increased by 0.1 percent to \$1,802.28 per troy ounce from \$1,800.39 per troy ounce.

Copper prices dipped by 5 percent to \$4 per lb from \$4.21 per lb, while silver prices dropped

by 14.52 percent to \$21.76 per troy ounce from \$25.45 per troy ounce.

MGB did not provide the average price of chromite and iron ore for the period.

MGB's report also noted a "positive expectation" the Phil-

ippines will be able to produce and export more minerals this year, given the likely improved level of metal demand most especially from China.

The agency said under the latest list of priority projects which encompassed three phas-

es, 33 projects are expected to commence within the next six months, 14 of which are for metallic minerals.

Of the 14 metallic mineral projects, one will be in Cagayan Valley for iron magnetite sand; one in Central Luzon for nickel

laterite; one in Bicol for gold; one in Eastern Visayas for nickel laterite; two in Zamboanga Peninsula for copper, gold and iron; five in Davao region for nickel, copper and gold; and three more in Caraga also for nickel, copper and gold.



Chinese maritime militia in Pag-asa since Saturday

By ROBERTZON RAMIREZ

Philippine Coast Guard personnel stationed in Pag-asa spotted vessels of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China anchored in the island last Saturday, which along with the CCG-5203 and at least 42 suspected Chinese maritime militia have continued to ignore PCG warnings, an official said.

In a forum yesterday, PCG spokesman for the West Philippine Sea Commodore Jay Tarruela said he does not want to speculate how long the Chinese vessels have been loitering in Pag-asa, but he emphasized that such is the usual action of Chinese maritime militia in Philippine waters.

Tarruela said the Chinese continuously ignore radio challenges of the PCG directed at the PLA, China Coast Guard (CCG) and maritime militia vessels still loitering in Pag-asa and violating Philippine territorial integrity.

He said China's continued presence in Philippine waters is inconsistent with the "right of innocent passage" in violation of sovereign waters.

"Our coast guard station in Pag-asa is continuously challenging over radio saying that within 12 nautical miles of Pag-asa Island is Philippine territorial sea and we have sovereignty here. But China still maintains presence and does not respond to calls of our coast guard personnel," Tarruela said, mostly in Filipino.

"The implication of these Chinese vessels in our territorial sea in Pag-asa (is that) they are violating our sovereignty and this is inconsistent with the right of innocent passage. In short, they don't respect the territorial integrity of this sea," he added.

Despite China's continued presence, Tarruela said that they will keep to their commitment to patrol the West Philippine Sea (WPS) and that vessels and personnel have been deployed to ensure the safety of Filipino fishermen.

He added that they will continue to issue radio challenges against their Chinese counterpart even if they are being ignored as he emphasized that they will continue reporting China's aggressive actions and bullying antics.

For his part, PCG Commandant Admiral Artemio Abu told reporters that they will continue their presence in Pag-asa Island through the deployment of vessels to protect and ensure the welfare of Filipino fishermen against the CCG.

Abu said that they have also established sub-stations to monitor areas where Chinese vessels are loitering as he asked the Filipino fishermen not to worry since the "government is doing

Reassures commitment

The Western Command (WESCOM) of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), which exercises jurisdiction over the WPS, gave reassurance of its commitment to protect the country's territory amid China's growing assertiveness and presence within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

WESCOM declared yesterday that it is heeding the call of President Marcos for the military to adapt and shift its focus on external defense.

Commander Ariel Joseph Coloma, WESCOM's public affairs office chief, said the AFP remains steadfast in defending Philippine territory.

"The Armed Forces of the Philippines, through the Western Command, heeds the call of our Commander-in-Chief President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on recalibrating the AFP's focus towards external defense operations in light of the recent increase in complexity of the country's external security environment," he said.

"This Command remains steadfast in fulfilling its solemn duty to defend Philippine sovereignty, territorial integrity, and protecting the rights of our country and

our people with vigilance, dynamism, and determination in our operations in the WPS," he added.

Coloma said WESCOM welcomes the opportunity to work with friends and allies in patrolling Philippine waters, building on existing partnerships, forging new ones, strengthening military interoperability, and developing indigenous capabilities to respond to threats that may arise within the area of operations.

Such statement apparently refers to ongoing talks for joint sovereign maritime patrols in the WPS involving the United States, Australia and Japan, among others.

Coloma said WESCOM also appreciates and supports the ongoing efforts of the PCG in making known the realities faced in the WPS.

He said these include "incidents of harassment, coercion, and provocations that challenge our legitimate entitlements as upheld by the 2016 Arbitral Award."



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High seas treaty

The Philippines meanwhile welcomed the historic agreement on protecting marine biodiversity in international waters.

United Nations member countries finalized a text to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, a "breakthrough" after nearly two decades of talks.

The deal was struck last week at the UN Headquarters in New York, where tough negotiations on the draft treaty have been underway for the past two weeks.

The agreement reached by delegates of the Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, better known by its acronym BBNJ, is the culmination of UN-facilitated talks that began in 2004.

Already being referred to as the "High Seas Treaty," the legal framework would place 30 percent of the world's oceans into protected areas, put more money into marine conservation, and covers access to and use of marine genetic resources.

"The Philippines welcomes the adoption of the 1st international treaty on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, proving once again the importance of multilateralism in finding common ground amid competing interests," Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo said in a Twitter post.

In negotiations that lasted 10 years, Manalo said the Philippines consistently underlined the principle of common heritage of humankind and importance of giving due regard to the rights and jurisdiction of adjacent coastal states and archipelagic states, which are heavily dependent on the sea.

Meanwhile, the United States government hosted a regional maritime sanctions enforcement workshop in Manila.

Organized from Feb. 28 to March 2 in Manila by the US embassy's Export Control and Border Security Program and the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, the workshop for customs, coast guard and legal officials from the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and Taiwan would strengthen regional cooperation in enforcing international maritime sanctions.

The workshop trained participants on the impact of sanctions on key stakeholders, regional examples of sanctions evasion, challenges to the enforcement of sanctions, and models for implementing relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. Delegates also participated in tabletop exercises where they applied skills in investigating and preventing sanctions evasion.

- With Michael Punongbayan, Pia Lee-Brago



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Biggest PH reforestation deal

BIZ BUZZ



One of the biggest reforestation programs in the country is about to be hatched courtesy of a local conglomerate and its Japanese partner, with the technical assistance of a key government agency, Biz Buzz hears.

According to our source, Dacon Corp.—the construction management arm of billionaire **Isidro Consunji**—has entered into a deal with Japan's Marubeni Corp. to reforest a sprawling tract of land that was stripped bare of trees by a large logging firm decades ago.

Specifically, the Dacon-Marubeni partnership aims to saturate a 40,000-hectare property on the northern tip of Negros Island with trees in the hope of contributing to the greening of the environment.

The property in question used to be the logging concession area of a firm called Insular Lumber Co.—the largest lumber firm in the country in its day—before the natural resources of the area were fully exhausted.

We're told that the undertaking will be funded fully by Marubeni Corp. which, along with Dacon, will then "earn" from the undertaking by con-

verting it into carbon credits which it can use to offset the carbon footprint of its other business units or trade on the international market.

Several million trees will be planted, but the exact species has yet to be determined. That will be the responsibility of the experts from the University of the Philippines in Los Baños, we're told. Talk about a win-win deal for everyone. —**DAXIM L. LUCAS**

Women leading Ayala's charge

It's International Women's Day today, a global day that celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women everywhere.

And at the Ayala Group that is turning 189 years old this year, there are many reasons to celebrate, not least of which is the sheer number of its women executives in key positions, many of whom stand a chance of eventually taking over the reins of the different multibillion corporations that make up the conglomerate.

At property giant Ayala Land Inc., there's **Anna Ma. Margarita Dy**, who's a member of the management committee and heads the estates group as well as corporate marketing and urban and regional planning. Also in the mix is **Carol Mills**, president and CEO of AREIT INC. and head of

Ayala Land Offices.

Over at BPI, those speculating on who could succeed TG Limcaoco are looking at two of the bank's executive vice presidents: **Ginbee Go**, head of consumer banking and **Marie Josephine Ocampo**, head of mass retail products; as well as **Maria Theresa Marcial**, president and CEO of BPI Asset Management and Trust Corp.

The Globe Group also does not lack for top female executives, among them GCash president and CEO **Martha Sazon**, CFO **Rosemarie Maniego-Eala**, chief transformation and operations officer **Rebecca Eclipse**, chief commercial officer **Maria Louisa Guevarra-Cabreira** and Kickstart Ventures president **Minette Navarrete**.

Then there's **Mariana Zobel de Ayala**, BPI vice president and a member of the eighth generation of the Zobel family now taking more responsibility at the group where women have ample opportunity to shine. —**TINA ARCEO-DUMLAO**

Westin returns to PH

Westin Hotels and Resorts, part of the Marriott Bonvoy's global portfolio of 30 extraordinary hotel brands, has returned to the Philippines with the opening on March 6 of The Westin Manila in Mandaluyong City, in partnership with Robinsons Land Corp.

"We are thrilled to celebrate the opening of The Westin Manila, marking the brand's re-entry in the Philippines as well as another milestone in its expansion in Asia-Pacific," said **Jennifer Connell**, the global brand leader of Westin Hotels and vice president of distinctive premium brands for Marriott International.

The Westin brand was last carried by The Westin Philippine Plaza until December 2005, after which the property was rebranded by the Sofitel chain in January of 2006.

The new 32-storey Westin Manila is situated in the Ortigas central business district and features 303 rooms including 57 suites.

Guest rooms and suites feature the patented Westin Heavenly Bed, Nespresso coffee machines, Bluetooth speakers, complimentary Wi-Fi and 55-inch flat Samsung TVs that both corporate travelers and "staycationers" are looking for in a city hotel.

"Located in the vibrant heart of Metro Manila, guests will have all they need for a productive and relaxing stay in the city," said general manager **Alexander Dietzsch**. "We look forward to welcoming guests to a new world of personalized wellness with our signature Westin guest experiences." —**TINA ARCEO-DUMLAO**