

12 March 2023 Sunday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

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**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**



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**MINDORO OIL SPILL:**

# Mayors to consolidate raps vs vessel owner

By BELLA CARIASO

Officials of local government units in areas affected by the oil spill from the sunken motor tanker *MT Princess Empress* have agreed to consolidate the filing of charges against the owner of the vessel.

Oriental Mindoro mayors met with Gov. Bonz Dolor on Friday to discuss the filing of charges, Pola Mayor Jennifer Cruz told a radio interview yesterday.

Cruz said it was agreed upon during the meeting that the provincial government would file the case.

She said the municipal government of Pola has tapped the assistance of the National Bureau of Investigation as it is mulling the filing of a separate case.

Cruz noted that their town suffered the biggest damage.

"I have asked our municipal agriculture office to measure our shoreline. We also need to check our total mangrove areas and the total number of fisherfolk who were displaced as well as the marine protected areas that were affected. We will enumerate these in filing the damages against the owner (of the vessel)," she said.

The oil spill from *Empress*, which was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel when it sank amid inclement weather on Feb. 28, has reached Caluya, Antique and Taytay, Palawan.

### 'Slow response'

Cruz lamented the slow response to the oil spill, noting that it took six days before the con-

tainment booms arrived.

The owner of *Empress* has not provided any assistance, she added.

"Wala po talaga, as in wala pa po kaming nararamdaman na tulong from them," Cruz said in an interview with "The Chieft" on *One News* on Friday night.

Cruz said a representative from RDC Reield Marines Services visited Pola and offered to provide relief goods. However, she said they have not received anything.

She said RDC has not responded to requests for additional containment booms.

"Wala talaga silang malinaw na inilatag na tulong para sa bayan ng Pola," Cruz said.

She said 11 barangays in Pola were affected by the oil spill, which also displaced 1,700 fisherfolk.

- With Emmanuel Tupas



## Mayors, Gov. sa Oriental Mindoro nagkaisa

# May-ari ng lumubog na barko, kakasuhan sa oil spill

Sasampahan ng patung-patong na kaso ng mga alkalde sa Oriental Mindoro ang may-ari ng lumubog na MT Princess Empress dahil sa inabot na pinsala sa lalawigan dulot ng malawakang oil spill mula sa nasabing barko.

Ayon kay Pola, Ori-

ental Mindoro Mayor Jennifer Cruz kahapon, ang mga mayors ng Oriental Mindoro at Governor Bonz Dolor ay nagkaisang paghahain ng kaso laban sa owner MT Princess Empress matapos ang kanilang ginawang pagpupulong

nitong Biyernes.

"Yesterday (Friday) all the mayors (of Oriental Mindoro) attended a meeting with the governor. We discussed how to file the case and it was agreed that the filing of the case will be through the provincial government," ani Cruz sa isang

**Ni BELLA CARIASO**

radio interview.

Idinagdag ni Cruz na, kinuha na ng Pola local government ang tulong ng National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) sa paghahanda ng "class suit" laban sa may-ari ng naturang barko na lumu-

bog sa karagatang sakop ng Naujan, Mindoro

Sinabi naman ng environmental group Oceana na ang class suit ay posibleng maisampa may be laban sa may-ari ng MT Princes Empress sa ilalim ng Republic Act 9483 o ang Oil Pollution Law.

"We are awaiting the result of the investigation of the NBI and other concerned agencies for Pola as we suffered the biggest damage," dagdag ni Cruz.

Ayon pa kay Cruz,

ang Pola ay may kabuuang 538 ektarya ng mangrove areas at 50-kilometer shoreline kung saan malaking bahagi nito ang napinsala dulot ng oil spill.

Samantala, sinabi ni Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) Spokesperson Nazario Briguera na naglaan na ang BFAR ng karagdang P15 million budget upang tulungan ang mga mangingisda na nawalan ng pangkabuhayan dahil sa oil spill.

Naglagay na rin ang

Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Environment Management Bureau (DENR-EMB) Region 4-B, Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) at Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRRMO) ng mga spill booms at absorbent booms sa Calimawawa River, Casilagan River, at Brgy. Misong sa Pola, Oriental Mindoro upang mapigilan ang paglawak pa ng oil spill mula sa lumubog MT Princess Empress.



### Owner ng barko, kakasuhan sa oil spill sa Mindoro

Nahahamp sa pating-patong na kaso ang may-ari ng lumubog na MT Princess Empress mula sa mga mayors at governor ng Oriental Mindoro dahil sa inabot na pinsala ng kaniyang lalawigan dulot ng malawakang oil spill mula sa nasabing barko.

Sinabi kahapon ni Pola, Oriental Mindoro Mayor Jennifer Cruz, nagkaroon sila ng pagpulong nitong Biyernes at nagkasundo ang mga mayors ng Oriental Mindoro at Governor Bonz Dolor ay para sa paghahain ng kaso laban sa owner ng MT Princess Empress.

Idinagdag ni Cruz na, kinuha na ng Pola local government ang tulong ng National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) sa paghahanda ng "class suit" laban sa may-ari ng natunang barko na lumubog sa karagatang sakop ng Naujan, Mindoro.

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# PCG seeking US help in oil spill cleanup

By ROBERTZON RAMIREZ and GHIO ONG

The Philippines has formalized its request for help from the United States in containing and cleaning up the oil spill coming from a sunken oil tanker off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

"I've sent a letter to the embassy of the United States... that we need help," Philippine Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Artemio Abu said at a news forum in Quezon City yesterday.

While describing the content of the letter as "generic," Abu said it expressed the Philippines' wish to receive any kind of help from the US government in addressing the oil spill problem.

"Whatever help they can give us,

response equipment, everything. Whatever they're capable of giving us - they know what's needed at this time," the PCG chief said in English and Filipino.

"They have more experience and knowledge on this issue. It's just a matter of making known to them that we are asking assistance from them," he added.

He said the oil spill from *MT Princess Empress*, which sank on Feb. 28, has already reached 70 kilome-

ters in the direction of Caluya Island in Antique.

"If we're talking about distance, it's 70 kilometers from the sinking site, going to Antique in Caluya Island. It's the farthest it has gone so far," he said at the news forum.

*MT Princess Empress* was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil when it sank. Its 20 crewmembers were unharmed.

Abu said their "order of priority"

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A member of the Coast Guard inspection team walks with a resident as they examine an oil slick on the shores of Barangay Caslan, an island village in Taytay, Palawan the other day. The oil slick is likely from the industrial oil spilled by the sunken tanker *MT Princess Empress*. Barangay Caslan is 159 nautical miles or 295 kilometers away from Naujan in Oriental Mindoro, where the tanker carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil sank in rough seas on Feb. 28.





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is to determine the source of the spill, contain and disperse it, protect shorelines at risk and cleanup and recovery of "oiled debris."

He said they have yet to receive information on the source of the oil spill.

"At the moment we can't tell yet the percentage (of spillage contained) because we're not sure how much of the oil cargo has spilled out," he said in Filipino.

He added the arrival of necessary equipment would help them get a better picture of the problem.

He said the Naujan oil spill problem is in "Tier Two" of PCG's National Oil Spill Contingency Plan, meaning it is still manageable.

Any help from the international community, he stressed, would be

welcome.

Abu said the Japanese government has sent a team to help the PCG contain the oil spill. He added that representatives from other countries are set to meet with the PCG tomorrow to discuss extending assistance. He did not give details.

Asked if the Chinese have offered to help, he said "there is no offer yet from them."

He emphasized that the Philippines will not turn down any offer of assistance. "Who are we to decline offer of help?"

### Boracay at risk

Meanwhile, the Department of Tourism (DOT) has warned that the oil spill in Mindoro might reach Boracay.

In a statement last Friday, the DOT

said the local government of Malay in Aklan, which hosts the world renowned Boracay, "is already preparing for the possibility of the effects of the oil spill reaching its area of jurisdiction."

"The PCG and the Malay Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office are continuously conducting roving 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 DOI said.

The DOT's Western Visayas regional office has also gotten in touch with the Malay local government for the possibility of "extending assistance to tourists in Boracay in case the spillage reaches the island's coastal area."

The DOI reported the most affected by the oil spill were areas in Pola town, Oriental Mindoro, site of

marine protected areas and several beach resorts.

"Based on the information gathered by the DOT, the oil spill has intruded several Marine Protected Areas in the municipality of Pola in Oriental Mindoro, such as the King-Fisher Reserve, St. John the Baptist Marine Sanctuary, Song of the Sea Fish Sanctuary, Stella Mariz Fish Sanctuary, Bacawan Fish Sanctuary, St. Peter the Rock Fish Sanctuary and the San Isidro Labrador Fish Sanctuary," the DOT said.

It added that resorts - namely the Bihiya Beach, 3 Cottage, Long Beach, K. I. Aguada Beach Resort, Oloroso Beach Resort, Munting Buhangin Tagumpay Beach Resort and Buhay na Tubig White Beach Resort - have been affected.

The department noted that coastal cleanup efforts were being undertaken in the areas to mitigate the effects of the oil spill on coastal communities

and marine life.

Cleanup drives were also held in Caluya town in Antique, particularly the shorelines of Sitio Sabang, Barangay Tinogbo, Liwagao Island, Barangay Sibolo and Sitio Tambak in Barangay Semirara.

The DOI is also coordinating with the Tubbataha Management Office in Cagayancillo town, Palawan to prepare measures in case the oil spill reaches the Tubbataha Reef, a world-famous diving destination.

"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," DOT Secretary Christina Garcia-Frasco said.

She revealed that 34 cruise ships were expected to dock in Mindoro, Romblon, Marinduque and Palawan this year.



## Coast Guard seeks US assistance in locating oil spill source

THE Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) on Saturday confirmed it sought the assistance of the United States to contain an oil spill in Oriental Mindoro that is fast spreading to other coastal communities.

The M/T Princess Empress carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil, sank off the coast of Naujan on Feb. 28.

PCG Commandant Admiral Artemio Abu said the oil slick has already reached more municipalities, with the farthest re-

corded in Catuya Island, Antique.

On Friday, it was reported that the oil spill has reached Barangay Casian, Taytay, Palawan, which is approximately 159 nautical miles or 295 km. from the Naujan accident site.

"I have sent a letter to the Embassy of the United States through the Coast Guard na nangangailangan tayo ng tulong," he said at the Saturday News Forum in Quezon City.

"Generic naman iyon, kung anong maibabagay nila, like equipment, kung

ano nasa kaniyang kakayahanan," he added.

Abu said the tanker had sunk at least 389 meters beneath the water's surface, but the country's available equipment to contain oil leaking from the vessel itself has "limited depth coverage."

"(We need a) remote(ly) operated vehicle (ROV) for ang pinakamahalaga. Ang first objective natin is to contain the oil from the source," he said.

He said the Philippines has a new ROV, but it could not go that deep.



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## Oil spill lumalawak, PH pasaklolo na sa Amerika

Kinumpirma ng Philippine Coast Guard na humingi na sila ng saklolo sa Amerika para mapigilan ang oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro na kumakalat na rin sa mga karatig probinsya nito.

Sinabi ni PCG commandant Admiral Artemio Abu na maraming munisipalidad na ang inebot ng oil spill kung saan ang pinakamalayo ay naitala antiya sa Caluya Island sa Antique.

Nitong Blyernes ay napaulat naman na nakarating na rin umano sa Brgy. Casian, Taytay, Palawan ang oil

spill.

Unang kumalat ang oil spill sa Naujan, Oriental Mindoro matapos na lumubog ang MT Princess Empress na may dalang 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel oil noong Pebrero 28, 2023.

Sa kanyang pagdalo sa isang forum sa Quezon City nitong Sabado, sinabi ng PCG chief na sumulat na siya sa United States Embassy upang ipabatid na nangangailangan ng tulong ang bansa para mapigilan ang pagkalat pa ng oil spill.

Wala naman umanong binanggit si

Abu kung anong partikular na tulong ang hiniingi niya sa Amerika ngunit sinabi nito na kinakailangan ng remotely operated underwater vehicle para matukoy kung saan ang partikular na pinangagalingan ng oil spill.

"Ang first objective natin is to contain the oil from the source," ayon pa kay Abu. (Betchai Julian)





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EDITORIAL

CARTOON

SUNDAY, MARCH 12, 2023

## LRay urges DENR to create risk management plan for oil spill

A HOUSE leader is calling on the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to take decisive steps to speed up not only the cleanup of 800,000 liters of industrial fuel leaked last month by a sunken tanker off Oriental Mindoro but also the crafting of a risk management strategy to contain the environmental, economic and health impacts of the oil spill on possibly five or six provinces.

Camarines Sur Representative LRay Villafuerte pointed out that while the actual cleanup might be completed before the year is over, environmental groups have warned that the ecological, economic, social,

and health impacts of the oil spill will likely be felt for decades.

President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. has also ordered the DENR to speed up the oil spill cleanup in Oriental Mindoro, and DENR Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said her office is looking at possibly tapping the participants of this year's RPL-US Balikatan exercises to help in the cleanup.

Villafuerte supported the DENR's plan to tap Balikatan participant-soldiers and said the Department should harness as well for the oil slick cleanup drives countries like Japan and South Korea that have offered to help remove the

smudge, which said Yulo-Loyzaga, is being discharged from the sunken vessel at a rate of 35,000 to 50,000 liters a day.

"It's bad enough that a fifth of an estimated 2.7 million tons of plastic waste generated annually in our country ends up in the ocean," Villafuerte said. "Aquatic pollution will only get worse with the spillage of 800,000 liters of emulsified black oil by the sunken MV Princess Empress, which has put at risk an estimated 36,000 hectares (ha) of coral reefs, mangrove forests, and seagrass beds," Villafuerte, a former CamSur governor, said.

Depending on its trajectory, the University of the

By RYAN PONCE  
PACPACO

Philippines-Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) believed the smudge leaked by the sunken tanker might affect about 20,000 ha of coral reefs; 9,900 ha of mangroves; and 6,000 ha of seagrass in Oriental Mindoro, Occidental Mindoro, Antique and Palawan.

Hence, he said, "the urgency for the DENR to put on the fast-track its crafting of a mid- to long-term risk management strategy to prevent the smudge from spreading to coastal municipalities in more provinces and containing the oil spill's impact on the environment, on human health, and on tourism and the economies of the affected areas."

The motor tanker MV Princess Empress sank last Feb. 28 off Naujan in Ori-

ental Mindoro, leaking 800,000 liters of industrial fuel in a spill, initially reported as 25 kilometers (km) long and 500 meters wide, that is one of the worst leakages in the country in recent history.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) reported that the tanker sank last Feb. 28 after encountering engine trouble while on its way from Bataan to Iloilo.



EDITORIAL

## Beyond cleaning up the oil spill

**T**he sinking of an oil tanker off the coast of Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28 has a tremendous impact on the environment, economy, and people's health that will be felt for many years, even decades. It has also once more brought to light the importance of protecting the Philippines' vast marine resources by revisiting laws and passing new regulations, as well as improving capability on responding to and containing disasters like this given the country's archipelagic features.

Authorities will now have to answer why it took a week before an oil spill boom was placed around the possible location of MT Princess Empress to help contain the leak from the sunken tanker. The vessel was said to have sunk at least 1,200 feet or 400 meters below sea level, bringing down with it 800,000 liters of industrial oil. By the time the boom was placed last Wednesday, thousands of liters of oil have spilled into the ocean and reached the surrounding coastlines sending at least nine towns into a state of calamity, impacting the livelihood of fishermen, affecting the health of residents, and threatening the area's rich marine biodiversity. News reports showed volunteers scrambling to clean up the oil slick from the beaches of the island, a popular tourist destination, while many residents have fallen ill due to the worsening stench as days stretched to over a week now and still no sign that the leakage has been contained.

Oil spills, per this paper's special report published on March 7, are a common occurrence, especially for a country whose waterways serve as channels for transportation and commerce.

An incident that happened in Guimaras in 2006 propelled the government to review oil spill contingency arrangements and revise the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCP) that was promulgated in 2008. The NOSCP provides response arrangements, depending on the tier of the spill, on which party should undertake the clean-up and other contingency measures with the Philippine Coast Guard as the lead responsible agency and the Marine Environmental Protection Command as the point of contact. This structure is clear enough, so why were there bottlenecks in the response operation in Mindoro, including transmitting crucial information to the affected communities? On top of the NOSCP, Republic Act No. 9483 was enacted in 2007 to establish the oil pollution management fund in anticipation of incidents similar to the Guimaras oil spill. But this law, based on reports, still lacks implementing rules and regulations—16 years after it was signed.

The 2006 Guimaras incident affected 1,500 hectares of the local ecosystem comprised of mangroves, seagrass, and coral reefs, and is considered one of the worst environmental disasters to hit the country. The sunken oil tanker spilled more than 2.1 million liters of bunker fuel, and it took years to rehabilitate the island, which lost billions of revenues in the process. That incident should have served as a precaution, but many other disastrous oil spill incidents have happened since (e.g., in Cordova, Cebu, in 2013; and again in Guimaras, in 2020) and unless the government acts to protect its crucial marine areas, the latest in Mindoro will not be the last.

The Mindoro oil spill occurred in the Verde Island Passage (VIP) marine corridor, where the South China Sea and Pacific Ocean waters converge. The VIP is one of the most important marine ecosystems in the world and is said to host about 60 percent of the world's known shorefish species. The passage provides livelihood and food resources to over 2 million people and serves as a shipping route to international ports in Batangas, Manila, and Subic Bay.

Calls have long been made to make VIP a World Heritage site to ensure that its rich underwater resources are protected. At least one measure, Senate Bill No. 518 filed last year, seeks to declare VIP a protected area under RA 7586 or the National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 1992 given the threats, particularly navigation, to its biodiversity. The oil spill should prompt the government to take serious steps to protect this vital passage.

A disaster of this magnitude goes beyond containment and—long after all the oil has been skimmed and cleaned up—recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction will be a long, arduous process. In previous oil spills, affected communities faced not only the loss of their livelihood but also continuous threats against their health, from the safety of the water they drink to the fish sold in the markets. Helping them survive and get back on their feet should be the responsibility and priority not only of the government but of the owner of MT Princess Empress.

The extent of the damage in Mindoro has yet to be fully determined, but this should not only prompt authorities to revisit the laws but to tighten already-existing mechanisms to ensure accountability and enforce preventive measures. And this should be followed through, not as mere lip service, and only revisited when another oil spill incident takes place.



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## NEWS BRIEF

### DENR kinalampag sa tamang estratehiya vs oil spill

NANANAWAGAN si Camarines Sur Rep. LRay Villafuerte sa Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) na gumawa ng bahang upang hindi lamang mapabilis ang paglilinis sa narapong 800,000 litro ng langis mula sa lumabog na tanker sa karagatan ng Oriental Mindoro noong nakaraang buwan kundi ang pagbalangkas ng mga estratehiya upang mapigilan ang

epekto nito sa kapaligiran, ekonomiya at kalusugan sa iba pang kalapit na probinsya.

Naniniwala si Villafuerte na mahalagang magkaroon ng 'risk management strategy' binusod na rin ng babala ng environmental groups na posibleng abutin ng dekada ang epekto ng oil spill sa ekolohiya, ekonomiya, panlipunan at kalusugan ng mga tao. Kasabay nito, sinuporta-

han ramon ng mambabatas ang plano ni DENR Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga na hingin nito ang tulong ng mga lalahok sa RP-US Bilateral exercises ngayong taon para sa paglilinis ng oil spill.

Bukod dito, nirekomenda rin ng kongresista na kailangan din umanong Langgapiin ng DENR ang alok na tulong ng bansang Japan at South Korea. (Eralyn Prado)



## 'Protect Verde Island Passage from oil spill'

**A** FAITH-BASED coalition that seeks to protect the Verde Island Passage (VIP) is calling for accountability and deeper look into the oil spill that wreaked havoc in the waters of Oriental Mindoro.

The Protect VIP campaign network said the incident must serve as an "eye opener" to the region. The Verde Island Passage has long suffered despite its socio-economic and ecological significance.

VIP is a strait that separates the islands of Luzon and Mindoro, connecting the South China Sea with the Taybas and the Sibuyan Sea beyond.

The devastating oil spill occurred after MT Princess Empress captured on February 23, bringing down 800,000 liters of industrial oil.

"We call on the Philippine government for the most urgent action to contain the spill, assess the severity of damage, and prioritize the welfare of impacted communities who must receive livelihood support and protection from health impacts," said Fr. Edwin Gariguez, lead convenor of Protect VIP.

"We also demand accountability from the owner of MT Princess Empress, BDC Beidel Maritime Services and the fuel supply it contains," he said.

The oil spill has put at risk more than 30 of Oriental Mindoro's marine-protected areas, and has affected other provinces like Antique in West-

ern Visayas.

The province of Oriental Mindoro has placed at least 76 coastal villages across nine out of its 14 towns have been placed under the state of calamity.

The faith-based group said at least 18,000 fisherfolk in Oriental Mindoro alone have been robbed of their livelihood as fishing activities are put on hold.

Residents, it added, are also robbed of their seafood supply—a heavy blow for a province in which over 50 percent of households already suffer various levels of food insecurity.

"We, thus, join local residents in lamenting what would be a prolonged suffering of the local fishing industry—valued at P11.80 billion across the five provinces of VIP in 2011—as impacts of the oil spill are expected to be felt for years to come," said Gariguez, who is also the former executive secretary of Caritas Philippines, a relief, development and social service organization of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

He also stressed the need for the government to take into account the bigger picture and what is at stake in the oil spill incident in biodiversity-rich VIP.

The group has been raising alarm on the issue of having more heavy industry development around the VIP



VOLUNTEERS join coastal clean-up drive in the town of Pola in Oriental Mindoro which is among the towns hit the hardest by the oil spill. (Photo by AFP/Julio) (Photo by AFP/Julio)

area—especially fossil fuel power plants and liquefied natural gas terminals, which would receive shipped cargoes of LNG.

"More plans for LNG terminals means more shipping vessels passing through the marine corridor. This increases the possibility of a similar situation happening in the future," Gariguez said.

"The Verde Island Passage must be afforded no less than the greatest protection due to a global treasure for marine biodiversity," Gariguez pointed out.

At the same time, Gariguez said Caritas Philippines would extend assistance to 250 families.

"Caritas Philippines has committed

to support 250 affected families with food packets with items available to the unreached and most needy affected coastal communities," Gariguez said in a statement on Thursday.

He added that the Diocesan Social Action Center, which Gariguez leads, and the affected parishes would have a meeting at St. Augustine Parish in the town of Finafayanon on March 14 to determine the beneficiaries of the assistance.

The Lipa Archdiocesan Social Action Commission and the Center for Energy, Ecology and Development (CEED) will also provide food items and emergency assistance.

"The relief goods will be temporarily stored in the available space in

St. Francis of Assisi Quasi Parish for distribution once the beneficiaries' list has been finalized and operation plan has been set up by next week," the priest said.

The church is also in contact with the concerned local government units and the provincial government of Oriental Mindoro for continuous response to the needs of the most affected communities.

The towns of Nasajon, Pinamalayan, Gloria, Ionsod, Bongbong Roxas, Mansalay and Balabac have been placed under a state of calamity due to the damage of the oil spill, and in order to help those concerned the communities affected by the disaster.

A state of calamity was also declared in the town of Caluya, Antique due to the oil spill.

Meanwhile, President Marcos Jr. has ordered the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to speed up the oil spill cleanup in the affected areas in Oriental Mindoro.

In response, the DENR is looking into the possibility of tapping the participants of this year's Balikatan exercises for the cleanup along the shores affected by the oil spill.

Environment Secretary Antonio Loyaga said Japan and South Korea have expressed their willingness to help contain the oil spill.

The DENR, Loyaga said, is also

coordinating with the provincial local government units, the vessel owner and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) as a potential additional source of funds for the cash-for-work program as assistance to the affected residents.

Social Work Secretary Rex Gatchalian said areas to be given the temporary means of livelihood include the affected towns in Oriental Mindoro; Caluya in Antique; and Agutayan in Palawan.

Loyaga noted that about P80 million has been set aside for the cash-for-work program of the Department of Labor and Employment called the Tulayng Paghahangibuhay sa Ating Disastrang-jud/Displaced Workers.

She said the vessel owner's insurance provider has offered to bring in a ship from China to plug the leak in the vessel.

The DENR chief cited the latest reports indicating that the oil spill has reached the Cuyo Islands group.

She said the oil spill in Antique and Semirara Island is continuing to spread, estimating the rate of discharge of oil from the tanker vessel at 35,000 to 50,000 liters a day.

According to the models of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Naga and Pola in Oriental Mindoro would be the hardest hit. GCP News and PH



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# Mindoro oil spill victims reach 19,000

By Dempsey Reyes  
and Joey Marzan  
@Team\_Inquirer

Oriental Mindoro residents affected by the oil spill from the tanker Princess Empress have risen to 19,000, Social Welfare Secretary Rex Gatchalian announced on Saturday.

But the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) will begin on March 15 a cash-for-work program, in addition to the food relief that is already being distributed, to help affected residents and pump-prime the local economy.

"Our list of beneficiaries keep on expanding since more areas are being affected by the spill," Gatchalian said in a radio interview on Saturday.

"All of them will be given food packs and these are not just one-time food packs, but it will be [sustained] since we all know that they weren't able to do their daily work because of the spill," Gatchalian added.

The DSWD has been distributing food packs in Oriental Mindoro shortly after the MT Princess Empress sank in waters between Mindoro island and Marinduque.

But the resulting oil spill has devastated almost all towns in Mindoro's east coast, particularly Pola town, before moving south, then southwest before reaching an island village of Taytay, Palawan, on Friday.

## Cash-for-work program

According to the Maritime Industry Authority, it had already communicated with the operator of the tanker, RDC Reield Marine Services Inc., and suspended its safety certificate until it satisfies reportorial requirements.

Under the cash-for-work program, affected residents will be paid P355 daily (the minimum wage in the Mimaropa region) for 15 days to help in the oil spill cleanup led by the Department of Environment and

Natural Resources (DENR).

Gatchalian said the wages will be paid by the DSWD every five days over the 15-day period.

## P84-M cleanup budget

"The fishermen there want to be part of the solution. They don't want to sit idly there and just watch while their home province is being cleaned up by other people," he explained.

The DSWD has allotted more than P84.4 million for the program, but that was only for about 14,220 expected participants.

Gatchalian, however, said the program will also be implemented in other areas that may be affected by the oil spill.

The residents will also be trained on proper protocols on cleaning up an oil spill, Gatchalian said.

Maria Rosario Vergeire, officer in charge of the Department of Health, has already gone to Mindoro to help orient residents on the proper protocols, he added.

If need be, Gatchalian said, the program may also be expanded to other affected areas, like Antique and Palawan.

After devastating fishing villages in Mindoro's eastern coast, the oil spill moved to the island town of Caluya in neighboring Antique, a group of five islands in the Tablas Strait between Mindoro and Panay.

Gatchalian said affected families already received P8,000 cash assistance from the DSWD and more families may receive such aid by next week.

The department will also have an emergency cash transfer program to over 1,000 individuals in Agutaya, Palawan.

The Office of Civil Defense's (OCD) regional office in Western Visayas said agricultural damage in Caluya town had already reached P3.8 million.

At least 16,400 liters of oil were found stretching eight kilometers off Semirara and Liwagao islands, the OCD said in a report. **INQ**

  
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## Oil spill posibleng umabot sa Boracay

Maaaring umabot pa sa pamosong tourist destination na Boracay island ang oil spill mula sa isang tanker na lumubog sa karagatang sakop ng Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, ayon sa Department of Tourism (DOT).

Sa isang pahayag nitong Biyernes, sinabi ng DOT na ang pamahalaang lokal ng Malay, Aklan ay pinaghahandaan na ang posibilidad na epekto ng oil spill sa kanilang nasa-sakupan sakaling umabot na ito doon.

"The PCG and the Malay Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office (MDRRMO) are continuously conducting roving 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," sabi pa ng DOT.

Nakipag-ugnayan narin ang DOT Western Visayas Regional Office sa lokal na pamahalaan ng Malay para sa posibilidad na magpaabot ng tulug sa mga turista sa Bora-

cay sakaling umabot ang spillage sa coastal area ng isla.

Samantala, sinabirin ng DOT na ang pinakamatinding naapektuhan ng oil spill ay ang bayan ng Pola, sa Oriental Mindoro, kung saan matatagpuan ang marine protected areas at mga beach resort.

Kabilang sa sinasabing napasok na nglangis na tumagas mula sa MT Princess Empress ang KingFisher Reserve, St. John the Baptist Marine Sanctuary, Song of the Sea Fish Sanctuary, Stella Mariz Fish Sanctuary, Bacawan Fish Sanctuary, St. Peter the Rock Fish Sanctuary, at San Isidro Labrador Fish Sanctuary, Bihya Beach, 3 Cottage, Long Beach K. I, Aguada Beach Resort, Oloroso Beach Resort, Munting Buhangin Tagumpay Beach Resort, at Buhay na Tubig White Beach Resort, na pawang nasa Pola.

Patuloy naman ang pagsisikap na malinis ang coastal areas upang mas mapagaan ang epekto sa

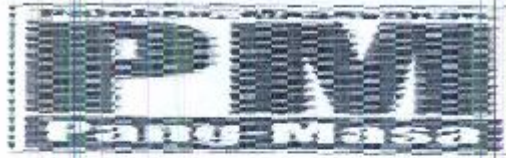
coastal communities at marine life.

Gayundin ang clean-up drives na isinasagawa mga baybayin ng Sitio Sabang, Barangay Tinogbo, Liwagao Island, Barangay Sibolo, at Sitio Tambak, sa Barangay Semirara na pawang nasa Caluya, Antique.

Nakikipag-ugnayan narin ang DOT sa Tubbataha Management Office sa Cagayancillo, Palawan para mapaghandaan ang mga hakbang sakaling abutin din ang Tubbataha Reef, na sikat na diving destination.

"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," ani DOT Sec. Christina Garcia-Frasco.

Aniya, inaasahan pa naman ngayong taon ang pagdaong ng 24 na cruise ships sa Mindoro, Pombion, Marinduque at Palawan. (*Ludy Bermudo*)



# Sa lumubog na barko sa Mindoro.. **OIL SPILL, POSIBLENG UMABOT SA BORACAY**

**P**osibleng umabot pa ang oil spill sa Boracay Island sa Aklan, ang isa sa mga pamilyarong tourist destination ng bansa, mula sa lumubog na tanker sa karagatang sakop ng Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, ayon sa Department

of Tourism (DOT). Ayon sa DOT, naghabanda na ang pamahalaang lokal ng Malay, Aklan, sa posibilidad na epekto ng oil spill sa kanilang nasakupan sakaling umabot na ito roon. "The PCG and the

Malay Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office (MDRRMO) are continuously conducting roving and monitoring along the coasts of Boracay, and have prepositioned oil slick booms in strategic areas around the

**NI LUDY BERMUDO** island in anticipation of the oil spills," ayon sa DOT. Nakipag-ugnayan narin ang DOT Western Visayas Regional Office sa lokal na pamahalaan ng Malay para sa posibilidad

na magpaabot ng tulong sa mga turista sa Boracay sakaling umabot ang spillage sa coastal area ng isla. Samantala, sinabi rin ng DOT na ang pinakamatinding nampektuhan ng oil spill ay ang bayan ng Pola, sa Oriental Mindoro,

kung saan matatagpuan ang marine protected areas at mga beach resort. Patuloy naman ang pagsisikap na malinis ang coastal areas upang mas mapagaan ang epekto sa coastal communities at marine life.

Gayundin ang clean-up drives na isinasagawa mga baybayin ng Sitio Sabang, Barangay Tinogbo, Liwagao Island, Barangay Sibolo, at Sitio Tumbak, sa Barangay Serrirara, na pawang nasa Caluya, Antique.



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# Cash aid for oil spill-affected families can be drawn from ₱37-B DSWD fund – Angara

By MARIO CASAYURAN

Senator Juan Edgardo Angara called on the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to ensure that all the affected families in the oil spill brought about by the sinking of M/T Princess Empress off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28 would receive assistance at the soonest possible time.

As chairman of the Senate Finance Committee that deliberates on the annual national budget, Angara said the ₱5.268-trillion General Appropriations Act (GAA) of 2023 contains ₱37 billion for the Protective Services for Individuals and Families in Difficult Circumstances (PSFIDC) of the DSWD that could be tapped for the assistance to the affected families.

Specifically, the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS), that is part of the PSFIDC, could cover the situation in Oriental Mindoro based on the guidelines issued by the DSWD, he explained.

"The AICS covers a broad set of beneficiaries who are in a state of active crisis or crisis situation and that is precisely what has befallen the residents of nine municipalities of Oriental Mindoro with this massive environmental disaster," Angara said.

"Most of the affected municipalities are coastal communities whose residents rely on fishing as their primary source of livelihood. With the suspension of all fishing activities there, the families are faced with uncertainty over how to put food on their tables. This is where government can step in with its programs on cash aid and emergency employment."

A state of calamity has been raised over 77 coastal villages of Oriental Mindoro and based on data from the DSWD, more or less 19,500 families have been affected by the disaster.

Angara urged the DSWD to fast track the downloading of AICS funds for the affected families to help them with their basic necessities such as food, transportation and medical services.

From the initial ₱20 billion proposed by Malacañang for the PSFIDC under the 2023 National Expenditure Program (NEP), Congress raised this amount by ₱17 billion to allow the DSWD to cover more disadvantaged Filipinos, who require temporary assistance immediately.

Apart from the AICS, Angara said the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) should provide emergency employment to the affected residents through its Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/

Displaced Workers (TUPAD) program.

Under the TUPAD, emergency employment to displaced, unemployed and seasonal workers would range from 10 to 30 days.

Angara said the job of cleaning oil in the affected areas could be offered to residents who would earn while helping their communities.

A total of ₱20.1 billion was provided under the 2023 GAA for the TUPAD/ Government Internship Program.

This is a ₱4.5-billion increase from the ₱15.5 billion proposed under the NEP.

Apart from the fisherfolk, workers in the tourism sector in the province were also affected by the oil spill.

## Oil spill inquiry eyed

Meanwhile, Senator Cynthia Villar is seeking an inquiry into the oil spill from the sunken M/T Princess Empress that has compromised the marine ecosystem, biodiversity, tourism industry, health, and livelihood of the people.





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THE SPOKESMAN OF THE PHILIPPINE PROGRESS  
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Villar filed Senate Resolution (SR) No. 537 directing the Senate Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change to conduct, in aid of legislation, a probe on the escalating adverse effects of oil spill from the oil tanker. Villar chairs the particular committee.

While reports said the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Philippine Coast Guard and the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) have assessed the oil spill incident, Villar pointed out that no concrete action to contain it has been initiated.

She cited urgent calls by the local government units (LGUs) concerned, the people affected and environmentalists for the government to act swiftly to contain the oil spill and avoid further damage to the environment, livelihood and health of the people, and the tourism industry.

Villar noted reports by University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute experts which said the oil spill could possibly affect over 36,000

hectares of coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass across Oriental Mindoro, Occidental Mindoro, Palawan and Antique.

The oil spill also threatens the marine biodiversity of the Verde Island Passage, considered by scientists as the center of the world's marine biodiversity. There were already findings of dead fishes, marine life and sea birds.

"The oil spill has likewise affected the tourist destinations in Oriental Mindoro, such as the Bihiya Beach, 3 Cottage, Long Beach K. I, Aguada Beach Resort, Oloroso Beach Resort, Munting Buhangin Tagumpay Beach Resort, and Buhay na Tubig White Beach Resort in Oriental Mindoro, and even threatens to affect Boracay, the country's premiere tourist destination," she said. "Apart from the environmental damage to the marine ecosystem, biodiversity, fisheries and tourism, the livelihood and health of the people in the area are already adversely affected by the said oil spill."



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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### GSIS opens emergency loan to oil spill victims

The Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) announced that members and pensioners who were affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro can avail themselves of emergency loan. In a statement, Wick Veloso, GSIS president and general manager, said the pension fund has earmarked P315 million in emergency loan to victims of the oil spill, which emanated from a motor tanker that capsized off the coast Naujan last Feb. 29. "The oil spill has affected more than half of Oriental Mindoro. With our emergency loan program, we hope to alleviate the plight of nearly 13,000 GSIS members who are working or residing in the affected areas and pensioners who reside there," Veloso said. Veloso added that GSIS has allocated a total budget of P5.2 billion for its emergency loan program for the year. The municipalities of Baneud, Bongabong, Bulalacao, Olana, Miravalay, Naujan, Pinamalayan, Pola, and Roxas in Oriental Mindoro have been declared under a state of calamity. Upon receipt of the required documents from the Provincial Government of Oriental Mindoro, GSIS will open the emergency loan to affected 11,024 active members, and 1,896 old-age and disability pensioners. Qualified to apply are members in active service and not on leave of absence without pay, have at least three months of paid premiums within the last six months prior to application; have no pending administrative or criminal case; have no due and demandable loan; and have a net take-home pay of not lower than P3,000 after all required monthly obligations have been deducted. Old-age and disability pensioners are also qualified to apply if their resulting net monthly take-home pension after loan availment is at least 25% of their basic monthly pension. Members with existing emergency loan balance may borrow up to P40,000 to pay off their previous emergency loan balance and still receive a maximum net amount of P20,000. Meanwhile, pensioners and those without existing emergency loan may apply for a P20,000 loan. (Chino S. Leyco)



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PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF DENR  
WORKERS from the DENR-EMB Region 4B, Philippine Coast Guard, and the  
Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office install absorbent  
booms at Callmawawa River, Casilagan River, and Barangay Misong in Pola,  
Oriental Mindoro to contain the oil spill from the sunken *MT Princess Empress*.



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## DENR seeks to address gender gap in mining

By DANESSA RIVERA

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is looking to address gender gap in the mining sector amid various challenges faced by women in the sector.

"We will be revisiting the Philippine Mining Act (and) we will be looking at this in tandem with the Magna Carta for Women," DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga said in a recent luncheon hosted by the Philippine Mining Club.

She cited a 2020 scoping study commissioned by the Philippine Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) which laid down key issues women face in the mining industry.

In the study, the DENR chief said women constitute a minority of the workforce, with only a few occupying technical and leadership positions in mining companies.

The environmental problems linked to mining operations such as pollution of rivers and drying up of water sources puts pressures on women as household managers and as providers.

The study also noted the lack of a sustainable livelihood outside employment of mining companies.

There is also an absence of guidelines on the inclusions of gender responsive projects in the Social Development and Management Program (SDMP) and the minimum participation of women in the development of these programs, according to the study.

Finally, there are gaps in the context and implementation of policies and frameworks to address gender dimensions in the mining industry.

"We hope there will be a more in depth and a more comprehensive look at gender and mining. There is a need to ensure women's representation in the mining industry is meaningful in all levels of decision making," Loyzaga said.

She urged the mining industry to work together to ensure that the sector becomes an enabling and empowering environment for women.

"We hope this would include rescaling, upscaling, strengthening education to motivate women to pursue careers that are very important and related to this industry," she said.

In its own backyard, the DENR is working on mainstreaming gender and development (GAD) into its policies.

"Within this year, you will hear something from us in terms of gender," Loyzaga said.



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# Bill seeks to create body to protect Sierra Madre

BY EDJEN OLIQUINO  
@tribunephil\_eao

A proposed law calling for the creation of a body to manage and safeguard the Sierra Madre mountain range has gained traction in Congress.

The unnumbered substitute bill of House Bills 1214 and 1972, which both seek to protect the 540-kilometer range from deforestation by creating the Sierra Madre Development Authority, hurdled the House ways and means panel on Monday, subject to amendments.

The Sierra Madre region contains most of the nation's 68 Protected Areas, including national parks, watershed forest reserves, natural monuments, and marine reserves.

It serves as Luzon's "storm barrier," guarding various provinces against the onslaught of typhoons that are becoming more potent owing to climate change.

Isabela Rep. Inno Dy, one of the

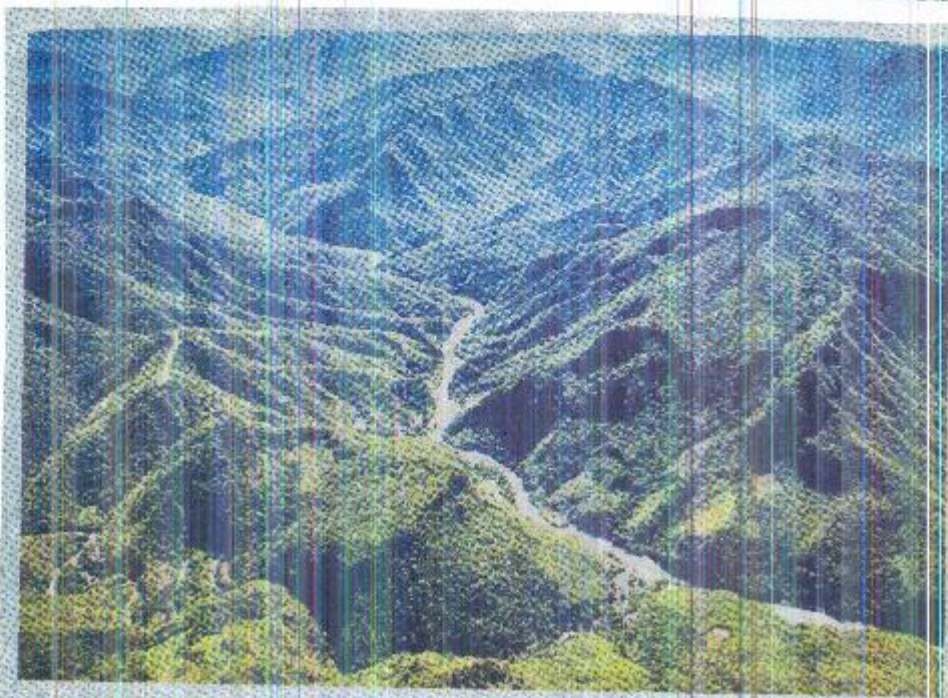
measure's proponents, said the SDMA will promote the development and balanced growth of Sierra Madre and its surrounding areas. Doing so should be a top priority, he stressed, as lives and livelihoods are on the line.

However, the Department of Finance said during the hearing that the creation of SDMA is inconsistent with the current thrust of the Marcos administration to streamline and rationalize its corporate sector and the bureaucracy.

Under the legislation, the body will be under the Office of the President, which will also collect regulatory fees.

House deputy minority lawmaker France Castro questioned why the proposed body should fall under the authority of the President when it could be governed by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Earlier, Rizal Rep. Fidel Nograles, the other proponent, expressed hope that Congress would prioritize the bill following President Marcos Jr.'s vow that addressing climate change would be one of his government's top priorities.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF H2CORE, INC.

THE Sierra Madre region contains most of the nation's 68 Protected Areas, including national parks, watershed forest reserves, natural monuments, and marine reserves.



# Leveling up PHL eagle conservation breeding

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

AT the foot of Mount Apo in Barangay Malagos, Davao District, Davao City, sits the Philippine Eagle Center (PEC), an 8.4-hectare facility adjacent to the Malagos Watershed that is being run and operated by the Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF).

In partnership with the local government of Davao City, the PEF is now developing another facility to relocate the breeding pairs at the PEC. It is a preventive measure in case of an outbreak of zoonotic diseases that can wipe out the entire Philippine eagle population at the center.

At the same time, the PEF is leveling up its conservation breeding program by attempting, for the first time, a captive breeding that will hopefully boost the chances of survival of the eagles bred in captivity upon release to their natural habitats.

"While we are constructing a new facility, the fortification of PEC is continuing," said Jayson Ibanez, director for Research and Conservation at the PEF, told the BusinessMirror in an interview on February 27.

"Recently we completed a solid perimeter wall around the pre-existing facility. This coming Arbor Day, we will plant trees as buffer along its perimeter," Ibanez added.

## Rescue and rehabilitation center

THE PEC has served as home for rescued Philippine eagle, a critically endangered species that is endemic to the Philippines, and other endangered birds of prey, including wild animals, for 35 years now.

The PEC currently houses 32 Philippine eagles—either rescued or bred in captivity—which number has significantly increased since the conservation breeding program started in the early 1990s.

So far, the PEC has produced a total of 29 Philippine eagles, half of its number are still alive.

Besides the Philippine eagle, the Pinner's hawk eagle is also being bred in the facility, with 10 of this unique species have been bred in captivity.

Previously thought to be a common hawk eagle, the Pinner's hawk eagle is now viewed as a distinct species. It is endemic to Mindanao and could be distinguished because of its crown-like feathers on the head.

## Wild animal sanctuary

WHILE it is primarily dedicated to the conservation breeding and rehabilitation of eagles, the PEC also serves as a conservation education and tourist destination in Davao City.

A SAITWATER crocodile, one of the wildlife kept at the PEC, is older than the facility itself. It was rescued 38 years ago and was the first inhabitant of the facility before it became the rescue center for the Philippine eagle and other raptors. PEC/PTC



Besides raptors, the PEC serves as home to other wildlife, such as the Brahminy kite.

Other unique birds found in the PEC are the white-bellied sea eagle, Philippine serpent eagle and the giant scops owl.

The PEC is also a sanctuary for the Philippine warty pig, Philippine brown deer, Asian palm civet, a crocodile that is older than the facility itself, and other wild animals.

## Tender loving care

ALL the wild animals found at the PEC are rescued after they were shot or severely injured, confiscated from the illegal wildlife trade, or hatched for breeding purposes, Ibanez said.

"All of the eagles and other species here are provided the tender loving care they deserved. While they can no longer be released back into the wild, we make sure that their stay at the center is pleasant," he said.

Ibanez pointed out that "they are well-protected, well-fed and they serve very important purposes, like for information and education or breeding."

## Tourist destination

THE PEC is not a tourist magnet because of the wild animals alone. It is also a small park in its own right.

The PEC Trail, divided into different areas, are learning opportunities with the help of a PEC tour guide.

Visitors learn about different wildlife through the Raptor Road, Talm Alley, Macaque Island, Eagle Duplex Enclosure, Hawk Walk, Rainforest Walk, Fairing Dome, Brown deer, Crocodile enclosures and audio visual presentations.

The Flight zone within the PEC, meanwhile, is an open area—a hub for the rescued birds' enrichment activities.

It is used for flight demonstrations and socialization with their keepers and guests. It gives the birds a creative outlet for the physical facility, as well as a mental exercise.

The enrichment activities, the PEC said, gives sanctuary animals options on how else to spend their time.

The PEC Arboretum and Nursery were put up recently in partnership with the Energy Development Corp.

While still in its initial phase, the Arboretum ensures the perpetuation of endemic and even rare floral species in the center for public viewing.

It also serves as a library of trees, as well as a source of seedlings for future nursery establishment and eventually, tree planting.

## Breeding sanctuary

THE soon-to-be constructed Philippine Eagle Conservation Breeding Sanctuary (PECBS), a 13-hectare forest in Barangay Eden, Davao City, will be better and bigger, devoid of threats that are already looming at the PEC.

At the recent soft launching of the PECBS, Ibanez said the facility within a 100-hectare reservation in Davao City will house seven breeding cages and six duplex cages for a total of 26 Philippine eagles.

Only breeding pairs of the Philippine eagle will be brought to the new breeding facility once they are ready, Ibanez said.

The target date for moving in is on April 22 Earth Day, with three eagle pairs as its first residents.

Identified for first batch of transfer are pairs Fanyuan and Agamur, Arels and MVP Matang, and Hiyas and Nagiting, Ibanez said.

"This is a response to the increasing threat to the Philippine eagle at our current facility in Barangay Malagos in Davao City. The establishment of a new breeding sanctuary that is isolated, away from human communities, major roads and potential sources of disturbances is part of our initiative to further protect our captive eagles," he explained.

## Ideal breeding ground

ACCORDING to Ibanez, the cages that will be built at the new facility will be designed for natural breeding and incubation, as well as natural rearing.

"There will be a nest platform, a feeding platform, but there will be a back door at the nest platform that we can open just in case we need to intervene to retrieve an egg or eaglet," he explained.

"We will level up Philippine eagle conservation breeding through this approach. Doing so also imprints captive-bred eaglets to its kind, and this can make our future releases back to the wild successful," Ibanez said.

Dominic Tadena, senior animal keeper and manager of the Conservation Breeding Program at PEC, said the new facility will be better with the humidity in the area and isolation from human activities, with a low natural breeding.

PEC has two methods of eagle



DOMINIC TADENA with a captive-bred female Pinner's hawk eagle, PTC/PEF

breeding. The eggs are produced through natural pairing and artificial insemination.

Its personnel are in charge of rearing the eaglet upon hatching around two months after being placed in an incubator.

"There are birds who do not accept the same species, which is why artificial insemination is also used. When the male is in heat, we take semen and inject it into the female to produce the egg," Ibanez said.

He said the humidity at the new facility is ideal for natural breeding.

He said this will be the first time the PEF will attempt to allow natural breeding. Meaning, after natural pairing, the eagle pairs will be the ones to incubate the egg. Upon successful hatching, the parent eagles will be allowed to do the natural rearing, unlike at the PEC wherein puppets are used by PEF personnel to feed the chicks.

"With this new method, if successful, we will have better chances of eagles surviving in the wild upon their release," Ibanez added.

## Pride of Davao City

DAVAO City considers the Philippine eagle and hosting the PEF facility as its pride and honor.

Interviewed by the BusinessMirror, Councilor Tek Ocampo, chairman of the Environment Committee of the Davao City Council, said Mayor Sebastian Duterte is very supportive of the relocation of the Philippine eagle to help the PEF protect and conserve the country's national bird.

"We, at the government, are supporting the project of the PEF. This

is important because this will ensure the safety of the eagles. We, at the City Council, of course, support this. For us, the Philippine eagle is our pride. Because the Philippine eagle is our national bird," Ocampo said.

He said the Eden Nature Reserve is the perfect place to erect the sanctuary.

## Protected against threats

UNLIKE in Barangay Malagos, the would-be breeding facility in Barangay Eden will be "off-limits" to poultry and game warden firms.

Lt. Rey Vallesjo (Ret.), of the Public Safety Office and Security Command Center assigned at the nature reserve in Barangay Eden, said 13 personnel will be conducting regular patrols in the area to prevent illegal settlements and prevent destructive human activities, including the construction of buildings in the area.

"There will be regular patrolling, including the Bantay Gabat [Forest Guards], to prevent human encroachment and construction of buildings or any infrastructure in this area," Vallesjo said.

Engineer Mildred Martinez, a consultant at the Eden Task Force, said the city government plans to develop the 105-hectare reserve into a nature resort, but assured the 10-hectare of the PEF will be "off-limits" to such a development project.

"We will develop this area for ecotourism, to generate revenue and help sustain the operation. Of course, the PEF facility will be spared from the development that will take place here," she assured.



# US HOSTS CSO SUMMIT TO PROTECT PHL MARINE RESOURCES, BIODIVERSITY

**T**HE United States government, in partnership with more than 60 civil society organizations (CSOs), convened the first-ever CSO Summit in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, on March 3, said the US Embassy in Manila in a news release.

The event aimed to coordinate action for marine biodiversity conservation and protection in the coastal areas of Northern Luzon, Mindoro, and Palawan that face the South China Sea.

Ryan Washburn, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) mission director, led the CSO Summit. It highlighted the US government's continued commitment to supporting local stakeholders in conserving biodiversity and protecting marine resources from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities of domestic and foreign fleets, the US Embassy said.

"As an enduring friend, partner and ally, the United States will continue to collaborate with local stakeholders in the western Philippines to support sustainable fishing practices, strengthen food security and advance the conservation of marine ecosystems as we work toward achieving our shared goal of inclusive growth and a free,



USAID Philippines Mission Director Ryan Washburn and Palawan Third District Rep. Edward Hagedorn join participants at the first-ever CSO Summit in Palawan on March 3. USAID PHOTO

prosperous, and secure Indo-Pacific region," Washburn said.

Palawan Third District Rep. Edward Hagedorn, USAID Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Senior Adviser Kathryn Booker-Veloz, and representatives from academia, women's groups and indigenous peoples living along the seaboard attended the Summit.

"We know that the protection and preservation of the West Philippine Sea is a herculean task that requires collective, whole-of-nation action," Hagedorn said in his remarks.

"We thank the USAID Fish Right Program for leading this summit and bringing together representatives from universities, NGOs (nongovernment organizations), municipal



USAID Philippines Mission Director Ryan Washburn (second from right) and USAID DEIA Senior Adviser Kathryn Booker-Veloz (right) turn over three fish-dryers and freezers to the women of the Tagburos fishing village in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan. USAID PHOTO

fisherfolk peoples' organizations, commercial fishers' associations, the private sector, co-ops, and alliances to prepare a common agenda and action plan protecting West Philippine Sea resources and addressing food security and livelihood issues.

The CSO Summit was organized as a follow-up to the visit of US Vice President Kamala Harris to Palawan in November 2022

where she underscored the importance of the US-Philippines partnership in creating economic opportunities and protecting coastal ecosystems throughout the region, the US Embassy said.

While in Puerto Princesa City, Washburn and Booker-Veloz handed over freezers and other fish drying materials valued at P00,000 (\$5,460) to women associations in the fishing

village of Tagburos. This donation will help the local fishing community reduce post-harvest losses, the US Embassy added.

The two USAID officials also joined partners from the Gerry Roxas Foundation to award environment grants valued at P64 million (\$1.2 million) to four local organizations: Nagkakaisang Tribu ng Palawan, Palawan Biodiversity Conservation Advocates, World Wide Fund for Nature, and Community-Centered Conservation.

Through the grants, the CSOs will implement Palawan-based projects on biodiversity conservation, wildlife protection, natural resource management, and local climate actions.

Currently, USAID is implementing three biodiversity conservation projects covering the Philippine waters in the South China Sea: Fish Right, the Sustainable Interventions for Biodiversity, Oceans and Landscapes, and Investing in Sustainability and Partnerships for Inclusive Growth and Regenerative Ecosystems, the US Embassy pointed out.

The three projects have a combined value of P4.3 billion (\$78.2 million) in development assistance from the US government.



## Developing and promoting ecotourism and nature-based tourism

Last March 1, 2023, the Senate Tourism Subcommittee on Select Senate Bills on Ecotourism and on the Proposed Senate Resolution on Nature-Based Tourism held a hearing to discuss various measures and ultimately, to find solutions and initiatives to advance the domestic tourism industry's recovery while instilling eco-consciousness amid the country's upcoming summer months and in anticipation of the influx of tourists this year owing to "revenge travel."

The following measures were tackled: Senate Bill 238, establishing the Northern Antique Protected Seascape and Landscape Act of 2022 filed by Senate President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda; several bills which I filed, namely, Senate Bill 1166, declaring the Pag-Asa Island as an ecotourism cluster and protected area; and Proposed Senate Resolution 472, for the creation of policy reforms and budgetary expenditures to develop the Philippines' potential to be the leading country in the world for sustainable Nature-Based Tourism (NBT).

Discussions on Senate Bill 238 centered on Northern Antique's crucial role in the region's development and its surrounding environment. Department of Tourism (DOT) Region VI Regional Director Crisma Rodriguez emphasized how



**BETTER DAYS**  
SENATOR SONNY ANGARA

Northern Antique positively contributed to tourism growth in Antique, with five of its municipalities registering 14,311 tourist arrivals, or equivalent to almost half of all tourist arrivals in the province and with receipts amounting to P103 million owing to the area's wide range of recreation activities like white river rafting, river tubing, diving, among others. Moreover, local chief executives reiterated that Northern Antique is both a tourism destination and a habitat to dugongs, which are classified as vulnerable species by the World Wildlife Fund

(WWF). All the concerned stakeholders concurred that the proposed measure will ensure the protection of the flora and fauna of the Northern Antique seascape and landscape for the benefit of the local communities and future Antiqueños.

For Senate Bill 1166, Rep. Johnny Pimentel (Surigao del Sur 2D), being the counterpart measure's author in the House of Representatives, started the discussion by explaining the bill's noble purpose, which is to assert our sovereign rights through economic initiative or soft diplomacy and to pave the way for the Pag-Asa Island's development. Rep. Edgardo Egay Salvame (Palawan 1D) also manifested his support on the measure and said that the declaration of the Pag-Asa Island Cluster as a protected area would help ensure its coastal and marine resources are protected from overfishing, poaching, large-scale ocean filling or reclamation. While Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Undersecretary Augusto dela Peña manifested the agency's support to the bill, he flagged the need for supporting infrastructures and resources to guarantee peace and order so that the safety and security of civilians and civilian activities would be unhampered. Pag-Asa Island is the only Philippine-occupied island in the Spratlys that is inhabited by civilians. We are talking about pristine waters that is rich in biodiversity that makes it an ideal destination for tourists.

Proposed Senate Resolution 472 is a result of our meeting with academics from the University of the

Philippines (UP) who observed that we are not maximizing the promotion of NBT in spite of the competitive advantage our country has because of its wealth of resources. Masungi Georeserve trustee Billie Dumallang agreed that nature-based tourism in the country is still underdeveloped and undermarketed. In fact the United Nations Development Program found that the gap on financing for biodiversity in the Philippines is at 80 percent. Biodiversity Conservation Society of the Philippines pressed the need for consultations to identify protected areas and other nature reserves in the country that have the potential to become flagship destinations for NBT.

As Philippine tourism was heavily hit by the recent Covid-19 pandemic, there is a need to diversify the sector's products and services while being conscious of sustainability. We fervently hope these discussions would form part of the country's rallying cry to further advance and develop our competitive advantages to propel growth and recovery in the tourism sector.

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(Senator Sonny Angara has been in public service for 18 years — nine years as Representative of the lone district of Aurora, and nine as Senator. He has authored, co-authored, and sponsored more than 330 laws. He is currently serving his second term in the Senate.)





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## Number one in the world... and I'm ashamed

Let's be honest, it's not often we Filipinos can legitimately say we're numero uno in the world in some category. Back in the early years of this century, I would hear reports about how we were number one in "speed texting" and text messaging; and you're probably aware that if not outright number one, we're in the top percentile globally, when it comes to hours spent on social media by a country's population. Nothing to especially be proud about, but nothing for which we should bow our heads in shame — although I would like to see how it relates to a nation's productivity.

So when I saw a survey proclaim the Philippines as number one in the world, I hung my head in shame with the realization that it was for Highest Ocean Plastic Waste Polluters. To my chagrin, I looked at the pictorial representation, and discovered we were even beating the competition by miles, and it would probably be pointless to even question the methodology by which these figures were arrived at.

For 2021, with over 1,000 rivers surveyed, as these rivers account for 80 percent of global riverine plastic emissions into the ocean, the Philippines could claim dubious credit for an annual estimation of contributing

356,371 metric tons of plastic waste. The closest single country after us would be India, with 126,513 metric tons, and that's 50 percent less than our polluting capabilities. After the Philippines and India, you'd have to direct your attention to Malaysia and their 73,098 metric tons. To put it into perspective, after the top 10 country polluters, the rest of the world combined, come in at 176,012 metric tons — a far cry from our record waste emission.

Now I know this is a 2021 chart, and we recently enacted the Extended Producer Responsibility Act of 2022, Republic Act No. 11898; but let's also be open enough to admit that if we're talking about concerted public and private sector efforts to curb this alarming statistic, not enough is being done to downgrade these plastic waste emissions. The RA is directed towards producers of products generating plastic packaging waste, that they develop EPR programs. We can conduct beach clean-ups every so often; but any cursory glance at the mouths of our rivers and the state of our riverbanks as we head inland, will show that so much still needs to be done.

So what bugs me is how we can talk glibly about sustainability, about global warming and climate change,

about neutral carbon emissions, about environment conservation, protection, preservation, and regeneration — and yet so many of us are blithely ignoring how we lead the whole world in plastic waste emissions.

It's such a black eye to be living under, and the time for doing something about this is yesterday!

And if we try to take a look back at how this situation came about; I know some blame will have to be placed on our sachet culture; and how in the drive to sell consumer products in a nation where disposable income is on tinkle effect for the vast majority of the population, big corporations opted to instill this sachet culture, and took plastic packaging to a new level of consumption here.

Our deficient system of waste disposal and sanitation, the meager promulgation of garbage segrega-



HEARD IT  
THROUGH THE  
GRIPE-VINE:  
OUR NEW  
ABNORMAL  
PHILIP CU UNJIENG



STRATEGIC  
COMMUNICATION  
AND  
INITIATIVES  
SERVICE

THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRAMS  
SINCE 1909  
**MANILA BULLETIN**  
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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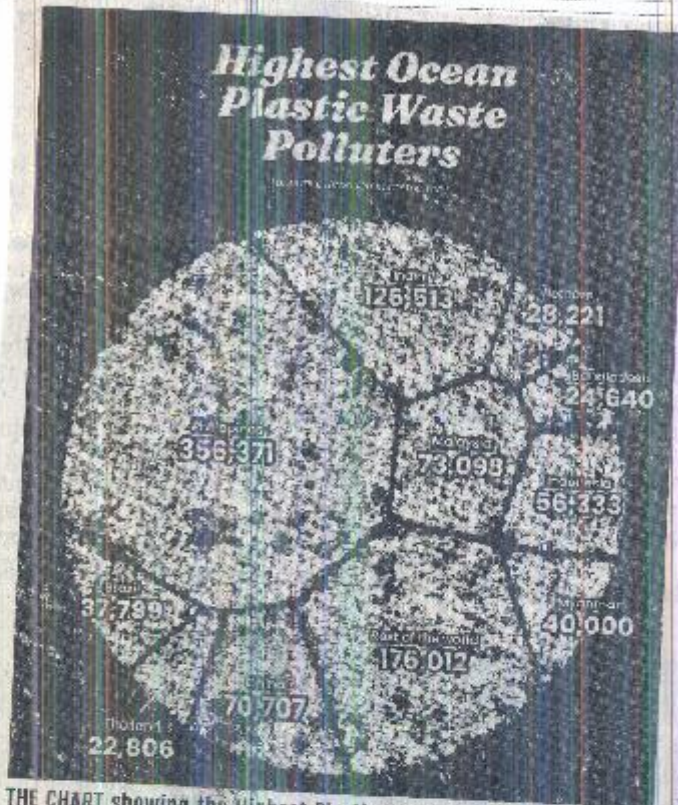
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THE CHART showing the Highest Plastic Waste Polluters, from 2021.  
(From science.org)

tion; these are all contributory to the sad state of affairs we find ourselves in. In essence, there is a deep-rooted systemic failure; and I'm left wondering what we can do. For unless it trickles down to our rural seaside communities, plus all the towns and villages inland that, on a daily basis, use the rivers and streams as their

natural waste disposal receptacle, nothing much will change.

Organizations such as Surfrider Foundation work tirelessly all over the world's coastal areas to raise awareness of this problem. They seek to make it a major concern of everyone. For the Foundation, it's not enough to say "I don't eat fish, or make use of plastic products." None of us can think this issue isn't our concern. We all have to actively be part of the solution -- and in our nation's case, that's so crucial.

The Deluge by Stephen Markley is a recently published novel that depicts an apocalypse in slow motion. There is no single epochal event; but minute, incremental chaos, political indifference, and with scientific papers, podcast transcripts, and White House briefings as

facts. Scary novel to ruminate on, and it may be oh-so-true.

We can be proud about being the country with the best beach destinations, but there's some irony in realizing that's coupled with being the world's most notorious Ocean Plastic Waste Polluter.



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## 'Ozone pollution linked to heart disease'

OZONE air pollution is linked to a higher rate of hospitalizations for heart diseases, according to a large study released on Friday, the latest warning of the health dangers posed by greenhouse gases.

While a layer of ozone in the upper atmosphere helps block harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation from reaching Earth, at ground level it is a major component of the smog polluting most big cities.

Scientists have warned that a different kind of air pollution, fine particulate matter known as PM2.5, causes 8.8 million

► **Pollution A3**

premature deaths a year, but ozone's full impact on health is still becoming clear.

Ozone is created in the atmosphere by a chemical reaction when two pollutants, often emitted by cars or industry, combine in the presence of sunlight, and has been shown to interfere with plant photosynthesis and growth.

The new study said it was the first to evaluate the risk of hospitalization for heart disease when ozone levels rise above the World Health Organization's daily guideline of 100 micrograms per cubic meter of air.

For the study, published in the *European Heart Journal*, a team of China-led researchers looked at data on hospital admissions from 2015 to 2017 in 70 Chinese cities collected for health insurance purposes.

The data covered 258 million people across 70 cities, representing roughly 18 percent of China's population.

The researchers compared the hospitalizations to air quality data tracked in real-time across the cities.

It found that — independent of other pollutants — ozone was associated with more than 3 percent of hospitalizations for coronary heart disease, heart failure and stroke.

Also, each increase of 10 micrograms of ozone per cubic meter of air was linked to a 0.75 percent rise in hospitalizations for heart attacks, and to a 0.40 percent increase for stroke.

"Although these increments look modest," the impact would be "amplified by more than 20 times" when ozone levels soar above 200 micrograms in the summer, study author Shaowei Wu of Xi'an Jiaotong University and his colleagues told Agence France-Presse.

In this extreme example, ozone exposure would be linked to 15 percent of heart attacks and 8 percent of strokes, the researchers said.

### Key for health, climate

The researchers called for more aggressive action to reduce the consumption of fossil fuels, as well as a warning system so people could limit their exposure on high ozone days.

Because the study was observational, it was not able to directly show that ozone pollution causes heart disease.

But Chris Malley, an air pollution researcher at York University in Britain, who was not involved in the study, said it added to a growing "weight of evidence that there is a causal relationship."

In 2017, research led by Malley estimated that ozone pollution was linked to more than 1 million deaths a year from respiratory disease.

"If cardiovascular disease were added to this total, then the health burden would be substantially higher than we estimated," Malley told AFP.

"Ozone is not just a threat to human health; it also has a large part to play in climate change," he added.

"Taking action to reduce ozone is therefore a key way to improve public health and combat climate change at the same time." **AFP**