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Senate reso sets investigation into destructive Oriental Mindoro oil spill

By BUTCH FERNANDEZ
@butchBM

SENATE probers, acting on Senator Cynthia Villar's motion, are poised to mount an inquiry into the oil spill leaking from the tanker MT Princess Empress that sank off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, damaging the marine ecosystem and biodiversity in the area and beyond.

In filing Senate Resolution 537, Villar asked the Senate Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change to spearhead the probe on the escalating adverse effects of the oil spill from the tank ship that sank off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro last February 28.

The Villar resolution also cited initial reports that the Department

of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Philippine Coast Guard and Office of Civil Defense (OCD) have assessed the oil spill incident, but the lawmaker lamented, "No concrete action to contain it has been initiated."

Moreover, the senator also received reports that urgent calls were made by the local government units (LGU) concerned, as well as the people directly affected and environmentalists asking 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 also cited reports by University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute experts that also warned that the oil spill can possibly "affect over 36,000 hectares of

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

According to the chairperson of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, the oil spill is also likely to threaten the marine biodiversity of the Verde Island Passage, considered by scientists as the center of the world's marine biodiversity, noting reports that "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 Suhay 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," Villar added.

Based on the monitoring report of the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO), nine out of the 13 towns in Oriental Mindoro have been affected by the oil spill while 10,362 families or 48,885 people were likewise affected.

The ill-fated tanker vessel was traversing the route from Limay, Bataan to Iloilo, carrying a around 800,000 liters of industrial fuel when it encountered rough sea conditions and engine trouble that resulted to the ship's sinking.



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REGIONS

Oil spill threatens VIP, experts say

CITY OF CALAPAN—The continuous leakage of industrial oil from a sunken fuel tanker in the waters off Oriental Mindoro is projected to reach this week the Verde Island Passage (VIP), known as the global center of marine biodiversity. The UP Marine Science Institute warned that the spill might spread further as changing wind directions pushed the slick northward toward VIP. —STORY BY INQUIRER STAFF

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VULNERABLE The coastline of Pola town in Oriental Mindoro is reeling from the widespread oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress as seen in this photo taken on March 6. The industrial fuel that leaked from the vessel has forced local fishermen to abandon their source of livelihood for now due to health risks. —PHOTO BY NOEL GUEVARA OF GREENPEACE

Oil spill in Oriental Mindoro threatens Verde Island Passage

Experts say weakening 'amihan' may push slick toward spot between Batangas and Mindoro known as global center of marine biodiversity

By **Madonna T. Virola,**
Krixia Subingsubing
and **Delfin T. Mallari Jr.**
@Team_Inquirer

CITY OF CALAPAN—The continuous leakage of industrial oil from the sunken MT Princess Empress in the waters off Oriental Mindoro province is projected to reach this week the Verde Island Passage (VIP), which is extremely rich in marine biodiversity, according to marine experts.

The University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP MSI) warned that the massive oil spill might yet spread further as changing wind directions caused by the weakening of the "amihan," or the northeast monsoon, now propelled some of the slick northwards toward the critical biodiversity center.

Speaking to the Inquirer, Dr. Irene Rodriguez of the UP MSI said that while most of the oil would still end up along Naujan town and Pola Bay in Oriental Mindoro, the weakening of the northeast monsoon winds could cause the oil earlier seen

to go southwards to northern Palawan, to flow northwards instead to VIP by March 16.

Naujan is 69 kilometers while the town of Pola is 109 km south of the VIP.

The UP MSI, in a report released Sunday, also said that the northward trajectory of the slick would likely affect the coastal areas of the provincial capital Calapan City, the Verde Island at the VIP and some parts of Batangas province.

Data-based prediction

The VIP is a strait that traverses Batangas and Mindoro. It is known to have the world's highest concentration of coastal fishes, corals, crustaceans, mollusks, seagrasses and mangroves.

Rodriguez said this prediction was based on latest data on wind direction and velocity, as well as satellite images from both the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration and the Philippine Space Agency.

Ideally, Rodriguez said, a weakened amihan should have

made containment of the oil spill easier, especially now that the government has identified the exact location of the sunken tanker that caused the spill.

However, "wind direction is very unpredictable," said Rodriguez. "Unfortunately, this would widen the area that would be affected by the oil slick."

On March 11, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said the actual depth of the ship's location was 389.1 meters and it sank 13.89 km northeast of Balisungan Point, Pola town. It capsized on Feb. 28 while en route to Iloilo province from Linao town in Bataan province due to engine trouble. It was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil and was initially reported to have sunk in the waters off Naujan town the following day.

According to the PCG, the oil spill has also spread to Oriental Mindoro's neighboring provinces of Antique and Palawan.

The UP MSI earlier estimated that the spill would affect 20,000 hectares of coral reefs, 9,900 ha of mangroves and 6,000 ha of seagrass. Most of these are found in

fragile marine ecosystems in Pola in Mindoro, Caluya in Antique and the Cuyo Group of Islands.

While the oil spill has yet to be contained, it remained a threat to the global center of marine biodiversity located in the VIP, including endemic species only found in the country and species that have yet to be discovered, according to various environmental groups.

The VIP is also home to endangered and threatened species, including the critically endangered Hawksbill sea turtle, whale sharks, manila rays, dugongs, humphead wrasses, giant groupers and giant clams.

But the UP MSI reiterated that the projection was just a forecast, noting that "the accuracy is difficult to determine."

It said the projection was based on the "weathering characteristics" of the bunker oil and a seepage rate of 1,000 barrels per day.

Different groups advocating the protection of VIP said the oil spill could also adversely affect tourism revenues and food security in the area.

On Monday, Calapan Mayor Malou Flores Morillo said she had called for an emergency meeting with various concerned government agencies early this month to prepare for the possible spread of the oil spill to the coastline of Calapan Bay.

In an interview, Morillo said the local government had formed a task force to address the impact of the spillage on the environment, health and livelihood of the residents.

"The construction of improvised oil spill barriers along Calapan Bay using rice straw has started with the help of volunteers," she said.

According to environmental group Protect VIP, the latest oil spill to threaten the area should serve as an eye-opener to the government to protect it from future similar incidents.

'No sufficient measure'

"This is not the first time that a vessel carrying highly polluting fuels leaked its contents into the VIP's waters," Fr. Edwin Gariguez, Protect VIP lead convener,

said in a statement on March 9.

Gariguez noted that "no sufficient measure is in place that could have prevented the latest oil spill from occurring or causing as massive a devastation as it already has."

He said more heavy industry developments, especially fossil fuel power plants and liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals, are being planned around the VIP area.

According to the group, VIP would be the site of eight proposed gas plants and seven planned LNG terminals.

The priest warned that more power plants and LNG terminals mean more shipping vessels passing through the marine corridor.

"This increases the possibility of a similar situation happening in the future," Gariguez said.

Gariguez demanded that the government provide the VIP with all necessary protection.

"We are in a race against time to stop even worse destruction in the lives of local communities and critical marine and coastal life," he stressed. **ma**



Regional Updates

Owner of sunken vessel says oil spill clean-up equipment, program under way

THE OWNER of the vessel carrying 800,000 liters of oil that sank off Negros Oriental, Mindoro assured on Monday that immediate clean-up and long-term response programs are under way, with activities currently focused on minimizing the impact of the spillage.

RDC Field Marine Services, owner of the *MT Princess Empress* tanker, said it is working with concerned agencies and international experts to make a strategy to "ensure most effective operation can be mounted."

"Our primary focus at this stage remains on the oil spill response and we are adopting a phased approach as advised by experts," RDC Vice President for Administration and External Relations Frizle Cabral-Tee said in a statement.

She said the company is conducting emergency measures such as deploying tugs with spill response equipment.

They have also coordinated with the French waste management company Le Floch Depollution to import needed equipment.

The International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation (ITOPF) and clean-up contractors are developing at-sea and shoreline response plans, Ms. Cabral-Tee said.

This will lay down details on the techniques, survey process, and objectives needed.

The IOTF will also lead a series of joint surveys on affected areas for clean-up plans.

"We are working closely with our insurers, and those affected by the spill will be duly advised on how to submit their claims for processing," she said.

"We must, however, emphasize that the immediate priority has to be the coastal clean-up, which directly im-

pacts the lives of the communities who depend on the sea," she added.

JAPANESE ASSISTANCE

Meanwhile, equipment and gears such as oil blotters, heavy oil absorption mats, working gloves, rubber boots, and protective workwear donated by the Japanese government arrived at the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) in Mindoro on Monday.

On Friday, a team of Japanese oil spill control experts arrived in the country to advise on the clean-up operations.

PCG Spokesperson Armando A. Balilo said in a radio interview that they might request needed equipment after the team is done evaluating oil spill sightings.

He added that there are ongoing talks with the United States Coast Guard

through the American Embassy for possible support on necessary assets.

"What is really needed are remotely operated vehicles, although the company already had discussion with a provider, if our partner countries may also send, it will be greatly appreciated and will be a great help to contain the leakage from the tanker," he said in Filipino.

The University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute, in its latest bulletin on the spill incident, showed through a trajectory model that the oil slick is threatening to reach the Verde Island Passage by March 16 due to the weakening northeast monsoon.

The passage is considered a key marine channel having the highest concentrations of coastal fishes, corals, crustaceans, mollusks, seagrasses, and mangroves. — **Sheldan Jay Talavera**



'Oil spill covers space of 1,000 football fields'

By Macon Ramos-Araneta and Maricel Cruz

THE oil spill from the sunken tanker M/T Princess Empress has spread to an area the equivalent of "around a thousand football fields," the environmental group Greenpeace Philippines said.

"Based on our satellite imagery from our mapping team in Greenpeace International, we have seen as of March 8, around 6.2 kilometers worth of oil is continually being spilled," Greenpeace Philippines campaigner Jefferson Chua told ANC in an interview.

"This is equivalent to around a thousand football fields. So, we can imagine how big that is," Chua added.

The tanker, which was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil, sank on February 28 off the waters of Naujan in Oriental Mindoro.

"With their projection of around a thousand barrels a day being spilled, we will see all of that 800,000 liters spilled,

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'Oil...

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which will put it way beyond the Guimaras oil spill that is considered the worst in Philippine history," Chua said.

In 2006, an oil tanker sank off the coast of Guimaras and spilled more than 500,000 liters of bunker fuel.

Greenpeace Philippines also raised the alarm that the oil spill may reach the Verde Island Passage — considered the center of marine biodiversity in the planet.

For his part, Puerto Galera Mayor Rocky Ilagan said there are no traces of the Mindoro oil spill yet in the island destination.

"If the oil arrives, we are ready," Ilagan said.

The University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute on Sunday showed the results of a recent simulation model on the oil spill crisis.

The simulation focused on the tanker's location from March 10 to 16 and claimed that the non-stop discharge of oil from the alleged seepage area and the weakening of the northeast monsoon or "amihan" may lead the oil to flow northwards toward Verde Island.

The oil trajectory will also affect the coastal areas of Calapan and some parts of Batangas, the UP MSI study noted.

So far, more than 137,000 people or 30,000 families living in the Mimaropa and Western Visayas regions—nearly double than previously reported—have already been affected by the oil spill, the government said.

800K liters of industrial fuel aboard vessel 'intact'

PCG: Oil slick 'operational fuel'

BY VICTOR REYES

THE Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) yesterday said the 800,000 liters of industrial oil fuel cargo of MT Princess Empress that sank off Oriental Mindoro last February 28 appears to be intact.

In a radio interview, PCG Rear Adm. Armand Balilo said the PCG believes the oil slick in the waters of Oriental Mindoro and nearby provinces came from the vessel's

operational fuel.

"We believe it's only the vessel's operational fuel that spilled," Balilo said, adding the vessel was also carrying about 10,000 liters of operational fuel when it sank in Naujan town and was later located in nearby Pola.

"There is an image given to us by NAMRIA (National Mapping and Resource Information Authority) and it appears that the tanker is still intact and there is no significant

leakage from its tanks," said Balilo.

He said the vessel continued to leak oil as of yesterday, reaching as far as Taytay town in Palawan.

The PCG had earlier claimed it had "contained" the oil spill.

"There's no longer a concern (in Taytay). The Coast Guard and the LGU (local government unit) were able to clean the affected shorelines. There is no more spill oil going to the area," Balilo said.

Palawan provincial disaster risk

reduction and management council office chief Jerry Alili said about 100 to 150 liters of oil have been collected in the shorelines of Barangay Calawag in Taytay.

Alili said a seaweed farm has been affected by the oil spill, adding they are gathering more information so the affected farmers can be given assistance.

"After we contained and cleared

See PCG ► Page B2



Japanese help.
 Equipment and gear donated by Japan through the Japan Disaster Relief are offloaded at the Philippine Coast Guard post in Mindoro. The support items include oil blotters, heavy oil absorption masks, working gloves, rubber boots, and protective workwear that are expected to boost the oil slick clean-up campaign.

ICA PHOTO

800k liters

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PCG

the oil slick there, there's no further oil spill in the area. Hopefully, that would be the last, it won't be followed by another incident," said Alili.

Alili said other LGUs in the province have prepared improvised oil spill booms to protect their areas.

He also said the provincial government has not imposed a fishing ban in the province "because the volume (of oil spill) seen (in the province) is not that significant."

Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humelito Dolor said the oil spill has taken a toll not only on fishermen and fish vendors but also on tourism and marine life.

Dolor could not immediately say the estimated cost of damage, adding he has formed a technical working group to assess the extent of the damage.

"We still don't have a final figure but our focus now is to contain the oil spilling from the tanker... and prevent the oil spill from reaching the shoreline of other barangays," said Dolor.

He said the oil slick has reached 13 more coastal barangays, aside from the 77 coastal barangays that were

placed under a state of calamity last week.

Dolor also disclosed that 122 residents have contracted oil spill related illnesses.

"Based on our latest count, 19,956 families or more than 99,000 individuals were already affected," he said.

Dolor said Pola town is the worst affected area, noting the oil slick has affected the shoreline of the town's coastal barangays.

Dolor also said the owner of the vessel has met with him and other provincial officials.

"They met with us and gave assurance that they are not going to run away from their obligations," said Dolor, adding the vessel owner also assured them they are doing all they can to address the situation.

"They informed us that a vessel from another country is due to arrive, it's capable of going straight to the (sunken vessel) and patch the leak," said Dolor.

He said the vessel's arrival will depend on the permit that will be issued by authorities.

Mayor Rocky Ilagan of Puerto Galera in Oriental Mindoro said they have not monitored traces of oil in

their area.

"Our shoreline is very clear," Ilagan said, adding that "if the oil spill reaches us, we are ready."

DSWD AID

Family food packs (FFPs) and non-food relief items (NFRIs) distributed to families affected by the oil spill in Regions IV-B (Mimaropa) and VI (Western Visayas) have reached more than P20 million, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) said.

The DSWD's Disaster Response Operations Monitoring and Information Center said that as of yesterday, 31,592 families or 141,988 persons from 122 barangays in Mimaropa and Western Visayas have been affected by the oil spill that started in Naujan.

More than P120.3 million worth of food and non-food relief items have been provided to affected communities.

DSWD said it has more than P2.02 billion worth of standby funds (P745.9 million) and stockpile (P1.277 billion) that are ready to be tapped and distributed. — *With Jocelyn Montemayor*

P750

stantial wage increases amid historic inflationary surges," she said in a statement.

The bill was co-authored by Reps. France Castro (PL, ACT) and Raoul Mannel (PL, Kabataan).

Brosas said workers' wages remain stagnant "while company profits increase and they also got savings for lower taxes under the CREATE law or the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises Act."

HB No. 7568 echoed the statement of workers groups that among the factors to consider in the determination of minimum wages, "wage boards should give more weight on the 'demand for living wages,' especially since workers' actual conditions show us that the current minimum wage rates barely enable working class families to escape or stay above mere subsistence.

"As legislators, we must consider the proposals forwarded by workers groups since it comes from their concrete situation," said the militant lawmakers.

The bill cited the BusinessWorld Top 1000 Corporations in the Philippines report that the aggregate gross revenue of the top companies jumped 17.5 percent in 2021 (or P13.44 trillion), from the P11.44 trillion posted during the height of the pandemic in 2020. This was the fastest gross revenue growth since the 24.4% expansion recorded in 2001.

As for micro and small enterprises, Gabriela party-list said a wage subsidy program will be

instituted to assist them in complying with the proposed significant wage increase.

"Significant wage increase is long overdue. Instead of Charter change, the government should prioritize wage increases to give the people a reprieve from the worsening crisis in our country," Brosas said.

FFW WEIGHS IN

The Federation of Free Workers (FFW) yesterday expressed support to House Bill 7568, saying this will enable workers to have "living wages."

"Government has a commitment to provide living wages to our workers. It has been in our Constitution from the start," said FFW Vice President Julius Cainglet.

"Giving an additional P750 in wages to workers that HB 7568 provides will be in fulfillment of this mandate," he added.

Cainglet said such a wage increase is highly necessary considering the skyrocketing prices of basic commodities.

"Enterprises have been on the road to recovery with government support. But workers have been left behind. Workers can't cope because of unbridled inflation. It's time for the government to look after the welfare of workers," he said.

The labor leader said provision of salary adjustments can no longer be relied on the regional wage boards as they have been "so little and so few."

"It has failed to give workers a living wage," said Cainglet. — *With Gerard Naval*



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Oriental Mindoro oil slicks reach Palawan; seaweed plantations affected

By JEL SANTOS

Oil slicks from the recent oil spill in Oriental Mindoro have already reached several areas in Palawan, affecting some seaweed plantations.

In a "Laging Handa" briefing on Monday, March 13, Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO) head Jerry Alili shared that a number of barangays in Taytay, Palawan, were already affected by the oil spill, particularly the coastal barangays of Casian, Calawag, and Biton. ▶ 7

Oriental Mindoro oil slicks reach Palawan; seaweed plantations affected

After receiving reports on the oil slick sightings in Casian, the Philippine Coast Guard led the local government of Taytay and the barangay in conducting clearing operations. The area was easily cleared and after several days of observation, not a single new sighting of oil slick was found," Alili said.

In Barangay Calawag, the Taytay

LGU is currently conducting containment activities in areas with oil slick sightings with the help of PCG.

"Here in Calawag, some 100 to 150 liters of oil slick have been collected," he said.

On Feb. 28, the PCG reported an oil spill from motor tanker (MT) Princess Empress which capsized off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro. It was

reportedly carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil as cargo.

"Our communities are not severely affected as the volume of oil reaching us is not as much as the amount there in ground zero, in Mindoro, where the oil spill came," the official said. "Only a few oil slicks were sighted here and these were immediately cleaned by our barangay volunteers and the PCG."

But Alili said some seaweed plantations are already affected and the

extent of the oil spill effect is currently being determined.

At present, the PDRRMO, the LGUs, and the barangays are preparing for possible oil slicks in other areas in the coming days.

"We are preparing municipalities that might be affected by the oil spill in the area. Many of them have already created improvised oil spill booms to be placed around production areas," the PDRRMO head stated. "The areas where there are seaweed plantations, fish cages, and tourism destinations and establishments are now protected

to prevent oil slick from reaching the shores," he added.

At present, there is still no fishing ban in the areas. The Department of Environment of Natural Resources (DENR) has already conducted tests in areas reached by the oil spill to check the water quality and effects on seaweed plantations.

Various agencies are also set to meet to ensure that the assistance needed by residents are being provided.

The PDRRMO also encouraged the public to immediately report any sighting of oil slick.



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BFAR warns oil slick in Antique may affect seaweed production

By TARA YAP

ILOILO CITY — The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)-6 (Western Visayas) has warned that the oil slick from the oil tanker that sunk in Oriental Mindoro that has reached Caluya town, Antique province may affect seaweed production.

"Caluya is known for its seaweed production. In fact, 99 percent of seaweed production is from Caluya," said BFAR-6 Director Remia Aparri.

As of March 9, BFAR-6 said damage to seaweed production and the fishing industry has reached more than P4 million in the town with three major island barangays.

Aparri said in an online press briefing that more than 73 fisherfolk have been affected so far and their number could be higher.

She noted that seaweed planting has been halted since the oil slick reached the shores of the municipality.

Aside from seaweed, "tatus" or coconut crabs are found in Caluya.

Aparri assured that fisherfolk involved in seaweed and coconut crab production will get needed financial and technical assistance from BFAR.

BFAR-6 is awaiting the laboratory result to determine if fish and marine products taken from areas in Caluya affected by the oil slick are contaminated.



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Blame Marina for MT Princess Express sinking

While the focus on the sinking of the *MT Princess Express* tanker last Feb. 28 remains largely about the cleanup operations of spilled diesel and industrial fuel oil polluting a growing number of island coastlines, very little has been reported on why it happened.

Up to now, more than two weeks after *MT Princess Express* sank, very little information on RDC Reield Marine Services Inc., the vessel's owner, has been made available to the public.

In fact, in a press interview given by the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) last week, the regulatory agency spoke

BIZLINKS



REY GAMBOA

on behalf of the tanker owners, saying that the vessel was covered by a \$1 billion protection and indemnity insurance for every incident, including an oil spill, that the shipping company had a valid Certificate of Public Convenience (CPC) for *MT Princess Express*, and that RDC Reield should file an insurance claim for the oil spill.

As a government office responsible for regulating the maritime industry, MARINA should lead an investigation

into the reasons why an oil-bearing tanker failed at sea, and in the process posed threats to the environment, as well as to the livelihood and health of thousands of Filipinos.

Unfortunately, it seems that MARINA is by itself compromised in this instance, especially after stories surfaced that the vessel's license had been revoked by the former MARINA head in 2021 for failing to prove its seaworthiness in carrying fuel oil products.

Under the new MARINA administration, however, *MT Princess Express* was given the go-signal to ferry oil products via a technical loophole, which could have gone unnoticed or could have deliberately been overlooked.

Adherence to strict standards

When you have an administrator who lacks the depth of

knowledge in shipping operations, decisions about ship worthiness can become fatal especially when a more cunning shipping company can undermine the approval process in a bid to get a permit to operate.

Industry sources have been pointing out that MARINA needs an administrator who has a proven track record in shipping. Not having one could undermine the regulatory responsibilities of the agency, foremost of which would be to make sure that all shipping vessels that leave port are designed, equipped, and managed by competent shipping companies.

Only by ensuring that shipping companies adhere to strict standards will there be little or no chances of accidents at sea. Almost all of sea accidents point to deviations in set standards as causes, which only emphasizes the fact that accidents can indeed be prevented.

It's unfortunate and ironical that, during the day when the *MT Princess Express* sank, the first-ever Philippine Maritime Industry Summit was held with no less than President Marcos delivering the keynote address and asking for the Philippine maritime industry "to be looked upon with admiration by the region and the rest of the world."

During the event, the updated Maritime Industry Development Plan 2028 was presented espousing the vision of "achieving a strong and reliable Philippine merchant fleet that addresses the sea transport requirements of the archipelago in support of the national development agenda."

One of the overriding programs mentioned was the enhancement of maritime transport safety and security, a keen recognition of the risks that an archipelago like the Philippines, with over 36,000 kilometers of shoreline, faces should any accident happen.

Whitewashing

How *MT Princess Express*, which was registered as newly built, had encountered engine problems while at sea begs some credible explanation. Not only does its rescued crew of 20 need to be held accountable, but also its tanker owners and MARINA.

An attempt to whitewash the whole incident will only lead to more if not bigger accidents in the future, especially if the rumored lobby of small, but influential ship owners, to relax existing MARINA policies will be successful.

Lessons learned from the sunk *MT Princess Express* must be clearly amplified to ensure that corrective measures are insti-



tured, and any lapses on the part of the government's regulatory agency must be remedied by the right policies.

Oil spills, like chemical spills at sea, pose a great danger to the ecosystem, as well as to humans. This is why preventing them from happening is the first line of defense. But when the inevitable happens, countries like the Philippines must have the capability to respond quickly and adequately.

Lessons

For a long while, the Philippines has not had any major oil spill incident. The last one was in 2006, when an estimated 1.5 million liters of bunker fuel spilt from *MT Solar 1* when it sank off the coast of Guimaras Island and contaminated the sea and the island's shoreline.

Aside from the damage on the local ecosystem comprising mangroves, seagrass and coral reefs, a full stop to fishing activities had to be implemented. Even the local tourism industry was hobbled while the shores were being rehabilitated.

It took Guimaras more than decade to restore the environment to its pristine state. During that time, while clean up of the oil spill continued, mangroves were replanted, coinciding with the slow return of seagrasses and resuscitation of coral reefs.

Where *MT Princess Express* sank is an area where the sea current is strong, which has complicated spilled oil containment efforts. Even if the tanker was carrying only 800,000 liters, the leaked fuel drifted much farther beyond Oriental Mindoro.

This could turn out to be a bigger tragedy than *MT Solar 1*, which only means that we need to have a more resolute MARINA that truly understands all the safety rules that ships carrying oil should comply with.

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SMPC partners with stakeholders to clean up Mindoro oil spill debris in Semirara Island

Integrated energy firm Semirara Mining and Power Corporation (SMPC) and the Department of Energy (DoE) have been working with the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), Office of Civil Defense (OCD), Department of Health (DoH), local government units, and impacted residents in Semirara Island since March 4 to clean up and contain the oil spill from the sunken tanker in Oriental Mindoro.

The hazardous waste first reached the shores of Semirara Island in Caluya, Antique after-noon of March 3, Friday.

The oil spill currently covers almost 3 kilometers of shoreline stretching from Sitio Sigayan and Sitio Toong of Barangay Semirara and Sitio Sabang of Barangay Tinogboc, affecting 341 households who mainly rely on fishing for livelihood.

Responders from the multi-stake-



Semirara Mining and Power Corporation Emergency Response Team (SMPCERT) and Barangay Semirara responders working to clean-up and contain the Mindoro oil spill that reached Semirara Island.

holder group have so far recovered 4,590 kilograms of oil-contaminated wastes.

To date, the SMPC ERT has devoted over 4,700 man-hours to the oil spill clean-up. The company has also provided the responders from PCG and DOH with accom-

modation, transport services, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including hazardous material (hazmat) suits, N95 masks, boots, and safety gloves.

An oil spill containment boom has also been installed 1 kilometer from the shoreline to protect the reseeded giant clams in Semirara Marine Hatchery in Tabunan.

In collaboration with the local barangay health workers, the SMPC Infirmary has deployed a medical team to the clean-up sites to serve as on-site medics and to conduct a community health survey among the impacted households.

SMPC relief operations are ongoing, benefitting all 341 affected households who were given food packs with rice, canned goods, noodles and produce from the company's agro model farm and poultry model farm projects.



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SMPC PARTICIPATES IN MINDORO OIL SPILL CLEAN-UP: Semirara Mining and Power Corporation Emergency Response Team and Barangay Semirara responders work together to clean-up and contain the Mindoro oil spill that reached Semirara Island. Integrated energy firm Semirara Mining and Power Corporation and the Department of Energy have been working with the Philippine Coast Guard, Office of Civil Defense, Department of Health, local government units, and impacted residents in Semirara Island since March 4 to clean up and contain the oil spill from the sunken tanker in Oriental Mindoro. The hazardous waste first reached the shores of Semirara Island in Caluya, Antique afternoon of March 3, Friday.



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PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SMPC.

Clean up squad Integrated energy firm Semirara Mining and Power Corp. and the Department of Energy personnel have been working with the Philippine Coast Guard, Office of Civil Defense, Department of Health, local government units, and affected residents in Semirara Island since 4 March to clean up and contain the oil spill from the sunk tanker in Oriental Mindoro. Semirara Mining and Power Corporation Emergency Response Team and Barangay Semirara responders work to clean-up and contain the Mindoro oil spill that reached Semirara Island.



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After 2 weeks

MAY-ARI NG BARKONG NAGDULOT NG OIL SPILL, NAGSORI NA

HUMINGI na ng paumanhin ang RDC Reield Marine Services, ang may-ari ng MT Princess Empress na lumubog sa karagatan ng Nautjan, Oriental Mindoro noong Pebrero 28.

Sa isang pahayag, sinabi ng RDC na humihingi rin sila ng paumanhin sa mga residente na maging kabuhayan ay naapektuhan ng oil spill.

Tiniyak din nila na patuloy ang kanilang pakikipag-ugnayan sa gobyerno, Philippine Coast Guard, lokal na pamahalaan at inter-

national oil spill experts.

Kumuha narin umano silang responders para tumulong sa pagpigil na lumaki pa ang pinsala ng oil spill sa karagatan.

Ilan sa mga ginawa umano ng kumpanya ay kumuha sila ng tug boat na may mga oil spill response equipment, meron din umano silang kinuhang espesyalista mula sa isang French oil spill response company.

Tumutulong rin umano sila sa mga plano para sa clean up drive sa mga apeltadong bayan.

(Madel Moratillo)



800K litro ng industrial oil sa lumubog na tanker, puwede pang maisalba - PCG

Kaya pa umanong maisalba ng Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) katuwang ang ibang ahensya ng gobyerno at internasyunal na organisasyon ang nasa 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel na karga ng lumubog na MT Princess Empress.

Sinabi ni PCG spokesperson Rear Admiral Armand Balilo na base sa National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA), "intact" pa ang tangke ng Princess Empress kaya piraninwalaan na ang kumalat na langis sa dagat ay ang "operational fuel" pa lamang ng barko.

"Merong image na binigay samin 'yung NAMRIA at mukhang intact pa po 'yung tanker at wala pang nakikitang tagas na maramihan na nanggagaling door sa kanyang mga tanks," sabi ni Balilo.

Sinabi ng Department of the Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) na ang NAMRIA ang nakakita sa lumubog na barko na nasa 400 metro talim sa dagat at may 7.5 nautical miles mula sa Balingawan Point.

Sa obserbasyon ng DENR, tinatayang 591 ektarya ng coral reef, 1,626 ektarya ng bakawan, at 362 ektarya ng seagrass o seaweeds ang posibleng maapektuhan ng epekto ng oil spill. (Danilo Garcia)



Higit 100 nagkasakit sa Mindoro oil spill

MAHIGIT 100 residente ng susuka at distruha.

Oriental Mindoro ang nagkasakit dahil sa spilled na mga gas na karga sa mga baybayin nito.

Ayon sa Oriental Mindoro Governor Ilumelito Dolor, hanggang kahapon ay hoo na sa 122 bilang residente ang nagkasakit dahil sa oil spill at karamihan dito ay nasa edad 50 pataas.

May mga bata rin aniya ang appektado ng oil spill. Kabilang sa mga idinadating ng mga biktima ang hirap sa paghinga, makakaring rashes sa balat, pag-

Sinabi ng gobernaador na rinutulungan sila ng mga toxicologist at iba pang health worker mula sa Batangas Medical Center, isa sa mga partner na ospital ng Oriental Mindoro, sa pangangalaga sa kanilang mga residente.

May apat na crew na aniyang ginagamot ng mga ito ang kanilang may mga sakit na residente.

Saintale, sinabi ni Philippine Coast Guard (PCG)

spokesperson Rear Admiral Armand Balilo na operasional fuel pa lang ng humabog na MT Princess Empress ang lumabas sa mga baybayin ng hindi ang misyon ng 800,000 litro o 210,000 gallon na karga nito.

Sa natanggap nilang larawan mula sa National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA) sinabi ni Balilo na hoo ang mga oil tanker tanker at walong nakatungag dito.

Feeling ko nga, hindi pa talaga lahat tumatag. Nandun pa sa berlas sa ilalim ang langis. Yun ang inaagapan natin dahil kapag lumabas lahat ng langis, yan ang magiging malaking problema natin, dardag ni Balilo.



ORIENTAL MINDORO



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Mga mangingisda tambay sa Mindoro oil spill

Nangangamba ang isang grupo ng mga mangingisda sa epekto ng oil spill mula sa lumubog na MT Princess Empress sa Oriental Mindoro.

Sinabi ni Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) national chairman Fernando Hicap na siguradong babagsak ang fish production sanhi ng paghalo ng langis sa karagatan ng Mindoro.

Ibinabala pa nito na maraming isda at iba

pang lamang-dagat ang posibleng mamatay dahil sa oil spill at magreresulta ito sa paghina ng mahuhuling isda.

Una nang inihayag ng Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) na nasa 13,000 pamilya ng mga mangingisda ang apektado ng oil spill na mula sa MT Princess Empress matapos itong lumubog sa bayan ng Naujan sa Oriental Mindoro.

Samantala, naglabas naman ng paha-

yag nitong Linggo ang may-ari ng MT Princess Empress at humingi ng paumanhin sa insidente.

Aminado ang RDC Reifeld Marine Services na sapot ng oil spill ang kabuhayan ng maraming pamilyan na nakatira sa mga baybaying apektado ng paglubog ng kanilang barko.

Nangako naman ang kompanya na tutulong umano sila sa mga isinasagawang paglilinis sa kumalat na industrial fuel oil.



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Help Mindoro

TRAILER

NESTOR CUARTERO

Raging, disturbing news about that giant oil spill in Oriental Mindoro reminds us of personalities we know who come from there.

We can imagine how Noli de Castro, Pola town mayor Jennifer Cruz (Ina Alegre), Vice-Governor Ejay Falcon, and Dr. Carl Balita, have become so bothered by this sad turn of events.

Moreover, we are equally worried about the health and safety of ordinary men, women, and children in the province, especially those who depend on fishing for their livelihood.

With this in mind, we urge government to act faster in arresting the multi-faceted problems posed by that giant oil spill caused by a commercial tanker in the waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

The oil spill has spread to other islands as far as Palawan and

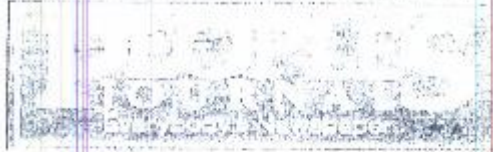
Antique.

Good thing that Japanese Ambassador Koshikawa Kazuhiko announced that Tokyo has already deployed its oil control experts to the Philippines.

I think it's also time that national government sought the help of foreign experts, such as those from the United States and Canada. Parang ang bagal ng aksyon natin dito sa malaking problemang ito sa panahon ng kahirapan. The oil spill has been timed with summer when people flock to the beaches.

According to Manila Bulletin, at least 76 coastal barangays in nine towns in Oriental Mindoro have been placed under state of calamity following the sinking of MT Princess Empress. The oil spill has affected scores of marine protected areas.

I was floored upon learning that management of the sunken tanker sent a team of lawyers, instead of engineers or control experts, when they learned of the incident.



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Japan signs P10M grant for safe water supply in Bohol

By Cristy Pisco

THE government of Japan yesterday signed a grant contract amounting to USD 184,042 (approximately 10 million pesos) for the construction of rainwater tanks in Bohol.

Japanese Ambassador to Manila Koshikawa Kazuhiko signed the grant contract for the project titled "The Construction of Rainwater Tanks to Provide Safe Water Supply and Sanitary Education to Prevent Infectious Diseases in Bohol with Frequent Droughts" with Japanese non-governmental organization Ikaw-Ako.

It will be funded under the Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO projects.

With few large rivers in the rural areas of Bohol, residents struggle daily to access safe water.

The project aims to improve the health and sanitation conditions of the locals in the rural areas of Bohol by constructing water supply systems that reuse rainwater, establishing a management network for it, and providing hygiene education.



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Japan grants P10M water supply project for Bohol

By **CRISTINA LEE-PISCO**

THE Government of Japan on Monday signed a grant contract amounting to US\$184,042 (approximately P10 million) for the construction of rain-water tanks in Bohol.

Japanese Ambassador to Manila Koshikawa Kazuhiko signed the grant contract for the project titled "The Construction of Rain-water Tanks to Provide Safe Water Supply and Sanitary Education to Prevent Infectious Diseases in Bo-

hol with Frequent Droughts" with Japanese non-governmental organization (NGO) "Ikaw-Ako."

It will be funded under the Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects.

With few large rivers in the rural areas of Bohol, residents struggle daily to access safe water.

The project aims to improve the health and sanitation conditions of the locals in the rural areas of Bohol by constructing water supply systems that reuse rainwater, establishing a management network for it, and providing hy-

giene education.

The Grant Assistance for Japanese NGO Projects started in the Philippines in 2002.

Since then, the Japanese Government has made contracts for 58 projects in the Philippines under this scheme, amounting to approximately 1.6 billion JPY (approximately P645.6 million) in total.

Japan believes that this project will not only strengthen the friendship between the peoples of the Philippines and Japan but also bolster the existing strategic partnership between the two countries.



DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENT AND
NATURAL RESOURCES
PANGASINAN
OFFICE

PEOPLES Tonight



03-14-23

Ecija cops recover hot lumber inside abandoned truck

By **STEVE A.
GOSUICO**

CUYAPO, Nueva Ecija - Responding members of the local police recovered some 105 pieces of undocumented lumber loaded in an abandoned truck here on Sunday night.

Town police head Lt. Col. Erwin V. Ferry said the recovered lumber contraband consisted of 105 pieces of mahogany fitches with a total volume of

817 board feet worth P35,000.

It was found loaded inside an abandoned Isuzu Elf truck with a plate number intact along the Cuyapo-Pangasinan Road in Bgy. Curva at 10:30 p.m. (March 12).

Ferry said the recovered items were turned over to Forest Ranger Raymundo Aguirre of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) office in the Science City of Muñoz.



LGU hiniling na ipasara ang top tourist destination sa N. Ecija

Dahil umano sa paglabag sa iba't ibang environmental laws ay hiniling ng mga lokal opisyal sa lalawigan ng Nueva Ecija na isara ang isang kilalang tourist destination sa lalawigan.

Nanawagan ang mga local officials ng lalawigan sa Department of Environment and Natural Resources na bawiin ang kasunduang pinasok nito sa isang pribadong kumpanya na nag-o-operate ng Minalungao National Park.

Sa tatlong pahinang apela sa DENR, sinabi ni General Tinio Municipal Mayor Isidro Pajarillaga na ang Ground-Air Logistics Corporation (GALCO), na siyang nag-o-operate sa Minalungao National Park, ay walang mga kaukulang business permits, kabilang na ang building at occupancy permits at dang natural rock formations sa loob ng parke ang inalis upang bigyang-daan ang kanilang infrastructure projects, na malinaw na pagsira sa protected areas sa nasabing parke na matatagpuan sa General Tinio, Nueva Ecija.

Noong 2003, ang DENR na kinatawan ni Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) chairman at Regional Executive Director Regidor De Leon, ay lumagda ng memorandum of agreement (MOA) kasama si GALCO Vice President for operations Rey Aviles, upang ipreserba, i-develop, i-operate at i-manage ang recreational park sa loob ng 25-taon.

Tiniyak naman ni DENR officer Artemio Almazar na rebibuhin nito ang kasunduan na pinasok sa GALCO-*Mer Layson-*



MOA na pinasok, pinapabawi sa DENR

Top tourist destination sa N.E. ipinasara ng LGU

Isang top tourist destination sa lalawigan ng Nueva Ecija ang ipinasara ng mga lokal na opisyal dahil sa umano'y paglabag sa iba't ibang environmental laws.

Kasabay nito, nanawagan ang mga local officials ng naturang lalawigan sa Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) na bawiin ang kasunduang pinasok nito sa isang pribadong kumpanya na nag-o-operate ng Minalungao National Park.

Sa 3-pahinang apela sa DENR, sinabi ni General Tinio Municipal Mayor Isidro Pajarillaga na ang Ground-Air Logistics Corporation (GALCO), na siyang nag-o-operate sa Minalungao National Park, ay walang mga kaukulang business permits, kabilang na ang building at occu-

pancy permits.

Tinukoy rin ng lokal na opisyal na ilang natural rock formations sa loob ng parke ang inalis ng kumpanya upang bigyang-daari ang kanilang infrastructure projects, na malinaw anila na pagsira sa protected areas sa Minalungao national park, na matatagpuan sa General Tinio, Nueva Ecija, at isang popular tourist spot sa Central Luzon region.

Noong 2003, ang DENR, na kinatawan ni Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) chairman at Regional Executive Director Regidor De Leon, ay lumagda ng memorandum of agreement (MOA) kasama si GALCO Vice President for operations Rey Aviles, upang ipre-serba, i-develop, i-operate at i-manage ang recreatio-

nal park sa loob ng 25-taon.

However, with the agreement, GALCO immediately initiated infrastructure projects within the tourist spot, constructing hotel, view decks, pathways and other buildings that were not coordinated with the local officials of General Tinio, bahagi ng ilham.

Sa kabila naman ng kawalan ng business permit at iba pang regulatory permits mula sa LGU, nagpatukoy umano ng operasyon ang GALCO.

Samantala, tiniyaan ni DENR officer Artemio Almazan na rerebyuhin nito ang kasunduan na pinasok sa GALCO at siniguro sa mga lokal na opisyal ng General Tinio na bubuwain nila ang hinain ng mga ito hinggil sa pagkabigo-umano ng tumalim sa environmental laws.



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What sea turtles can teach us about survival

Can we keep them as pets? A participant asked, when Ramon "Toby" Tamayo, a civic leader, community mobilizer, and citizen scientist from San Juan, La Union, recently gave an animated online talk in The Filipino SDG Action Hour about hundreds of sea turtles that have ascended the beaches of San Juan, La Union to lay hundreds of eggs. Toby explained that sea turtles need the sea to survive, and to recreate the sea and seawater in an aquarium in one's living room requires tedious effort to keep a pet marine turtle. There might be a bigger chance that the freshwater forest turtle can be kept as a pet but, then again, they are not the giant, lovable, majestic sea turtles we call the *pawikan*. The green turtle can reach 4 feet in length and weigh up to 660 pounds.

The good news, however, is that you do not have to own them to enjoy them. They are part of the sea, and a compelling excuse to go to the sea to observe them when they come ashore. The sense of wonderment they bring is equally strong for both adults and their kids, for how many adults would have had the chance to see sea turtles come ashore to lay eggs, or when the hatchlings emerge from the sand and race to the sea 60 days later?

Pawikans are fascinating to watch. But they are also good for science learning, empathizing, and particularizing the effects of climate change. For instance, we know that a sea turtle lays up to 100 eggs, the warm sand being their "incubator" for about 60 days. Scientists tell us the temperature of the sand determines whether a baby turtle will be male or female—cooler sand produces more males



ON THE MOVE

SEGUNDO ECLAR ROMERO

while warmer sand produces more females. They call this "temperature-dependent sex determination."

Now you ask the kids to reflect while observing sea turtles—how might warming trends due to climate change affect the genetic diversity not only of turtles but other reptiles like alligators and crocodiles?

I am also fascinated by their lessons in military science. Baby turtles hatch at the same time, with military precision, then race to the sea en masse past waiting predators which will manage to eat many, but not all of them. They are natural experts at "*patintero*." Sea turtles seemingly have a statistical survival frame of mind—ensuring that they lay enough eggs so that while many will be eaten, some will survive. One turtle can lay from six to 10 clutches with one clutch containing between 80 and 180 eggs.

The memory written into their DNA makes them come back to the same beaches that have been sanctuaries and nurseries

for their eggs for thousands of years. These beaches have always been populated with predators—humans and other animals.

But what happens when humans start modifying beaches and removing the sand? Naic and Ternate are reported to be among the coastlines where sand is vanishing from where turtles traditionally lay their eggs. Well, new airports need to be built in nearby Sangley Point and Bulacan and new cities need a mindboggling 21,000 hectares to be reclaimed from Manila Bay.

Pawikans are part of our community—global and local. They are "ours" for the brief time that they are in our care, but when they roam the vast West Philippine Sea and other waters and come face to face with marine harvesters of various nationalities, including our own, they are in grave danger.

Sea turtles give humans the sterling lesson of survival that works for them and should work for humans as well. Even knowing the harsh odds, we should continue producing community volunteers, racing to the sea of civic troubles and social turbulence, for tiny opportunities for heroism. These opportunities exist all over the archipelago. With every citizen equipped with a cell phone, the citizenry has a tremendous capacity for scientific observation, reporting, and activism.

Learning to save sea turtles is a mechanism for learning about our own survival. This is understood by various local communities who are now practicing and rewarding local heroism, one sea turtle at a time.

doyromero@gmail.com



QC TO HOST 2023 EARTH HOUR

QUEZON City will host this year's Earth Hour celebration in the Philippines on March 25 at the Quezon Memorial Circle.

This, according to QC Mayor Joy Belmonte, was in partnership with the World Wide Fund for Nature - Philippines.

The city will join over 7,000 cities from 193 countries to commemorate Earth Hour, which is considered one of the world's largest grassroots environmental movements.

"Local government units like Quezon City play a big part in raising awareness about the threats of climate change among our constituents. That's why every environmental program and initiative we have established and are currently planning inclusive and responsive to the circumstances of our peo-

ple," she said.

At exactly 8:30 p. m. on March 25, the city government will switch off the lights of the pylon QMC and other city government-run buildings for an hour.

QC citizens and business owners are also encouraged to switch off their non-essential lights.

"The city's participation in Earth Hour signifies our strong commitment to push for climate justice as we head towards advancing inclusive, ambitious, and evidence-based climate action to provide a livable and quality community for all," the mayor added.

Before the switch-off activity on the 25th, the city's Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Department and the Gender and Development Council Office will host the "Padyak ng Kaba-



baihan para sa Kalikasan' cycling event and scavenger hunt for the youth.

Various non-government organizations and social enterprises with climate and environment advocacies will also set up booths around the premises of Liwasang Aurora.

A pre-switch off program will also take place, where performances and messages of support from different non-government organizations and government agencies will be delivered, it said.

During the lights-off proper, a symbolic run spearheaded by fitness and envi-

ronmental conservation enthusiasts will take place inside CMC, signifying the power of collective action in achieving a future where Filipinos live in harmony with nature.

"We are celebrating Earth Hour again in-person to show our stronger commitment and solidarity as a people who want a better future for our country. We want to make this the Biggest Hour for Earth because we are fighting the biggest concerns of the planet: climate change and biodiversity loss," WWF-Philippines Executive Director Katherine Custodio said.



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The problem with plastics

I WAS in
college
in the
1950s
when I



ORLY?

**ORLANDO
MERCADO**

saw the critically acclaimed movie "The Graduate." Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman) was constantly asked what he wanted to do with his life. A businessman, Mr. McGuire (Walter Brooke), told him to remember one word: "plastics."

>MercadoA12



STRATEGIC
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MERCADO FROM A1

The problem with plastics

Since then, plastic use in a dizzying array of products has become a fact of life. I cannot remember the last time I bought something without it being wrapped in the material, often with the brash colors of its brand proudly printed in neat fonts: Shampoo, toothpaste, Detergent, Chips, Biscuits, Chocolates, Mineral water, Soft drinks. Everything is in neat lightweight containers. *Sari-sari* stores and groceries seem like they were built with a kaleidoscope of plastic walls.

Even the food I buy in *carinderias*, or from little carts here and there, would be handed to me inside a plastic container — whether or not I asked for one. The same goes for take-outs from fast food outlets and restaurants.

Easy to handle, these plastics are easy to dispose of, too.

Ideally, these cheap plastics are as effortless to recycle as they are advertised by large companies who often tout their “corporate social responsibility” to the world by including “recycle me” in their packaging. This effectively tells the public that they are using recyclable materials, environment-friendly, they say, reassuring those conscious of their consumption that they are buying the right choice and doing Mother Earth some good.

But alas, we do not live in a perfect world. Not all plastics can be recycled or repurposed.

And now, plastics have become one of the most serious environ-

mental threats. Unfortunately, as much as we want to take pride in everything Pinoy under the global spotlight, it is a shame to be notorious for being the third-largest contributor to plastic waste worldwide, which amounts to an estimated 2.7 million metric tons of plastic annually. Twenty percent of it, or 521,000 tons, end up in the oceans. Tell me you also almost instantly thought of poor *pariwakans* tangled in takeout cupholders and choking on plastic straws.

Because of these plastic products, as well as their improper disposal, our environment is being made to suffer. It is especially felt by our country folks in the coastal areas making a living by fishing. These big corporations are raking in millions in profits while leaving behind a toxic trail of pollutants that disrupt our biodiversity. If our environment suffers, we do, too. And most of the time, the low-income population feels the brunt of it.

Like what we say in Filipino, “*Ang hasurang itinapon mo, babalik sa’yo.*” Remember the floods of filth regularly thrown back at us after heavy downpours? Now think of marine animals living among the floating debris of your regular conditioner and instant noodle packets. Fishertfolk are taking less and less catch because of this, too. And we have yet to dive deep into the issue of microplastics seeping into our food.

I wanted to do something about this problem. A nongovernment

organization I belong to, the Community Legal Help and Public Interest Centre Inc. has taken legal steps that would hopefully make a difference.

Similar to the story of David and Goliath, 32 Filipino consumers are currently waging war against seven gigantic corporations — Coca-Cola, Pepsi Cola, Nestlé, Unilever, Procter and Gamble, Colgate Palmolive, and Universal Robina Corp. (URC) under the watchful eye of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). The complaint was filed last Nov. 15, 2022.

We are holding these companies accountable for violating our consumer rights to safety, a healthy environment, and information upon finding out that these products have dangerous packaging and are unrecyclable — even as they have the printed words “recycle me,” “recycle,” “recycle ready,” “recyclable” and other recycling marks or symbols on their plastic packages.

With the exception of URC, these corporations are unfortunately known to be global plastic polluters, as their product brands have been found in collected and audited wastes in the Philippines and the world since 2018.

Instead of making products more affordable to the poor, they exploit the “*tingi*” culture and package their goods in single-use sachets, costing the consumer a few pesos for their daily needs. With the insufficient solid waste management infra-

structure trying to keep up with the unsustainable production and consumption of plastics, the manufacturers should instead step up and take responsibility and not pass the buck to consumers.

If the problem with plastic continues to go unchecked, it will end up in dumpsites, landfills, streets, and various bodies of water, or burned up, causing health safety, livelihood, and environmental problems to people. This is why every citizen should be concerned and do something as the next generation’s future is at stake.

Dr. Jorge Emmanuel of Silliman University, a scientist specializing in environment, renewable energy, public health, and climate change, said that “recycling of plastics should be viewed in the context of the life cycle of plastics, a transition towards a circular economy model, the global climate crisis, and protection of public health and safety.” Just because the material is cheap, durable, and accessible does not mean its negative impact should be disregarded.

Plastics take forever to decompose completely, so while multimillion-corporate empires are being built on it, the 9 billion tons of plastic that have been produced globally since the 1950s are still somewhere on this planet — in our land, in our waters, and in the air we breathe.

They may already be in our very bodies — we are just not aware of it. Yet.



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Bilang tulong sa kalikasan at planeta... **MGA HAKBANG PARA MABAWASAN ANG PAGGAMIT NG PLASTIC**

ni **JENNY ROSE ALBASON (OJT)**

ANG pagtatapon ng basura ay isang hindi maliwasang gawain. Malaki man o maliit, lahat tayo ay gumagawa ng basura, at ang paraan ng pagkokontrol natin dito ay ang nakakatulong sa pagbabago ng klima.

Ang mga basurang bumabagsak sa mga baybayin, kalsadang binabaha, gayundin ang mga basura sa daluyan ng tubig ay pawang mga epelito ng hindi tamang pagtatapon nito, at ang pangunahing nag-aambag sa lahat ng ito ay walang iba kundi ang mga plastik.

Ayon sa 2021 report ng World Bank Organization, ang Pilipinas ay gumagawa ng 2.7 milyong tonelada ng mga basurang plastik taun-taon at 20% nito ay napupunta sa karagatan, kung saan karamihan sa mga ito ay hindi rare-recycle o single-use sachet.

Gayunman, hindi pa huli ang lahat para kumilos dahil may mga simpleng paraan upang mabawasan ang ating plastic footprint. Pagkatapos ng lahat, ang pamumuhay nang walang plastic ay posible nating magawa.

So, anu-ano ang mga paraan para mabawasan ang paggamit ng plastic?

1. REUSE PLASTIC BOTTLE. Ang mga plastic bottles at takip nito ay nasa ikatlo at ikaapat na pinakamaraming nakobolektang plastik na basura sa taunang Coastal Cleanup Day sa mahigit 100 bansa, ayon sa Ecosystems Research and Development Bureau ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Sa kasamaang-palad, ito ay tumatagal nang hindi bababa sa 450 taon bago mastra ang isang plastik na bote. Kaya, oras na para magsanay tayong magdala ng reusable bottles, hangga't maaari, pumili ng mga aluminum can kaysa sa plastic at i-recycle ang lahat ng plastic bottle.

2. MAGDALANG SARILING KUBYERTOS AT TASA. Ang mga plastik na kubyertos at straw ay kabilang sa pinakamalaking sanhi ng plastic pollution. Ang mga basurang ito ay napupunta sa landfill o mga daluyan ng tubig at karagatan. Kaya, kung ang mga tao ay may dalang reusable bottle o coffee cup kapag lumalabas, bakit hindi narin magdala ng sarili mong cutlery kit? Madali lang ito, i-wrap ang isang kutsara, tinidor, at straw sa isang telang

napkin, at itago ito sa iyong bag para mas convenient kung kailangan mo ito. Dahil sa cutlery kit na dala mo, talagang makakatulong ka sa pagsugpo sa plastic crisis.

3. BAWASAN ANG PAGGAMIT NG PLASTIC BAGS. Malinaw naman na ang labis na paggamit ng disposable plastic bag ay tunay na banta sa kapaligiran at ang pinakamahasag na paraan upang mabawasan ito ay sa pamamagitan ng paggamit ng eco-friendly na alternatibo tulad ng reusable bags. Sa paraang ito mababawasan ang paggamit ng mga plastic bags. Mag-imbak ng mga reusable na cotton o mesh bag at dalhin ito kapag pupunta ka sa grocery o pamilihan.

4. GUMAMIT NG GLASS JARS. Ang glass jars ay magandang alternatibo ng plastic, bukod sa ito ay isang ligtas na opsyon sa pag-iimbak ng pagkain. Sa halip na mag-recycle ng glass jars, madaling maaaring repurpose at magagamit ang mga ito para mga left-overs o dry goods, at paglagyan ng frozen foods. Mas mainam din na magkaroon ng mason

jars na puwedeng gamitin sa pag-inom.

5. LAGAY ANG PAGKAIN SA REUSABLE CONTAINERS. Ang pag-i-invest sa mga reusable products bilang kapalit ng mga disposable ay maaaring makabawas nang inalabi sa mga basurang nalilikha natin. Upang makatulong na mabawasan ang ating waste footprint, mag-stock ng mga reusable na lalagyan tulad ng metal at glass na may iba't ibang size. Iwasang gumamit ng single-use plastic packaging para kung sa convenience kung puwede namang gumamit ng mga reusable containers na maaari mong paglagyan ng pagkain at magamit ulit.

Ang mga hakbang na ito ay maaaring simula pa lamang upang iinisin ang krisis na ating ginawa, ngunit ang mga ito ay mahalaga upang makatulong sa kalikasan. Bagama't mahirap ang mamuhay nang walang plastic, ngunit oras na para gawin natin ito hindi lamang para sa ating sarili at sa susunod na henerasyon kundi mas higit pa — para sa planeta. Dahil kung hindi ngayon, bailan pa?





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Study: Rise in ocean plastic pollution 'unprecedented'

PLASTIC pollution in the world's oceans has reached "unprecedented levels" over the past 15 years, a new study has found, calling for a legally binding international treaty to stop the harmful waste.

Ocean plastic pollution is a persistent problem around the globe — animals may become entangled in larger pieces of plastic like fishing nets, or ingest microplastics that eventually enter the food chain to be consumed by humans.

Research published on Wednesday found that there are an estimated 170 trillion pieces of plastic, mainly microplas-

tics, on the surface of the world's oceans today, much of it discarded since 2005.

"Plastic pollution in the world's oceans during the past 15 years has reached unprecedented levels," said the study published in open-access journal PLOS One.

The amounts were higher than previous estimates, and the study found that the rate of plastic entering the oceans could accelerate several-fold in the coming decades if left unchecked.

Researchers took plastic samples from over 11,000 stations around the

➤Pollution A2

■ POLLUTION FROM A1

Study: Rise in ocean plastic pollution 'unprecedented'

world focusing on a 40-year period between 1979 and 2019.

They found no trends until 1990, then a fluctuation in trends between 1990 and 2005. After that, the samples skyrocket.

"We see a really rapid increase since 2005 because there is a rapid increase in production and also a limited number of policies that are controlling the release of plastic into the ocean," contributing author Lisa Erdle told Agence France-Presse.

The sources of plastic pollution in the ocean are numerous.

Fishing gear like nets and buoys often end up in the middle of the ocean, dumped or dropped by accident, while things like clothing, car tires and single-use plastics often pollute nearer to the coast.

They eventually break down

into microplastics, which Erdle said can look like "confetti on the surface of the ocean."

'Flood of toxic products'

On current trends, plastic use will nearly double from 2019 across G20 countries by 2050, reaching 451 million tons each year, according to the report, jointly produced by Economist Impact and The Nippon Foundation.

In 1950, only 2 million tons of plastic were produced worldwide.

Recycling, even in countries with advanced waste management systems, has done little to help the pollution problem since just a small percentage of plastics are properly recycled and much often end up in landfills instead.

If landfills are not properly

managed, plastic waste can leach into the environment, eventually making its way to oceans.

"We really see a lack of recycling, a flood of toxic products and packaging," Erdle said.

The rates of plastic waste were seen to recede at some points between 1990 and 2005, in part because there were some effective policies in place to control pollution.

That includes the 1988 Marpol treaty, a legally binding agreement among 154 countries to end the discharge of plastics from naval, fishing and shipping fleets.

But with so much more plastic being produced today, the study's authors said a new, wide-ranging treaty is needed to not only reduce plastic production and use but also better manage its disposal.

"Environmental recovery of

plastic has limited merit, so solution strategies must address those systems that restrict emissions of plastic pollution in the first place," the study said.

Last year, 175 nations agreed to end plastic pollution under a legally binding United Nations agreement that could be finalized as soon as next year.

Among the key actions under negotiation are a global ban on single-use plastics, a "polluter pays" scheme and a tax on new plastic production.

The total weight of the plastic pollution detected in the ocean today is estimated at 2.3 million tons, the PLOS study said.

It examined samples in the North Atlantic, the South Atlantic, the North Pacific, the South Pacific, the Indian and Mediterranean oceans. **AFP**



What the carbon market has to say about carbon markets

LAST week, I had a conversation with Shidan Gouran, the chairman and one of the co-founders of Canada-based Bluesphere Carbon, a relatively new carbon credit exchange that at first glance may look like any of the other dozens of carbon trading platforms that have materialized around the world in the past two or three years. As the old cliché goes, however, looks can be deceiving; if other carbon exchanges were as self-aware as this one, the carbon economy would be the legitimate driver of progress it's supposed to be.

The objective with Bluesphere, as with any other carbon exchange with sincere intent, is to provide an investment platform for greenhouse gas elimination. Those who are developing projects can finance ongoing operations and expansion through sale of carbon credits, which are bought by those who need to offset their emissions. Likewise, in a similar way to how a carbon tax punitively encourages emissions producers to clean up their act, the availability of a carbon market that allows them to monetize emissions-reduction activities also provides an incentive.

As many positive opportunities that framework presents, it presents almost as many opportunities for fraud, which is something that Bluesphere is keenly concerned



ROUGH TRADE

BEN KRITZ

about. Fraud in the carbon market context takes two forms, greenwashing and double counting.

Greenwashing occurs when an emissions producer claims to be eliminating emissions, but is really only doing so by creative accounting. For example, a chemical manufacturer can spew hundreds of thousands of tons of greenhouse gas into the atmosphere and simply purchase enough carbon credits to zero those out on the books instead of reducing those actual emissions in any way. Double counting is when two different entities claim the same offset, and the most common way this occurs is when both a company claims an offset through generating or buying carbon credits, and its host country also claims the offset as part of its emissions-reduction program under its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). The problem exists because there is no mechanism within the Paris Agreement to factor market-based carbon credits into accounting of national-level emissions, and there probably

cannot be, because the unit of carbon dioxide-equivalent (CO₂e) represented by a carbon credit does not necessarily represent a ton of CO₂e eliminated from the host country's emissions.

Bluesphere at least partially solves the problem of double counting by putting individual carbon credits on a blockchain, which is a rare and possibly unique practical application of that otherwise over-hyped technology. What this does is pins the carbon credit to the project that generated it, and keeps track of the ownership of the credit. Of course, there is still the problem of whether or not this information will be used properly by the responsible parties — for instance, governments trying to determine their national emissions profiles — but at least the information is secure and readily available.

The greenwashing problem is more difficult to solve, and it is in this context Bluesphere's Gouran offered some refreshingly candid views. The quality of the project which creates a carbon credit is of utmost importance, of course. The carbon credit is of no good to anyone if it doesn't represent an actual elimination of emissions somewhere, which is why the Bluesphere exchange only deals in credits that have been verified by one of four established and highly

reliable registries: Verra Carbon Credits (VCU), Gold Standard Carbon Credits (VER), Climate Action Reserve Carbon Credits (CRT), and American Carbon Registry Carbon Credits (ERT). The exchange itself adds another layer of verification when credits are first submitted for listing.

All of that process of creating bona fides only goes so far, however. It does not necessarily prevent greenwashing, but it still helps, because a company engaging in greenwashing will at least be doing so with legitimate carbon credits representing emissions elimination somewhere.

Gouran would like to see the concept behind carbon credits strengthened by eliminating "carbon reduction" as a basis for credits, and allowing only actual "carbon removal" to be counted. The former makes up almost the entire carbon credit market right now, according to various statistics, though there is some reason for optimism that may change in the coming years. The problem with carbon reduction, Gouran explained, is that even though it is better than doing nothing, or worse, doing things that increase emissions, it does not address the real problem, which is to actually remove the planet-killing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

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Governments to vet crucial

PARIS: Diplomats from nearly 200 nations and top climate scientists began a weeklong huddle in Switzerland Monday to distill nearly a decade of published science into a 70-odd-page warning about the existential danger of global warming, and what to do about it.

The UN intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) synthesis report — to be released on March 20 — will detail observed and projected changes in Earth's climate system; past and future impacts such as devastating heat waves, flooding and rising seas; and ways to halt the carbon pollution pushing Earth toward an unlivable state.

"It's a massive moment, seven years since the Paris Agreement and nine years since the last IPCC assessment report," Greenpeace Nordic senior policy advisor Kaisa Kosonen, an official observer at IPCC meetings, told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Since its creation in 1988, the IPCC — an intergovernmental body staffed by hundreds of volunteer scientists — has released six, three-part assessments, the most recent in 2021-2022.

"It is scientists telling governments how they are doing during these crucial defining years," Kosonen said.

The report card is not good: global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to grow, even as science has cautioned that deadly consequences are coming sooner and at lower levels of warming than previously thought.

Since the late 19th century, Earth's average surface temperature has risen more than 1.1 degrees Celsius, enough to amplify a crescendo of weather catastrophes on every continent.

Carbon budgets

Under the 2015 Paris treaty, nations promised to collectively cap the rise at "well below" 2C, and at 1.5C if possible.

An IPCC special report in 2018 made it alarmingly clear that the more ambitious aspirational goal — since adopted by governments and business as a hard target — was a better bet for

a climate-safe world.

But an already narrow pathway has become a tightrope: humanity's "carbon budget" for staying under the 1.5C barrier is less than 300 billion tons of CO2, barely seven times current yearly emissions, according to the IPCC.

Two other special reports — one on oceans and Earth's frozen zones, the other on forests and land use — will also be covered in the summary for policymakers under review in Interlaken.

"The synthesis report matters because it will be the last IPCC product for some years, and one of the major sources of knowledge to be considered in the first Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement," Oliver Geden, one of the report's lead authors and a senior fellow at the German Institute for International Security Affairs, told AFP.

Unveiled ahead of COP28 UN climate talks in Dubai in December, the global stocktake will confront nations with the deep inadequacy of their Paris pledges to cut emissions, which would allow global

UN climate science report

temperatures to rise 2.8 C above the preindustrial benchmark.

Among the IPCC findings that could be highlighted in the synthesis report is the looming threat of deadly heat.

'More politicized'

Even in a 1.8 C world — an optimistic scenario, according to some scientists — half of humanity could, by 2100, be exposed to periods of life-threatening climate conditions arising from the coupled impacts of extreme heat and humidity.

There are similarly dire projections for health, the global food system and economic productivity.

"What is at stake matters to everyone on the planet — our ability to have healthy, nutritious and affordable food, both now and in the future," said Rachel Bezner Kerr, a professor at Cornell University and an IPCC lead author for the most recent report on climate impacts.

Floods last year that covered a third of Pakistan,

and ongoing drought in East Africa, both bear the fingerprint of climate change.

The synthesis report will also reflect the debate over the best way to decarbonize the global economy, with some emphasizing the need to rapidly phase out fossil fuel use and reduce consumer demand, and others the potential of technological solutions.

Diplomats in Interlaken vetting the text line-by-line cannot change the science in the underlying reports' 10,750 pages, but they can decide what to leave in or out, and can highlight — or obscure — things through wording.

"Over time, IPCC meetings became more politicized as government representatives — mainly, but not exclusively, from oil-producing states — interfered in the scientists' discussions," the journal *Nature* said in a recent editorial.

Despite that, "the main IPCC studies have an extraordinary reach, informing everything from global climate agreements ... to the school climate strikes movement Fridays of Future," the journal said. **AFP**



VICE Mayor Rommel G. Alameda (Official Facebook page of the Vice Mayor Rommel G. Alameda)

Sand mining eyed in Alameda slay

By AARON RECUENCO

Police investigators are now pursuing a business angle in the killing of Aparri, Cagayan Vice Mayor Rommel Alameda in the Feb. 19 ambush that also left five other people dead.

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Sand ...

(From Page 1)

PNP chief Gen. Rodolfo Azurin, Jr. particularly mentioned the alleged rampant black sand mining in the province of Cagayan as the possible motive in the killing.

Azurin said Alameda had been very vocal against black sand mining business.

"The black sand mining has been a long issue in Cagayan. This is one of the angles being pursued because Vice Mayor Alameda had been against that kind of business which some of his kababayan in Cagayan are engaged in," said Azurin.

The black sand that is

mined in Cagayan, according to Azurin, is being sold to the Chinese.

In the past few years, the black sand mining has triggered speculations that they are ironically being used in the construction of structures in the West Philippine Sea.

Alameda's car was strafed with bullets by police uniform-wearing gunmen in front of a school in Nueva Vizcaya.

Police earlier said they have already identified the owner of the getaway car that was burned by the gunmen on their way to escape.

Azurin said they already have several persons of interest in the black sand mining angle.

"We are just trying to solidify the pieces of evidence so that it will stand in court," said Azurin.



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Mga mining operator utak ng pagpatay kay Aparri VM Rommel Alameda

TINUKOY ng Philippine National Police (PNP) ang pagkontra sa black sand mining bilang motibo sa pagpatay kay Aparri, Cagayan Vice Mayor Rommel Alameda at luma nitong bodyguard nitong nakaraang buwan.

Sa press briefing kahapon, sinabi na PNP chief General Rodolfo Azurin Jr isa sa nakikita nilang anggulo sa paglipit kay Alameda ang black sand mining sa kaulang lugar na matagal ng isyu sa Cagayan.

"Business rivalry in the sense na meron kasing ongoing na black sand mining kung saan itong mga black sand na ito ay hinebenta sa mga Chinese. Sa ito'yung isa sa nakikita natin na suggulo

because Vice Mayor Alameda had been against sa negosyo na yun ng ibang kababayan niya sa Cagayan," dagdag ni Azurin.

May mga susppek na rin aniya sila sa nasabing kaso pero tumanggi itong magbigay ng iba pang impormasyon hanggang makasalan nila ang mga ito sa korte.

Marstandaang patungong Maynila ang grupo ni Alameda nang tambagan sila ng mga susppek na nakauniforme ng pulis sa Bagabag, Nueva Ecija noong Pebrero '9. Kinabukasan, natagpuan ang sunog na get away car ng mga susppek sa bayan ng Solano. (Edwin Balasa)



Editorial

Holding up half the world

THE situation of women in the Philippines is best described as full of contradictions, according to the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Filipino women may be considered as some of the most advanced in the world in academic, professional, politics and legislation.

However, they also suffer from domestic violence, economic disadvantages, discrimination in the workplace, and exploitation as migrant workers and sex workers. Some of them also suffer from displacement caused by the intermittent wars in conflict-affected areas in Mindanao.

In 2010, the Philippines became the first country in Asia to close the gender gap in both education and health. Moreover, its scores on political empowerment rankings continue to rise. The Philippines is also one of the few countries in the world where women are equal to men in senior management roles.

The government has adopted the Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (PPGD) 1995-2025, a 30-year strategic plan that translated the Beijing Platform for Action into policies, strategies, programs and projects. To operationalize the PPGD, the government, with its partners in the nongovernment organizations and the academe, formulated the Framework Plan for Women (FPW).

The FPW has the following priority areas: a) promotion of women's economic empowerment; b) protection and advancement of women's rights; and c) promotion of gender-responsive governance.

Moreover, the Philippines is one of the few countries in the world that has adopted a Gender and Development (GAD) budget policy that requires all agencies (including local government units) to allocate at least 5 percent of their total budgets for programs, activities and projects that address women's needs and rights.

Female students in the Philippines also fare very well in education. Compared to male students, they have a higher participation rate in the elementary and secondary levels. Moreover, female students have a better cohort survival rate in elementary and secondary levels. This is because the drop-out rate for males is higher than that of the female students. The female students' completion rate is also higher than that of the male students in both levels.

Poor families tend to make boys work in the fields and in shops because they are considered to be more physically able than girls. Since boys generally perform poorer in school, it seems easier for parents to make them quit and get a job. Moreover, girls value education more than boys do because they no longer see themselves merely staying at home when they grow up. They now expect to have careers, as well they should. Boys tend to assume they would be able to find work even without finishing school.

While women's labor force participation rate is more than 50 percent, their rate is still lower than that of men. More women are prevented from entering the labor force because of the gender role stereotyping, particularly in relation to reproductive responsibilities. Women have a slightly higher unemployment rate than men.

Compared with its regional neighbors, the Philippines has the highest percentage of female professionals and technical workers. It is also the only country where women are equal to men in senior management roles. The lack of employment in the country has led millions of women to leave and work abroad as overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). This is another grave area of concern, as the recent death and maltreatment of domestic workers in Kuwait have shown.

Women have always outnumbered men as newly hired OFWs. They outnumber men as professionals, clerks, service and sales workers, laborers, and unskilled workers. Working overseas has brought a lot of difference in the lives of Filipino women. For instance, those working as domestic help are now getting paid for work which they have been doing in their own homes, but were not given any economic value. The women's ability to contribute financially to their families has not only empowered them; it has also given them a greater sense of self-worth.

It is this sense of self-worth that the government must address as it amends the old laws that have been passed by advocates for women's rights, and as it allocates more funds for women's education and health, particularly in Mindanao and poorer regions. It's been said that women hold up half the sky. And their energies can only be unleashed if they are nurtured and allowed to flourish.