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MGB holds geohazard management lecture

THE town of Baggao in Cagayan province is vulnerable to typhoons, landslides and other natural disasters. To address this issue, the municipal government hosted a regional Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) geohazard and disaster management orientation among the town's environment and local government officials.

The event was attended by 120 participants from the 48 *barangay* (villages) composed of local officials, Sangguniang Kabataan members and residents, according to MGB Region 2 (Cagayan Valley) Director Mario Ancheta.

He said Baggao town is a climate-vulnerable area directly hit during previous typhoons.

"We collaborated with local government officials to empower individuals, families and organizations living in the community to raise awareness and [disaster] preparedness," Ancheta said.

With the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Region 2, Ancheta said the MGB in the region also did a community outreach program in Barangay San Jose here.

He noted that with the DENR-Gender and Development Focal Point System, their outreach program aims to build disaster-resilient communities that also promote gender equality and empower women.

Ancheta said the event also included lectures and presentations on mining and environment-related programs.

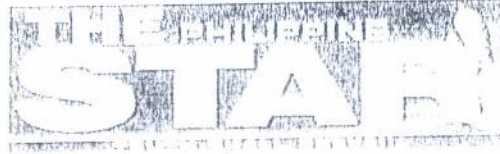
MGB Region 2 geosciences chief Felicitas Piligan, geologist Aina Claravall and science research specialist Rea Mae Leslie Mejares talked about geohazard mapping and the role of women in disaster management, landslide mass movement, and flooding and karst subsidence.

DENR Region 2 Youth Desk officer Ralfee Concepcion also discussed the DENR's Pinas Basura Buster (PBB) campaign and introduced the PBB mascot as the image of DENR in its solid waste management advocacy campaign. The aim is also to raise awareness and have a behavioral change on proper waste management and disposal.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO



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Tampakan mine operation seen to start by 2026

By DANESSA RIVERA

Sagittarius Mines Inc. (SMI), the proponent of the multi-billion Tampakan copper-gold project in South Cotabato, is eyeing to operate the mine in 2026 as it transitions to development stage.

The Tampakan project is now ready to move onto the next stage of development to be able to start operating in two to three years, SMI president and CEO Roy Deveraturda told reporters in a roundtable discussion.

"We would like to have it (operate by) maybe 2026 for us to really say that under the technical definition [that] it's really operating," he said.

Under this phase, SMI will start building the facilities necessary for mining operations to commence.

When asked why it will take longer to complete the project, the SMI chief explained that the company is cautiously following the country's mining laws.

"One of the most misunderstood industries is mining. It's

really a very complicated thing. We have to follow everything, and it requires big work and a lot of technical and expertise and financial muscle," Deveraturda said.

So far, SMI has invested P32 billion in the Tampakan copper-gold project.

Of the total amount, P2 billion had already been allocated for corporate social responsibility (CSR) and Social Development and Management Program (SDMP) projects, SMI external affairs and communications manager Roy Antonio said.

The SDMP is the five-year plan of mining contractors and permit holders, which contains plans to support the development and empowerment of host and neighboring communities.

"It's a substantial amount. Many of the expense, to prove we are serious about this, are commitments to social projects, aside from the technical. Meanwhile, a big portion of the investments will go to development and production," Deveraturda said.

Last year, the Sangguniang Panlalawigan of South Cotabato approved the amendment of the Environment Code of South Cotabato, particularly on the lifting of the open-pit mining ban.

This move will allow SMI to develop the area and commercially extract minerals.

The provincial code hurdled the operations of the Tampakan project even after the national government lifted the ban on open pit mining in December 2021.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said it would closely scrutinize the Tampakan copper-gold project on its environmental protection and rehabilitation obligations through the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB).

Touted as the largest undeveloped copper and gold mine in Southeast Asia, the Tampakan project has the potential to yield an average of 375,000 tons of copper and 360,000 ounces of gold in concentrate per annum over the proposed 17-year life of the mine.



OPEN PIT

TAMPAKAN GOLD MINE TO OPERATE BY 2026

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
@jordeenelagare

Mining company Sagittarius Mines Inc. (SMI) aims to get its Tampakan mining project in Mindanao, touted as the largest underdeveloped copper-gold resource in Southeast Asia, up and running by 2026.

"We would like to have it maybe 2026 for us to really say that, under technical definition, it is really operating," SMI president and CEO Roy Deveraturda said in a media roundtable.

Deveraturda said they have a timeline for constructing the Tampakan project in the next two to three years.

So far, SMI has completed the predevelopment phase, which includes the feasibility and environmental impact studies required by the government.

Now that SMI has reached the development phase, he said the company could start construction of the facilities, early works, engineering, drawing and design confirmation.

When asked why it would take up to three years to make Tampakan fully operational, Deveraturda said, "They thought [that] once you start, you just dig. It's not like that. It's really a very complicated thing and you have to follow all [regulations] ... and [it] requires big work and a lot of technical expertise and financial muscle."

Deveraturda said SMI was prepared to have the Tampakan copper-gold project operational even a decade ago, as it had already obtained the necessary permits and licenses. The ban on open-pit mining since 2010, however, derailed the project. The ban was only lifted in 2022.

"We have to be overly cautious on doing this," Deveraturda said.

"Bottom line is, we are now ready into the next stage—providing now for the access so that we can start operating maybe in two to three years, build the facilities for our operations in the near term," he added. INQ



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Illegal trade of endemic wild species needs urgent action'

A RECENT report revealed that a number of native species of birds and primates that are only found in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea were recovered in India.

A total of 13 wild species of birds and four species of monkeys, believed to be smuggled from these Southeast Asian countries and were shipped through Myanmar, were seized in a random check by Khawzawl police. The seizure that took place in March 2023 happened in an area near the India-Myanmar border.

According to TRAFFIC, some of the rare species that were being trafficked include the Mindanao Tarictic Hornbill *Penelopides affinis*, Southern Philippine Rufous Hornbill *Buceros mindanensis*, Mindanao Writhed Hornbill *Rhabdotorrhinus leucocephalus*, and Flame Bowerbirds *Sericulus ardens*.

The three hornbills species live only in lowland dipterocarp forest habitats and are endemic to the Philippines, and the colorful

bowerbird is only found in the forests of Papua province in Indonesia and neighboring Papua New Guinea.

"Poached species from the Philippines and Indonesia going through Myanmar and out of the Southeast Asian (SEA) region is a strong indication of the transboundary nature of wildlife crime and a strong collaborative action among the Asean Member States is truly needed to address this serious concern," said Dr. Theresa Mundita Lim, executive director of the Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB).

Previous studies on trade dynamics and wildlife poaching have shown that these species, along with dozens of others, such as snakes, lizards, turtles, songbirds, parrots, and pangolins, are among the highly trafficked animals from SEA. The region serves as a consumer, source, and a trans-shipment point. Much of the wildlife trading is also being done online and the trafficking operations are getting more and more sophisticated.

"Illegal trafficking and trade of wildlife and wildlife products have gone online. These digital transactions are hard to trace—exacerbating the already serious problem faced by the region," said Lim.

"To address this issue, we can also maximize the use of online tools such as social media. By reporting accounts that engage in such illegal activity, everyone can contribute to the fight against IWT (illegal wildlife trade)," she added.

"I am appalled because these bird species are rare and hard to find even in their native habitats, and despite this, poachers still find a way to capture these elusive bird species in the wild.

It is very alarming that there seems to be a growing market for rare and endemic wildlife species. It seems that we have not learned our lesson from the pandemic—that disturbing nature can trigger the emergence of previously unknown diseases," Lim stressed.

The ACB, together with the Asean member-states (AMS), adopts a three-way approach to prevent poaching of wildlife from

its source—protected areas (PA).

These involve supporting the AMS in strengthening their law enforcement capacities through training initiatives and provision of state of the art equipment to improve PA protection systems; promoting sustainable livelihood and community-based enterprise; and awareness raising on the value of conserving the region's wildlife.

Providing more sustainable economic opportunities for the communities living in the buffer zones of protected areas discourages them from engaging in illegal and unsustainable activities.

Some regional programs and projects supporting the protection and conservation of wildlife include the Asean Heritage Parks Programme, the EU-supported Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in the Asean, and the Small Grants Programme supported by the German Development Bank or KfW. All these regional efforts are in accordance with the Chiang Mai Statement of ASEAN Ministers Responsible for CITES and Wildlife Enforcement on Illegal Wildlife Trade.



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Big infrastructure projects

The first era of sustained infrastructure investment projects in the country since independence can be attributed to the first Marcos presidency.

It appears that the second Marcos presidency will further culminate in the strong rebirth of infrastructure investments in the country.

From 1966-1986: Marcos Senior. When Ferdinand Marcos became president in 1966, he immediately embarked on infrastructure investments to support his economic program. He was the first president ever elected to a second four-year term, which made his elected term of office twice longer than any previous president of the Republic. When he declared martial law in 1972, his rule extended to a total of 20 years.

CROSSROADS Toward Philippine Economic and Social Progress



GERARDO P. SICAT

As a result of this long period of rule as the nation's leader, he was able to build a large portfolio of infrastructure investments that laid out the transportation networks, provided irrigation and water for agricultural use and urban consumption, and generated electricity to the growth of industry and commerce. These infrastructure projects benefited the nation for many years beyond his term of service.

A review of the nature of these investments is called for. (It is also part of a larger exercise that I am making in relation to a paper that I am preparing at the UP School of Economics to commemorate 50 years of economic policy-making in the country.)

A system of roads and ports. First, he extended and expanded the system of transportation in the country. The transport network that covered the island archipelago became a system of connected major roads from the north of the country to its southernmost points. The road systems of the major islands - Luzon, Mindanao, and the larger Visayan islands - were enlarged and elaborated. Many new green projects were introduced to exploit the potentials of local island economic systems. The first express highway systems north and south

of Manila in Luzon island were built during this period, bringing prosperity to both central and southern Luzon provinces.

This transport network included the primary system of national roads, the connections of the provincial and rural roads to this network. The activities relating to the road system also connected to the system of seaports and airports. The improvement of major ports and the expansion of selected seaports helped to expand commercial traffic in important cities, like the ports of Bacolod, Iloilo, General Santos, Cagayan de Oro, Davao, Cebu and Batangas.

Water investments for agriculture and urban consumption. Investments in water resources led to the construction of large catchment systems for water. Angat Dam, the Upper Pampanga River Dam, and the Magat Dam all contributed to the rapid development expansion of agriculture in Luzon.

Provincial irrigation systems in Pangasinan, in Tarlac, in the island of Panay and in Cotabato and in Polangui River in Mindanao were some of the local irrigation systems built and developed.

Had local opposition not been so disruptive and marked during those years, major catchment systems would have been built around the Chico River in the Cordilleras and in the Bicol River Basin. Unfortunately, those regions have not been able to enjoy the benefits of these projects in raising local economic productivity as a result.

Power generation. The investments in energy infrastructure were another aspect of the major achievements of this period. In part, they were designed to meet the growing needs of the nation for electricity. For another, the infrastructure investments were also made in response to high volatility of world energy prices.

Hydroelectric power was partly a source of energy generation. Some of the dam projects, like the Upper Pampanga and the Magat dam in Isabela had energy generation components. And many hydro power projects along the Polangui and Mindanao River were designed as potential sources of energy production.

The government undertook to build a number of carbon-fed power plants for electricity generation, but it tried to expand energy production from non-traditional means. It helped the expansion of privately generated power plant

The energy crisis of the 1970s caused the price of electricity to go up and become unpredictable. Diversification of power production was needed in order to reduce dependence on carbon fuels. It also led to the intensification of the search for new and traditional energy sources in the country.

The exploration for carbon-fields had been of limited success, but that for geothermal sources were self-evident for a volca-



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nic archipelagic land mass. The Philippines became a major geothermal energy producer during these years. The major geothermal plants were built in Leyte; smaller plants were built in Tiwi, Albay and in Palimpinon, in Negros Oriental.

Finally, the Philippines became among the first countries in Asia, along with Japan and South Korea, to build a nuclear power plant to generate electricity.

(Unfortunately, this last major investment was not put to use by the succeeding government mainly for political reasons. The other countries whose economic progress during the same period of time owed part of their outstanding economic success from their timely use of nuclear power.)

Planning, financing, and institutional strengthening. All these accomplishments could not have been accomplished without proper planning, institutional strengthening, and overall coordination of the effort of government.

The government centralized some functions, decentralized some other operations, coordinated many activities, and monitored step-by-step the implementation of projects as they moved in time.

The government built up project pipelines of infrastructure projects over time. The principal implementing agencies were strengthened to undertake their major tasks. The use of foreign technical assistance was maximized in some cases.

The government assiduously undertook efforts to raise budgetary capability. Such an effort was naturally also a consequence of being able to coordinate the financing of major infrastructure projects with the help of multilateral and bilateral development lending institutions. While these development lending institutions helped the country with the major financing of the long term investments, major counterpart tax-financed resources were raised by the government to close the financing gap.

I witnessed and participated in this process of nation-building. For half of the years in which many of the major investments were being undertaken, I was a part of the government in a responsible capacity. I was Cabinet head of the NEDA, an institution in which the president was chairman. Within this governance structure, I worked with many capable and dedicated colleagues who had the interest of the nation foremost in their actions and recommendations.

(To be continued)

For archives of previous Crossroads essays, go to: <https://www.philstar.com/authors/1336383/gerardo-p-sicat>. Visit this site for more information, feedback and commentary: <http://econ.upd.edu.ph/gpsicat/>



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MINDORO OIL SPILL

MARINA FINDS GROUNDS TO SUE OWNER OF SUNKEN TANKER

By Tina G. Santos
@santostinaINQ

The Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) on Tuesday said it found probable cause to file charges against the owners of the fuel tanker that sank on Feb. 28 and caused a massive oil spill that wreaked havoc on the fishing villages and marine ecosystem in Oriental Mindoro.

"Marina has completed its initial investigation... and a resolution has been issued finding probable cause to file a formal charge to the shipping company," Marina Deputy Administrator Sonia Malalan said during an interagency meeting on the oil spill at the Department of Justice on Tuesday.

She did not elaborate what charges would be filed but she later told reporters that they were looking into filing an administrative case against RDC Reield Marine Services, owner of MT Princess Empress.

Cease-and-desist orders

Marina Administrator Hernani Fabia earlier said that the agency issued two cease-and-



ENVIRONMENT DISASTER Representatives from the environment department, Philippine Coast Guard, the Maritime Industry Authority and owners of the MT Princess Empress attend a Senate hearing on March 14 to discuss the sinking of the fuel tanker off Oriental Mindoro and its environmental impact. —RICHARD A. REYES

desist orders against the shipowner.

"One is for purposes of cancellation of the franchise or the Certificate of Public Convenience (CPC), while the other one is [for the company] to cease and desist operations," Fabia said, adding that the orders would remain in effect pending the result of the investigation into the oil spill.

Senators earlier said officials of Marina and the Philippine Coast Guard should be held liable for the spill, together with the vessel owner.

Sen. Francis Escudero suspected that officials of the two state agencies might have been bribed to allow the ill-fated ship to set sail without the required CPC issued by Marina.

Sought for comment, Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla said that it was "very possible" that Marina could be criminally charged.

"No one will escape scrutiny when it comes to this. It is a time for us to repent and account for what we have done," he said.

"Actually we are getting more information from Marina

because they have committed to submit everything within the next few days. We held off any punitive actions that will [embroil] us further. We are asking them to cooperate fully with us," he added.

'Crime, not accident'

The justice chief had also said the National Bureau of Investigation was looking into Marina's procedures "so that we will know the charges that will be filed."

"This will not be a time for people to say 'walang kaso ito' (there is no case here). There will be cases filed. And we are determined to make sure that people will not forget. What happened was a crime and not an accident," Remulla said.

"It is a crime against the environment. It is a crime against the Filipino people. A lot of people should be held accountable for it," he said further.

Remulla also said the shipowner, the insurance company and other possible fund sources should be checked so that they could compensate the country or at least help it recover from the environment disaster. INQ



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Tanker's certificate of registry questionable

ASIDE from lacking a permit to operate in the form of a certificate of public convenience (CPC), the certificate of Philippine registry (CPR) of the oil tanker MT Princess Empress that sank off the coast of

Naujan, Oriental Mindoro also appeared spurious.

A copy of the vessel's CPR showed that the documentary stamp was dated "08/17/2020" or Aug. 17, 2020, while

the issuance of the CPR was dated Sept. 23, 2022.

Both CPR and CPC are issued by the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina).

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Tanker's

All ships of domestic ownership plying Philippine waters, regardless of size and utilization, must be properly registered and issued a CPR.

A CPC, on the other hand, is issued to a water transport service provider to operate a vessel for commercial or public use, for which no franchise, either municipal or legislative, is required by law.

MT Princess Empress was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel when it capsized off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28, 2023.

It caused a massive oil spill that spread to other coastal towns of Mindoro island and nearby areas.

Latest satellite images from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration showed that the oil emanating from the sunken oil tanker may have reached Coron, Palawan.

During a Senate committee investigation last month, Marina said MT Princess Empress had no permit to operate.

This was contradicted by a document posted by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) on social media.

The document showed that the oil tanker had a CPC approved by Marina in its Nov. 16, 2022 decision.

The PCG later said it was in-

vestigating the authenticity of the document, which the vessel used in its operations till the day it sank.

Marina-National Capital Region (Metro Manila) Regional Director Marc Anthony Pascua has also questioned the authenticity of the PCG document, saying he had not signed an amended CPC in favor of MT Princess Empress owner RDC Reield Marine Services.

Pascua also said RDC Reield Marine Services only has a "screened application" for the amendment of its CPC because the vessel owner still needs to complete the documentary requirements in its application to amend its CPC.

Records showed that the sunken vessel was built in Bataan by Reyeld Townsite Shipyard Corp.,

which is also owned and operated by RDC Reield Marine Services.

However, questions were raised on why a ship built in Bataan with the owner based in Mandaluyong City was registered in Marina-Legazpi City, but the CPC was processed in Marina-NCR.

The confusion over the CPC has prompted the Department of Transportation, Marina's mother agency, to investigate the matter.

As a result of the incident, Marina issued a suspension order against RDC Reield Marine Services.

Authorities are yet to contain the oil spill that has affected the livelihood of communities on Mindoro island, Batangas, and other nearby areas. **WILLIAM B. DEPASUPIL**



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Marina: There's probable cause vs oil-spill ship owner

BY JOEL R. SAN JUAN
@jrspanjuan1573

THE Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) said on Tuesday that it has found probable cause to file charges against the owners of the sunken MT Princess Empress which caused a massive oil spill in Oriental Mindoro.

people." Remulla added that a lot of people should be held accountable.

Even officials of MARINA, according to Remulla, are likely to be criminally charged.

"That is very possible. No one will escape scrutiny when it comes to this," Remulla added.

Remulla noted that the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) is still investigating MARINA's processes to determine the possible charges that will be filed.

"We are determined to make sure that people would not forget that what happened was a crime and not an accident," the DOJ chief stressed.

This was disclosed by MARINA Deputy Administrator Sonia Malaluan at an interagency committee meeting on the oil spill held at the Department of Justice (DOJ).

Malaluan, however, did not elaborate on the charges that the agency is planning to file against the oil tanker.

"In fact, MARINA has completed its initial investigation on the shipping properties, on the show-cause order, issued before and a resolution has been issued finding probable cause to file a formal charge to the shipping company," Malaluan said.

MARINA earlier issued cease

and desist orders (CDOs) against the RDC Reield Marine Services, the company that owns the vessel.

The CDO was issued for the cancellation of RDC Reield Marine Services' certificate of public convenience (CPC) and another one enjoining the operations of its remaining vessels.

He said the CDOs will remain in force pending the result of its investigation on the February 28 sinking of the vessel.

Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla, in an interview with reporters, described the incident as "a crime against the environment" and "a crime against the Filipino



'Claims for Princess Empress oil spill to exceed limit'

THE International Oil Pollution Compensation (IOPC) Funds and Shipowners' Protection and Indemnity (P&I) Club opened the joint Claims Submission Office for the cleanup of the oil spill caused by the sinking of Princess Empress.

The IOPC Funds said cleanup and response operations are ongoing.

Given the latest information, it said claims relating to this incident may exceed the limit of liability of the insurer under the 1992 Civil Liability Convention (CLC).

"The 1992 Fund may therefore be called upon to pay compensation," it said.

"The Claims Submission Office will facilitate the submission of claims for compensation resulting from the incident on Feb. 28, 2023, in Oriental Mindoro." MT Princess Empress was

carrying 800,000 liters of oil when it sank off Naujan in Mindoro Oriental. The oil spill affected the livelihood of more than 99,000 individuals or 19,900 families.

The IOPC Funds has been working closely with the P&I Club and the government. The Philippines is a party to both the 1992 Civil Liability Convention and the 1992 Fund Convention.

Members of the IOPC Funds Claims team traveled to Singapore to meet with the Shipowners' Club in March.

They discussed the incident with the P&I Club and local P&I correspondents from the Philippines and remotely met with the Philippine Coast Guard.

The joint Claims Submission Office is located in Calapan, Oriental Mindoro and



Philippine Coast Guard personnel collect debris following the sinking of MT Princess Empress in Oriental Mindoro. FILE PHOTO

other smaller claims submission offices will open in affected regions in the next few weeks to allow claimants to submit their claims more easily.

"The IOPC Funds will continue to liaise with key stakeholders, to monitor

developments closely and will respond accordingly.

It will provide a detailed report to the upcoming session of the 1992 Fund Executive Committee in May," IOPC said.

GENIVI VERDEJO



Oil spill reaches Tablas Strait, Tayabas Bay

The oil spill from the sunken *M/T Princess Empress* continues to spread and has reached Tablas Strait and Tayabas Bay.

The Philippine Space Agency (PhilSA) said satellite images taken on March 31 and April 2 showed that the oil slick has reached the northern part of Tablas Strait, which separates Mindoro island from Panay and Romblon.

PhilSA said the oil spill also reached the northern part of Tayabas Bay, which stretches from San Juan, Batangas to several areas in Quezon province.

"The combined stretch is 36.5 kilometers and covers a total area of approximately 18.9 square kilometers," PhilSA said.

PhilSA had earlier said a satellite image provided by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) on April 2 shows that the oil spill threatens Coron in Palawan.

PhilSA said the NOAA map shows that "possible oil from *Princess Empress* continues to extend."

"The slicks located south and southwest of the tanker measure approximately 10.5 nautical miles in length and 1.8 nautical miles in width," PhilSA said.

The satellite maps are still subject to field validation, it said.

Meanwhile, a dynamic positioning vessel (DPV), *Pacific Valkyrie*, which is equipped with a remotely operated underwater vehicle, *Hydros*, arrived in Calapan on Sunday to help mitigate oil release from the sunken tanker, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said.

The PCG said *Hydros* is a 2,000-pound vehicle designed to meet rapid deployable salvage requirements to a maximum depth of 5,000 feet.

"Immediately after boarding formalities, the DPV proceeded to the oil spill site in the vicinity of the waters off Naujan to start its operations," the PCG said.

Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla assured the public that cases would be filed against the owner of *Princess Empress*.

Remulla yesterday led the Oil Spill Inter Agency Committee meeting at the Department of Justice office during which a representative from the Maritime Industry Authority said it has found probable cause to file an administrative case against RDC Reield Marine Services.

- Rainier Allan Ronda, Robertzon Ramirez, Marc Jayson Cayabyab



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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
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THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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OIL SPILL UPDATE — Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla (left) confers with officials of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) in a meeting at the Department of Justice (DOJ) office in Manila on Tuesday, April 4, 2023, to assess the progress of salvage efforts related to the oil spill caused by the M/T Princess Empress in Oriental Mindoro. (Wendy Macabunga)



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PEF installs retrofitted powerline system to protect eagle family in North Cotabato

THE Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF) announced on Tuesday

the installation work for a retrofitted powerline system designed to

avoid accidental electrocution of large birds, particularly the Philippine eagle.

The installation for the first 1.5-kilometer (km) of a 4.5 km powerline system was launched during a simple ceremony on March 24 at Sitio Bagtok in Barangay Tumanding.

The installation will be completed before June in time for the town-wide celebration of the Philippine Eagle Day and pay homage to the Arakan,

North Cotabato's "Bird Jewel."

"The survival of each individual to sexual maturity is very critical for an IUCN [International Union for the Conservation of Nature] 'critically endangered' species like the Philippine Eagle," Dennis Salvador, executive director at PEF said in a statement.

"We hope that through this pioneering project and by way of Cotelco's [Cotabato Electric Co-operative] example, we can encourage all elec-

tric companies operating in Philippine eagle forest habitats across the country to do the same and avoid the wasteful death of our national symbol," he added.

To recall, tragedy struck in 2018 with the electrocution of a Philippine eagle, one that inhabits Mt. Sinaka in Arakan town.

The corpse of the Philippine eagle was discovered about a meter distant from a concrete electric post owned

and operated by Cotelco.

Apparently, the bird came in contact with the two wires simultaneously, and the full voltage passing through its body caused its death.

This is already the second eagle death case involving accidental electrocution from bare wires in the country. The first was a captive-bred bird named "Kabayan," a Philippine eagle released at Mt. Apo in 2004. *Jonathan L. Mayuga*



LETTERS

A LENTEN APPEAL FOR SPIRITUAL COMMITMENT: FAST FOR MOTHER EARTH

AS Christian nations observe the Holy Week, my husband, the late senator and former environment secretary, Heherson T. Alvarez always called for environmental penitence—a FAST FOR MOTHER EARTH. It is a call for personal sacrifices by cutting individual carbon footprints to minimize the impacts of climate change, caused by deforestation and the excessive pollution of our water bodies that now manifest in our Philippine river bodies. Our oceans are polluted by oil spills and plastic gyre.

Climate change, which upsets the balance and sustainability of the global climate, is primarily caused by the warming of the earth due to exces-

sive carbon dioxide emissions with the abundant burning of fossil fuels, such as coal and oil, and derivatives—diesel and gasoline. In 1995, I joined my husband who was then Senate chair of the committee on environment when he presented the Manila Declaration in Bonn, Germany, the first Conference of the Parties for the protection of small island states.

He stressed: “We must minimize the use of our vehicles to cut back on fuel, cut back on food consumption, conserve water, take care of our forests and all other dwindling resources as our selfless penitence for the meaningful celebration not only of Lent but of three other significant environ-

mental events preceding Earth month—International Day of Forests (March 21), World Water Day (March 22), Earth Hour (March 25).”

I must reecho his call “to fast not only with food and drinks but with consumables like perfume and cosmetics, clothes, shoes to cut our fossil energy that process and produce them. A gradual withdrawal from our wasteful consumption habits, even in our food consumption, will provide some relief to our beleaguered environment. It builds the message that each individual is made aware of the extreme consequences of climate change—that a diminished carbon in the global atmo-

sphere could be our spiritual share to diminish death, devastation, disease, and deepening poverty, and generating health pandemics. Rising greenhouse gas emissions will exacerbate water-related risks over archipelagic Philippines.”

Our country is ranked third among 67 countries in the world as most vulnerable to climate change in a recent survey done by global corporate giant Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corp.

Fast for Mother Earth is an annual program for Holy Week observance during Earth Day Month, initiated by the Earthsavers Movement more than three decades ago. Sadly, a penitence that highlights

the need to protect personally the environment seems not to have grown in spiritual dimension as the ruinous impact of climate change is upon us. No continent is spared. I am compelled to keep alive his legacy and pursue his advocacies, such as relentlessly and tirelessly making this appeal every year to remind the public of the grave moral responsibility to protect Mother Earth and help mitigate carbon emissions to stop the destruction of our only common home, Planet Earth, our womb of life.

Just think if all the money corrupted were invested to defuse the ecological time bomb of global warming, it

would have been possible to prevent climate catastrophes through relevant dynamic application of science, technology, and effective cultural communications. We urgently need the discipline and political will to implement the existing laws to combat climate change that will guarantee a safe, clean, and healthy world. Hope springs eternal. All of us, regardless of color, creed, and social status, must act in concert as global citizens to affirm life. It is heroic to save our ailing Mother Earth.

CECILIA GUIDOTE-ALVAREZ
director,
Earthsavers Dreams Ensemble/
Unesco Artist for Peace



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OPINION

A Lenten appeal for spiritual commitment: Fast for Mother Earth

BY CECILIA GUIDOTE-ALVAREZ

AS Christian nations observe the Holy Week, my husband, the late senator and former environment secretary, Heherson T. Alvarez always called for environmental penitence—a **FAST FOR MOTHER EARTH**. It is a call for personal sacrifices by cutting individual carbon footprints to minimize the impacts of climate change caused by deforestation and the excessive pollution of our water bodies that now manifest in our Philippine Riverbodies. Our oceans are polluted by oil spills and plastic gyre.

Climate Change, which upsets the balance and sustainability of the global climate, is primarily caused by the warming of the earth due to excessive carbon dioxide emissions with the abundant burning of fossil fuels, such as coal and oil and derivatives—diesel and gasoline. In 1995, I joined my husband as Senate chair of the Environment Committee when he presented the Manila Declaration in Bonn, Germany, the first Conference of the Parties (COP) for the protection of small island states.

Senator Alvarez stressed, “We must minimize the use of our vehicles to cut back on fuel, cut back on food consumption, conserve water, take care of our forests and all other dwindling resources as our selfless penitence for the meaningful celebration not only of Lent but of three other significant environmental events preceding Earth Month—International Day of Forests (March 21), World Water Day (March 22),

Earth Hour (March 25).”

Earthsavers DREAMS Ensemble-UNESCO Artist for Peace with the Philippine Center of the International Theatre Institute (ITI), in fact, held a comprehensive Techno Arts SDGs ResiliArt Exhibition at the National Library with messages from his colleagues from the Senate.

I must re-echo his call “to fast not only with food and drinks but with consumables like perfume and cosmetics, clothes, shoes to cut our fossil energy that process and produce them. A gradual withdrawal from our wasteful consumption habits, even on our food consumption, will provide some relief to our beleaguered environment. It builds the message that each individual is made aware of the extreme consequences of climate change—that a diminished carbon in the global atmosphere could be our individual spiritual share to diminish death, devastation, disease and deepening poverty and generating



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health pandemics. Rising greenhouse gas emissions will exacerbate water-related risks over archipelagic Philippines."

Our country is ranked third among 67 countries in the world as most vulnerable to climate change in a recent survey done by global corporate giant Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corp. (HSBC). In the HSBC survey, India emerged as the most vulnerable, followed by Pakistan, and Bangladesh (4th).

Fast for Mother Earth, is an annual program for Holy Week observance during Earth Day Month, initiated by the Earthsavers Movement more than three decades ago. Sadly, a penitence that highlights the need to protect personally the environment seems not to have grown in spiritual dimension as the ruinous impact of climate change is upon us. No continent is spared.

I am compelled to keep alive his legacy and pursue his advocacies such as relentlessly and tirelessly making this appeal every year to remind the public of the grave moral responsibility to protect Mother Earth and

help mitigate carbon emissions to stop the destruction of our one and only common home, Planet Earth, our womb of life.

Earthsavers reiterate his conviction: "Our simple individual sacrifices will drive home the point that the scourge of climate change will need our scientific as much as our spiritual commitment. Then the agony and the death of our forests and oceans can be collectively resurrected to continue life for our children up to the 7th generation."

The leader of the Catholic church, Pope Francis, called the destruction of nature a "sin of modern times" and that acting on climate change is "essential to faith." Serendipitously, our Muslim brethren practice abstinence in the period of Ramadan.

In 2013, the strongest typhoon on Earth's history, Typhoon Yolanda, devastated the country, resulting to more than 8,000 deaths. Super typhoons have grown in intensity rapidly leaving refugees in tent cities.

Our country finally signed the landmark Paris Agreement on Climate Change that committed the Philippines to reduce its carbon emissions by 70 percent of our usual consumption by 2030. Quo vadis? Government now realizes the primary existential crisis the world faces. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report
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calls for Emergency Climate Action NOW. Let us pledge not in words, but in action towards a green transition pushing faster for alternative clean energy. There is no other alternative pathway. We cannot breach 1.5° Celsius. We suffer Armageddon. Climate Justice, loss and damage, decarbonization, biodiversity with heritage protection have been our battle cry.

Just think if all the money corrupted were invested to defuse the ecological time bomb of global warming, it would have been possible to prevent climate catastrophes through relevant dynamic application of science, technology and

effective cultural communications. We urgently need the discipline and political will to implement the existing laws to combat climate change that will guarantee a safe, clean and healthy world. Hope springs eternal. All of us, regardless of color, creed and social status must act in concert as global citizens to affirm life. It is heroic to save our ailing Mother Earth.

Cecilia Guidote-Alvarez is the Director of Earthsavers DREAMS Ensemble/ UNESCO Artist for Peace, and Founder of the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA). In 1972, she was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Outstanding Laureate. She is the President of International Theatre Institute-Social Change Network. In 2022, she was a LaMaMa Theater Global Artist Awardee. She is also a NYC-USA Multi-awarded Producing-Director of DZRH Radyo Balintataw.



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Delegation backs IPCC Synthesis Report for urgent climate action

THE Philippine delegation to the 58th Session of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has lauded the approval of the Synthesis Report (SYR) that will serve as a resource for policymakers in reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and adapt to human-caused climate change.

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Undersecretary Analiza Rebueta-Teh, led the Philippine delegation, together with Manila Observatory Head of the Regional Climate Systems Laboratory Dr. Faye Abigail T. Cruz, and Climate Change Commission Commissioner Rachel Anne S. Herrera.

In a statement, the DENR noted that the report, approved by govern-

ment representatives during a week-long session from March 13 to 19 in Interlaken, Switzerland, is an integrated and up-to-date analysis on climate change that includes an overview of the state of knowledge on the science of climate change based on the three Working Groups of the IPCC, and three Special Reports on the impacts of 1.5-degree Celsius global warming, and on climate change impacts to oceans, cryosphere, and land.

"The SYR serves as the fundamental basis for evidence-informed decisions and actions, and provides a clear and substantive analysis on climate science that would accelerate the pace of co-creating policies and designing and implementing programs for science-based actions," Teh said. *Jonathan L. Mayuga*



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PREPARATORY MEETING SET IN BEIJING

PH, CHINA OPEN TALKS ON JOINT OIL EXPLORATION IN MAY

Oil, gas exploration talks set in Beijing

Representatives from the Philippines and China “will meet for preparatory talks in Beijing sometime in May” regarding joint oil and gas exploration in the West Philippine Sea, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said. “The meeting will discuss parameters and terms of reference,” the DFA said in a statement, echoing Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo’s comment in an earlier television interview.

—STORY BY JACOB LAZARO AND MARLON RAMOS

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By Jacob Lazaro and Marlon Ramos
@Team_Inquirer

The Philippines and China will meet in Beijing next month to set the stage for cooperation between the two sides in exploring the West Philippine Sea (WPS) for gas and oil deposits, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said on Tuesday.

Representatives from the two countries “will meet for preparatory talks in Beijing sometime in May,” in connection with the Jan. 5 agreement to resume discussions on oil and gas development that were scuttled at the end of the previous administration.

“The meeting will discuss parameters and terms of reference,” the DFA said in a statement, echoing Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo’s comment in an earlier television interview.

Manalo also “assured Sen. Francis Tolentino that updates would be provided on this matter,” added the DFA statement, reacting to the senator’s misgivings about the revival of the

exploration deal amid persisting maritime tensions between Manila and Beijing.

On Sunday, Tolentino warned that China’s interest in reviving the deal could be a “trap” to legitimize its presence in the country’s waters.

The Chinese Embassy in Manila separately confirmed that the planned talks were raised during the 7th Bilateral Consultations Mechanism on the South China Sea last month.

The discussions are meant to build on the agreement between President Marcos and Chinese President Xi Jinping during the former’s state visit to China in January.

In June 2022, then President Rodrigo Duterte terminated the talks on the 2018 memorandum of understanding with China for joint exploration over sovereignty issues.

Manalo earlier said the discussions would be “guided by the requirements of the Constitution,” after the Supreme Court rejected in January a 2005 tripartite agreement between the Philippines, China and Viet-



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PH TERRITORY The Sabina and Ayungin Shoals in the West Philippine Sea are among the features that the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) is watching from poachers and unauthorized vessels. Photo taken during a PCG aerial surveillance on Feb. 21. —**NIÑO JESUS ORBETA**

nam for a similar exploration deal for being unconstitutional.

The high court described the deal as “illegal” as the 1987 Constitution requires companies in such joint ventures to be majority Philippine-owned, with the state retaining control over exploration activities.

Maritime expert and retired Rear Adm. Rommel Jude Ong said the talks were not likely to cool down tensions in the South China Sea.

“The exploratory talks have no bearing on other problems created by China within our EEZ (exclusive economic zone)/WPS. Their quasi-blockade of Ayungin and Panatag Shoals will remain as major drivers of tension,” Ong told the Inquirer, referring to recent incidents involving Chinese aggression in waters within the Philippines’ 370-kilometer EEZ.

According to Ong, one “non-negotiable” term in any agree-

ment for joint exploration of resources should be China’s recognition “that the exploration area is within our EEZ and we exercise sovereign rights over it.”

Also on Tuesday, Tolentino said a new law that allows foreign entities to fully own businesses in the country could not be used as legal cover in pursuing a joint exploration venture between the Philippines and China in the West Philippine Sea.

Tolentino, a lawyer who has a master’s degree in public international law, said Republic Act No. 11659, which amended the Public Service Act, only “defined and distinguished public utility from public service.”

He said the law, which was intended to entice foreign investors in the country without revising the Constitution, did not repeal the constitutional provision barring foreigners from using the country’s natural resources without partnering with Filipinos.

“[The law] does not have any effect on the planned exploration, development and utilization in the WPS. We should be

guided by... Article XII Section 2 of the 1987 Constitution,” Tolentino told the Inquirer.

The provision states that the country’s natural resources belonged to the government and that the “exploration, development and utilization of natural resources shall be under the full control and supervision of the state.”

Cha-cha required

“Unless and until the Philippine Constitution is amended or revised, exploration of our resources must abide by what is set forth by the Constitution,” the senator said.

Besides, Tolentino said the law was not meant to “reclassify Philippine territory and for that matter, the proper interpretation of the Unclos,” or the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Tolentino said the country’s 2016 arbitral court victory, which China has refused to honor, already recognized that the West Philippine Sea, including Reed Bank, “exclusively belongs to Filipinos and no one else.” INQ



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PUSHING THE SEA BACK Heavy machines flatten mounds of sand dumped by dredgers for use in a land reclamation project in Pasay City on Monday, April 3, 2023. PHOTO BY J. GERARD SEGUIA



'Rightsizing not aimed at terminating employees'

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Tuesday assured the public that his administration's rightsizing mission is meant to "upskill and reskill" government workers and "not aimed at terminating employees."

Marcos made the assurance after a sectoral meeting on the National Government Rightsizing Program (NGRP) on Tuesday, where he ordered the further assessment of the present setup in the executive branch to determine redundant positions and functions.

"The President made an assurance during the meeting on Tuesday that government rightsizing is not aimed at terminating employees but to serve as a tool to upskill and reskill the current government workforce to improve state services and programs," Presidential Communications Secretary Cheloy Garafil said in a statement.

During the meeting, the Presidential Legislative Liaison Office (PLLO) and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) also updated the status and salient features of the proposed National Government Rightsizing bill.

Present during the sectoral meeting were Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, Special Assistant to the President Antonio Lagdameo, Garafil, and DBM Undersecretary Wilford Will Wong and Director John Aries Macaspac.

In his first State of the Nation Address in July last year, Marcos cited the NGRP as among his administration's priority measures.

He described it as "a reform mechanism that seeks to enhance the government's institutional capacity to perform its mandate and to provide better services while ensuring

optimal and efficient use of resources."

"Compared to previous government reorganization efforts, the NGRP will entail a comprehensive strategic review of the functions, operations, organization, systems, and processes of the different agencies, and massive and transformational initiatives in agencies concerned, such as mergers, consolidation, splitting, transfer and even the abolition of some offices," Marcos said.

"The rightsizing efforts will also involve the conduct of a comprehensive strategic review of functions, programs, and projects that will cut across various agencies," he added.

The House of Representatives in March passed on third and last reading House Bill 7240 or the proposed "National Government Rightsizing Act."

The proposed rightsizing will determine which among the 187 government agencies and government-owned and -controlled corporations, with some 2 million personnel, may be streamlined through merging, restructuring or abolition, Secretary Amenah Pangandaman previously said.

Rightsizing is defined under the bill as "the process of analyzing and designing the appropriate roles, mandates, structures, functions, sizes, systems, as well as processes of government agencies to ensure effective, responsive, and efficient service delivery."

To oversee the implementation of the program, the Committee on Rightsizing the Executive Branch shall be established.

Meanwhile, the three bills on the NGRP that were filed in the Senate remain pending at the committee level.

CATHERINE S. VALENTE



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LPA monitored off Mindanao

Expect warm and humid weather with isolated rains this week as a low-pressure area (LPA) was monitored off Mindanao.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said the ridge of a high-pressure area and the formation of a low-pressure area are the dominant weather systems affecting the country this week.

PAGASA said the LPA may either dissipate or weaken, but its effects may be felt over parts of Mindanao by weekend.

The Visayas and Mindanao will experience cloudy skies with rains and thunderstorms.

Sunny with partly cloudy skies and isolated light rains in the afternoon may be experienced in Luzon.

Metro Manila and the rest of the country may see isolated rains due to localized thunderstorms, but there is no significant impact.

PAGASA said fair weather with sunny to partly cloudy skies with isolated thunderstorms are expected until Friday, mostly over the Visayas and Mindanao.

The state weather bureau urged the public to limit physical outdoor activities during extreme high heat index.

It encouraged the public to drink water and possibly stay indoors between noon to 3 p.m. to avoid cramps, exhaustion or heat stroke.

- Romina Cabrera