

11 April 2023 Tuesday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**



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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS  
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THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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## What's the cost of water for Metro Manila?

Summer is upon us and with it comes the usual complaint: "Walang tubig!" Our water authorities have imposed water rationing once more, with the threat of longer periods of dry taps due to the rapidly declining water levels at the La Mesa and Angat Dams.

Construction of the Kaliwa River Dam has been proposed as the solution to our perennial water woes, and the project seems to be proceeding as we speak. But has there been proper consideration for habitat loss, such as what will happen when the Kaliwa Dam is constructed, which will cause the loss of endemic and indigenous species, both plant and animal?

The DENR has issued an Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) for it in 2019, which enabled the approval of the funding of \$238.3 million loan from the Export-Import Bank of China. Ironically it comes with a higher interest rate (two percent) than that proposed by Japan (1.25 percent).

If completed, the Kaliwa Dam project will submerge about 300 hectares of the Sierra Madre protected forest reserve, which is home to at least 201 species of mammals, 556 species of birds, more than 85 species of amphibians, and 252 species of reptiles, half of them endemic and many threatened. And to think we still have to discover many species that are hidden in these areas!

An iconic plant that will be endangered is the *Rafflesia manillana*, so-called corpse flower (due to its rotting-flesh odor), the lauan (Philippine mahogany) and kalantas timber trees, also in the mahogany family, all of which will face possible extinction in the area once flooded.

The Philippine monkey-eating eagle (*Pithechophaga jefferyi*) will also face a dire future, since the Sierra Madre is one of their last habitat strongholds.

The impending ecological disaster will impact the indigenous Dumagat-Remontados, who have been granted ancestral domain titles

covering 188,305 hectares in the Sierra Madre. They face not only the loss of residence and livelihood but that of 11 sites held sacred by 12 communities as well.

So why does the government persist in pushing through with this project? Granted, the people of Metro Manila deserve to have potable water for their daily needs. Must it be at such a high cost both to the environment and the indigenous peoples, not to mention the flooding of lowland villages in In-

*Has there been proper consideration for habitat loss, such as what will happen when the Kaliwa Dam is constructed, which will cause the loss of endemic and indigenous species, both plant and animal?*

fanta, Quezon? Have we forgotten the disastrous flash flood of 2004, which killed a thousand and caused millions of property losses?

Are there alternatives to the Kaliwa Dam project? Actually, many. First is to instill the concept of proper water management in the 13 million Metro Manila residents. Many of our less fortunate citizens are actually the most frugal with water use, if they have any at all. It's the commercial sector that should think about conserving water, since they use the most.

Second, harvest rainwater which, instead of flooding our streets, will become the source for many water uses: flushing toilets, washing cars, watering gardens, etc. Metro Manila has an average of 2,061 mm of rainfall a year. Instead of letting it drain into Manila Bay, save a portion of it in cisterns. Save the potable water for sanitation purposes.

Third, reduce the loss from pipe

leaks, which is a big percentage of the 4,000 MLD (million liters per day) supplied by the Angat, La Mesa, and Ipo Dams. This will require both Maynilad and Manila Water to plug the leaks in their distribution systems. The added benefit will be, less contamination of our water pipes by sewage.

Fourth, speaking of sewage, why not adopt wastewater-treatment technology to convert sewage to fresh, potable water. We've seen Singapore's prime minister drink a glass of water from their wastewater treatment plant output. It's safe and it's very doable. It will reduce water pollution as well.

Fifth is the rehabilitation of the Pasig-Laguna River Basin (cost: ₱13 billion), which can be a source of potable water for the metropolis.

Sixth, why not consider desalination plants? We are surrounded on all sides by the sea, an unlimited source of water. The technology is available. And once the new fluorine nanostructure technology is commercialized, it will be 2,400 times faster and much more energy-efficient than current desalination methods.

Lastly, instead of drowning our forests, let us protect them as our watersheds that hold rainwater to protect us from flooding and to replenish our rapidly depleting aquifers.

Surely all these efforts will not exceed the ₱12.868 billion that the Kaliwa Dam will cost, not to mention the high interest rate and the huge environmental and indigenous peoples' costs that the dam will cause.

Or are there other reasons for doggedly pushing through with the Kaliwa River Dam project? Is it the windfall expected by certain people pushing for this project? Is it to ingratiate them to China? There must be millions, if not billions, of reasons. Draw your own conclusions.



**UNDER THE  
MICROSCOPE**

RAYMUND W. LO, MD, FPSP



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## Agencies join forces to avert El Nino water crisis



**WHAT WATER SHORTAGE?** Children frolic in a portable swimming pool they rented for P700 a day along Capulong Street in Tondo, Manila on Monday. **Danny Pata**

By Macon Ramos-Araneta and Rio N. Araja

GOVERNMENT agencies are joining forces to stave off a possible water crisis brought on by El Niño, the weather phenomenon characterized by below-normal rainfall that can lead to dry spells and drought and is projected to start in the second half of this year.

This developed as Sen. Grace Poe said Monday the water crisis is avoidable if the correct policies are in place and are being implemented.

The National Water Resources Board is coordinating with the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, National Irrigation Administration, and other agencies for contingency plans that will prevent a repeat of the water crisis in 2019, its top official said.

That year, tens of thousands of households in Metro Manila began to lose water supplies, and the water level at dams serving the megacity fell below their critical level of 69 meters

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### Agencies...

From A1

above sea level (masl).

Last week, water firm Maynilad also warned its customers in the National Capital Region and Cavite of possible water interruptions for as long as 19 hours a day.

Meanwhile, a low-pressure area spotted east of the country is likely to develop into a tropical depression, the first typhoon in 2023, the state weather bureau said.

The LPA was last seen 890 kilometers east of the Visayas. Once it develops into a tropical depression, the storm would be named "Amang."

"This weather disturbance may develop into a tropical depression as it moves generally westward towards the Southern Luzon-Visayas area over the Philippine Sea," the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration bulletin stated.

PAGASA said the LPA will bring light to moderate to at times heavy rains over Eastern Visayas and Caraga.

Meanwhile, Poe said the coming of El Niño is a predictable phenomenon, which should have kept water authori-

ties and concessionaires on their toes to prepare for contingency measures.

"Instead, we are confronted with the same old scenarios during this season of the year – dry taps, parched soil, below normal dam levels, long queues of pails," noted the chairperson of the Senate committee on public services.

But NWRB executive director Sevillo D. David Jr. said in a TeleRadyo interview: "I think we are more prepared than before. More facilities are now in place at Laguna Lake than in 2019."

"We need to save water and recycle and be responsible about water use. All leaks should be fixed," he added.

Climate projections by PAGASA earlier showed that El Niño will begin by the third quarter of 2023 or between July and September and will last until next year.

El Niño is the warm phase of the naturally occurring climate pattern El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO), marked by changes in wind direction and sea surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific.

Angat Dam, which supplies 96 percent of Metro Manila's water needs, is currently at 199.37 meters, which is still at operating level, the NWRB official said.



## Poe to WRMO: Address water shortage

SEN. Mary Grace Poe on Monday called on the Water Resources Management Office (WRMO) to address the water shortage being felt by households, businesses and the agriculture sector.

The senator said the water crisis "hounding Filipinos is avoidable if the correct policies are in place and are being implemented."

The Senate Committee on Public Services chairman said the coming of El Niño is a "predictable phenomenon," which should have kept water authorities and concessionaires "on their toes to prepare for contingency measures."

"Instead, we are confronted with the same old scenarios during this season of the year — dry taps, parched soil, below normal dam levels, long queues of pails," Poe deplored.

She said that while there are many water-related agencies, "there is a drought of common goals that would set clear directions and actions toward water security for all Filipinos."

"By this time, we expect the Water Resources Management Office to get its feet wet amid the water shortage being felt by households, businesses and the agriculture sector," Poe said.

She said the Senate will push for the creation of the Department of Water Resources as a "permanent body that will lead the comprehensive development and management of water resources to once and for all end our people's perennial water woes."

Senators earlier pressed concerned water agencies to present measures on how to address the looming water crisis aggravated by the upcoming El Niño.

Senate Majority Leader Emmanuel Joel Villanueva filed Senate Resolution 561 "to determine the steps being undertaken by the government to address the possible water shortage, especially now that there is an impending El Niño."

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel 3rd warned that he will call for a Senate inquiry if specialist agencies "remain quiet" on how to address the water shortage.

Villanueva lauded the move of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in creating the WRMO.

"Through this EO, the problems concerning water supply will be given much attention," Villanueva said in Filipino.

**BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO**



# 'Phl more prepared for El Niño than in 2019'

By **BELLA CARIASO**

National Water Resources Board (NWRB) executive director Sevilla David Jr. yesterday assured the public that the country is now more prepared for the possible impact of the El Niño phenomenon compared with 2019 during the drought that led to a water crisis.

In a radio interview, David emphasized that the government learned from that year's El Niño episode, where Angat Dam reached its lowest level of 116 meters in June.

"We are now more prepared.

There were developments that were not present in 2019. These are the treatment facilities at Laguna Lake and deep wells," he said, referring to the Cardona Treatment Plant and Putatan Water Treatment.

He added that the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) has already prepared a contingency plan to minimize the effect of the drought on the irrigation system.

"The NIA has prepared mitigating measures to help the farmers, in case the threat of El Niño will persist," David said.

At the same time, the NWRD chief

noted that the water level at Angat Dam continues to drop amid the dry season.

"In the last few days, the level of Angat has fallen. We can say this is normal during summer, amid the high temperature and lack of rains," he said.

Based on monitoring of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), the water level at Angat Dam was at 199.37 meters as of 6 a.m. yesterday, compared to the 199.76 meters last Sunday, or a drop of 0.39 meters.

"With the present level, we can say that the level of Angat is still normal or within operating level (and) is

still enough to supply the needs of consumers this summer," David said.

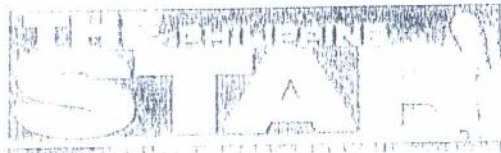
He added that evaporation and lack of rain contribute to the reduction in the water level at Angat Dam.

"If we have high temperatures, more water evaporates at the reservoir, causing the reduction in the level of Angat Dam," he said.

David gave assurance that aside from the NWRB, concerned government agencies, including the NIA and the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, regularly hold coordination meetings in preparation for the El Niño phenomenon.

PAGASA has said the country would experience El Niño starting this June or July.

Aside from Angat Dam, the water levels at five other dams have also dropped. As of 6 a.m. yesterday, Binga Dam was at 569.57 meters, compared with the previous level of 569.72 meters, or 0.15 meters less; San Roque Dam, 238.16 meters, from its previous level of 238.43 meters, or 0.27 meters less; Pantabangan Dam, 181.58 meters, from its previous level of 181.81 meters, or 0.23 meters less and Magat Dam, 174.84 meters, from its previous level of 174.96 meters, or 0.12 meters less. — With Paolo Romero



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## Phl, Indonesia eye partnership on major reforestation project

By DANESSA RIVERA

Indonesia and the Philippines are working on a bilateral partnership for a major reforestation project which may catalyze net zero and carbon market development in the ASEAN region.

The reforestation partnership was among the projects being pushed by the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC) this year.

This is because both countries have a significant forest resource, making them among the biggest oxygen producers in this region, Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Kadin) chairman and ASEAN-BAC 2023 chairman Arsjad Rasjid said in an interview with **The STAR**.

Indonesia has 91.2 million hectares of forest land while the Philippines has 23.3 million hectares.

And with the growing demand for carbon credits globally, the reforestation partnership presents an immense opportunity for both countries.

"Globally, for this net zero and carbon neutrality, every country, company has growing demand for the so called carbon credit and this creates big opportunity. We expect the carbon market to reach \$50 billion by year 2030 and the ASEAN region is well positioned to capitalize on this opportunity," Arsjad said.

"That's why we have net zero hub and carbon excellence as legacy projects (of the ASEAN-BAC) that will create ecosystem for net zero and carbon market develop-

ment, and also provide Indonesia and the Philippines to leverage their significant forests," he said.

This reforestation project will be a bilateral partnership between Indonesia and the Philippines to catalyze such a major undertaking in the region.

"Every country is doing it. Indonesia is doing it. The Philippines is doing it. But this is the first time for us we're working together. If we can put more resources and share experience that can reduce time because we'll have less mistakes, but we'll have more funding, more resources," Arsjad said.

Once the project is implemented, more ASEAN members can be invited to be part of the reforestation project.

"As long as we can start, we do believe it will be significant. After that, we can invite others to come in. We are trying to create a catalyst," Arsjad said.

The project was initially discussed with Environment Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga and various Philippine business chambers last February after Kadin secured the support of the Indonesian government to push for the bilateral partnership.

With talks still in the early stages, Indonesia and the Philippines are eyeing to finalize and sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) by the ASEAN leadership meeting in September.

"Hopefully we'll be able to find a resolution to at least sign the MOU then start feasibility and push forward," Arsjad said.



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OBSERVER

DURING the solemnities

YEN MAKABENTA

of Holy Week, I took the opportunity to review some major long articles online.

One such article was a provocative piece by Edward Ring in the American Greatness website, posted on April 4, 2023 and entitled, "How climate alarmism killed true environmentalism."

➤ MakabentaA5

Another PH distinction: 'Plastic-spewing superpower'

In the middle of the piece, there leaped into my attention two riveting paragraphs:

"Massive oceanic garbage patches: In the central Pacific Ocean, a body of water larger in area than every continent on Earth put together, there is a concentration of floating garbage spread over nearly 8 million square miles. It is the largest of several massive concentrations of plastic waste, contaminating literally every living oceanic organism from plankton to whales."

"The plastic-spewing superpower these days is the Philippines. With less than 2 percent of the world's population, this island nation produces nearly one-third of the estimated 1 million tons of plastic dumped into the ocean every year. The solution is to develop more sanitary landfills, implement new and more effective methods to reprocess plastic waste, and where possible, invent substitutes to plastic. But 'climate change' has nothing to do with this problem."

I looked at his endnotes to check his source for this information.

The source was the Visual Capitalist website, which posted the item on Feb. 17, 2023, along with a list of plastics pollution by country. The website reported:

"Where does all of this plastic come from? In this graphic, Louis Lugas Wicaksono used data from a research paper by Lourens J.J. Meijer and team to highlight the top 10 countries emitting plastic pollutants in the waters surrounding them (see table)."

"First, let's talk about how this plastic waste reaches the oceans in the first place. Most of the plastic waste found in the deep blue waters comes from the litter in parks, beaches, or along the storm drains lining our streets. These bits of plastic waste are carried into our drains, streams, and rivers by wind and rainwater runoff."

"The rivers then turn into plastic superhighways, transporting the plastic to the oceans."

"A large additional chunk of ocean plastic comes from damaged fishing nets or ghost nets that are directly discarded into the high seas."

"Some might think that the countries producing or consuming the most plastic are the ones that pollute the oceans the most. But that's not true."

"According to the study, countries with a smaller geographical area, longer coastlines, high rainfall, and poor waste management systems are more likely to wash plastics into the sea."

We chalked up this record despite our Congress passing a waste management act and banning plastics for garbage disposal across the archipelago. And we have a full-fledged environment and natural resources department."

Environmental disasters in progress

The rest of Mr Ring's article shocks in

Top 10 countries emitting plastic pollutants in waters surrounding them

Rank	Country	Annual Oceanic Plastic Waste (metric tons)
1	Philippines	356,371
2	India	126,513
3	Malaysia	73,098
4	China	70,707
5	Indonesia	56,333
6	Myanmar	40,000
7	Brazil	37,769
8	Vietnam	28,221
9	Bangladesh	24,640
10	Thailand	22,800
	Rest of the World	178,012
	Total	1,012,500

FROM VISUALCAPITALIST.COM

its indictment of climate alarmism as the enemy of environmentalism:

"The overwhelming theme of environmentalism today, designed to obscure its true agenda, is the alleged 'climate crisis.'"

"Americans may or may not eventually muster the impertinence to successfully challenge the political power grab masquerading as environmentalism today. But either way, its centerpiece, the 'climate crisis,' is responsible for devastating harm both to what was once a legitimate environmentalist movement, as well as to the environment itself."

"Policies ostensibly designed to manage the planet's climate are taking attention and resources away from genuine environmental threats. At the same time, a growing percentage of people are recognizing the fraudulent essence of the 'climate crisis' agenda and, as a result, are becoming indifferent to legitimate environmental concerns..."

"Here are just a few of the environmental disasters in progress that nobody talks about either because they're making too much money pushing the climate change scam, and disregard all environmentalist concerns."

"1. Loss of insect population: By some estimates, and for reasons we don't yet adequately understand, the total insect mass on Earth is dropping by an estimated 2.5 percent per year, faster than any other endangered species. This is an existential threat. Insects pollinate many vital food crops. They play a critical role in consuming decomposing animals and plants. They are an essential link in the food chain, the glue that connects microorganisms to smaller predators. Wind turbine blades are a mass killer of insects. Whatever else is killing insects, it won't stop because we banned fossil fuels."

"2. Aquatic dead zones: While criticism has been appropriately directed at unjustifiable attempts to shut down farms that use fertilizers derived from nitrogen and phosphorus, the problems posed by these compounds cannot be ignored. But the consequences of overloading waterways with nutrient

runoff, either from flood irrigation, dairy and cattle manure, or insufficiently treated urban wastewater, have relatively little to do with 'climate change.' Instead, the problem is that nutrient-rich waterways nourish overgrowth of algae, which produce deadly toxins that kill fish en masse and create massive aquatic dead zones. A rational approach to this challenge would be to stop connecting it to climate change, which is a stretch at best, and instead develop precision irrigation and fertilizing methods, as well as adaptive reuse of effluent from livestock and humans."

"3. Overfishing: The overfishing of the oceans is another environmental catastrophe in the making that has nothing to do with climate change. Banning incandescent light bulbs will do nothing to stop illegal fishing trawlers from strip-mining the oceans with drift nets that can be over 30 miles long. Cramping humanity into small apartments will not prevent factory ships from decarcutting the floor of the continental shelf with weighted nets that scoop up every living organism. Anyone who thinks humanity hasn't by now acquired the capacity to extract every scrap of living protein out of the oceans isn't paying attention. Rational solutions are to enforce fishing quotas, and encourage industrial aquaculture onshore and in coastal waters."

"4. Energy security in developing nations: One of the many ironic results of the climate alarmist war on fossil fuel is the inability of equatorial African nations to achieve energy security, which is a prerequisite to prosperity, which, in turn, causes population stabilization. Instead of having energy security, these burgeoning, desperately poor populations are stripping the forests of wood for fuel and wildlife for food. The primary threat to wilderness and wildlife on Earth today is not 'climate change.' It is that the climate alarm has inspired the international community to do everything in its power to deny prosperity to the poverty-stricken populations living in proximity to

the world's great tropical forests.

"5. The biofuel disaster: Which brings us to biofuel, an example not only of an environmental catastrophe that is ignored in favor of climate alarm, but an environmental catastrophe explicitly caused by climate alarm. Over 500,000 square miles are now given over to biofuel monocultures, most of them saturated in chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, most of them replacing what previously were tropical rainforests. In exchange for this devastation, biofuel produces less than 2 percent of global transportation fuel."

"6. Massive oceanic garbage patches: In the central Pacific Ocean, a body of water larger in area than every continent on Earth put together, there is a concentration of floating garbage spread over nearly 8 million square miles. It is the largest of several massive concentrations of plastic waste, contaminating literally every living oceanic organism from plankton to whales. (already quoted above.)"

"7. Population crash: The population crash currently afflicting every developed nation on earth may be good news for those environmentalists who have succumbed to misanthropic nihilism, but for the rest of us, it's possibly the biggest catastrophe of all."

"The crash is usually attributed to cultural and economic causes, but environmental factors may play a direct and indirect role. Humans today ingest increasing levels of chemical endocrine disruptors unknown a century ago, present in everything from the air, water, and food, to fabrics and cosmetics, harming health and fertility. They are not only a direct physical cause of declining birth rates through lowered fertility, they may also cause behavioral changes that indirectly lower birth rates. Endocrine disruptors should be removed from the environment and avoided in the meantime. But carbon dioxide, the climate alarmist boogeyman, has nothing to do with endocrine disruption."

"These are just some of the environmental problems confronting humanity and the planet that have nothing to do with CO2 emissions and, in many cases, are worsened by misguided steps being taken to curb CO2 emissions. By now, the fraudulent reality of 'renewables' that aren't renewable is well documented, even if that fact receives scant attention in the mainstream press. But this additional fact — that the climate alarmist focus on achieving 'net zero' is discrediting environmentalism at large, and taking attention away from other serious environmental threats — is perhaps the saddest chapter in the story of a movement that has lost its way."

yenobserver@gmail.com



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REGIONS

## Mindoro folk: Spill worse than COVID

Over a month since the fuel tanker MT Princess Empress sank off the waters of Oriental Mindoro, local fishermen continued to suffer from the impact of the oil spill on their livelihood and the environment. Research done by scientists and environmental groups showed that the spill and fishing ban "were worse than the COVID-19 pandemic" since locals could not go on fishing trips, making them dependent on aid. —STORY BY DELFIN T. MALLARI JR.

A5





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# Spill worse than pandemic for Mindoro fishers

## Research by a coalition of scientists, environmentalists shows the 'immense' toll the toxic fuel spillage had on coastal communities

By **Delfin T. Mallari Jr.**  
@dtmallarijrINQ

More than a month after the MT Princess Empress sank off the waters of Oriental Mindoro and spilled toxic fuel oil, local fishermen continued to bear the brunt of the tragedy's impact on their livelihood and the environment, different groups said on Monday.

A coalition of scientists and environmental groups that conducted research on the effects of the oil spill on the communities reported that the affected residents complained the oil leak and fishing ban "were worse than the COVID-19 pandemic" since they had been prevented from catching food for their families' consumption.

In a statement, Berto Alinea, coordinator of the Serve the People Corps-Southern Tagalog (STPC), said the scale of the oil spill impacts was "immense," adding that it showed the need for "immediate and more comprehensive action responding to the needs of the people."

STPC is among the members of the coalition, which also includes Brigada Kalikasan, Advocates for Science and Technology for the People, Center for Environmental Concerns (CEC) Philippines and local organization Angat Kabataan Mindoreño.

The coalition's research, held from April 1 to April 3, covered over 400 individual respondents from two municipalities and six barangays across Oriental Mindoro, which were not identified in the report.

"Over 90 percent of individuals do not earn enough to meet their family's needs following the oil spill," the coalition said as quoted by environmental group Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment.

Jordan Fronda, CEC research coordinator, said on top of environmental issues, residents have had to deal with little to no income these past few weeks, "causing trickle-down effects on their health and education."

### Long-term effects

He added: "The impacts of the oil spill and fishing ban are also long-term, so it is not enough to just give one-time assistance."

MT Princess Empress, which was carrying some 800,000 liters of industrial fuel, sank off the waters of Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28, causing a fishing ban in the affected areas and jeopardizing the livelihood of thousands of fishers and their families.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), which has been leading

both the cleanup operation and the effort to plug the oil leaking from the sunken vessel, has so far collected 15,933 liters of oily water mixture and 180 sacks of oil-contaminated materials collected during its offshore oil spill response operations and another 4,706 sacks and 22 drums of waste collected for its shoreline operations in 13 affected barangays in the towns of Naujan, Bulalacao and Pola in Oriental Mindoro from March 1 to April 2.

Coast Guard Commodore Geronimo Tuvilla, commander of the Incident Management Team in Oriental Mindoro, said in a social media post by the PCG on Monday that their underwater bagging operation was still ongoing, having received assistance from the US Coast Guard, the Pacific Valkyrie, Phoenix International Holdings Inc., the US Navy's Supervisor of Salvage and Diving, the Japanese survey vessel DPV Shin Nichi Maru, and oil containment experts from Japan and South Korea.

### 'Lack of aid'

According to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, about 172,928 people have been affected by the oil spill.

While most residents have received aid over the past few weeks, nearly 100 percent of

respondents also reported that the aid they received was "insufficient," the coalition said.

"Ayuda (aid) packs would mainly come in the form of food, while other needs such as hygiene supplies for infants, money for allowances and transportation for children going to school were not addressed," the groups emphasized.

They reported "widespread economic impacts and a lack of sufficient and sustained ayuda" for the affected residents.

"Civil society is doing what it can, but this is not enough," the coalition lamented.

It added: "We need the national government to improve and hasten its response, especially in terms of addressing the socioeconomic impacts."

The groups called on the affected residents to seek accountability from the ship's owner, RDC Reield Marine Service, for the "grave" ecological and environmental impacts caused by the oil spill.

According to the coalition, their members would return to the affected communities to assist again in relief efforts.

They called for an immediate resolution to the oil spill itself, "as well as immediate, sufficient and sustained relief efforts from the national government." INQ



## PCG taps DOST in oil spill probe

By AARON RECUENCO

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) is collaborating with the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) in the investigation of the oil spill that hit the waters of Oriental Mindoro and nearby areas after the sinking of an oil tanker on Feb. 28.

In a statement, the PCG said the collaboration started when the DOST agreed to work with the agency by tapping Dr. Hernando Bacosa, a DOST-National Research Council of the Philippines (NRCP) member under the Biological Science Division.

Bacosa is an environmental science professor at Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT) and the head of the Mindanao State University-Main Campus Extension in Bataraza, Palawan.

"The PCG-DOST collaboration

aims to improve investigation through laboratory analysis in oil biomarker fingerprinting through the DOST-Industrial Technology Development Institute and confirm the suspected source of oil that reached the coastlines of Oriental Mindoro, Antique, and Palawan," the PCG said.

Teams from the PCG and DOST have started conducting sampling in offshore and shoreline operations to verify oil weathering characteristics.

The oil samples were collected from the offshore spill area, coastal communities affected, and the SL Harbor Bulk Terminal tank in Limay, Bataan where the vessel acquired its Industrial Fuel Oil (IFO).

"The collected samples are used to identify the specific bacteria present in the environment, culture local superior oil-degrading bacteria, and monitor the fate

of oil to provide clues for future oil spill events under Philippine conditions," the PCG said.

Barcosa sought the assistance of the MSU in running the appropriate tests and looking through proper methods like the American Society for Testing and Materials method and Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry for the determination of water-borne oil samples and oil residues that could be used as confirmatory evidence admissible in court and following internationally accepted standard.

Meanwhile, the PCG Marine Environmental Protection Command sent oil samples to laboratories in Japan and France for oil fingerprinting on April 5.

The oil slick started after M/T Princess Empress carrying over 800,000 liters of industrial fuel sank off the waters of Naujan town in Oriental Mindoro.



## Nurturing nature (3)

**M**ore than half a century ago, the biologist/ecologist Barry Commoner made a clarion call about an impending environmental crisis if human beings continue with their rapacious use of nature's gifts. He made this through his 1971 book that I have already cited in the first two parts of this series ("The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, Technology").

Commoner's third law is "Nature knows best." Left undisturbed, nature will just heal its own "wounds," to regenerate after a major catastrophe. This has been demonstrated in the earth's capacity for rebirth after the presumed "big bang" that decimated prehistoric creatures like the dinosaurs and other living organisms. This period of continuous and speedy rebirth of the earth is what environmentalists and ecologists call the Holocene. The Holocene has stabilized the earth for quite a long time, which led to the era of massive regrowth and development, and the rise of human civilization.

Unfortunately, it is this same human arrogance and sense of superiority that erected massive monuments of power (like the Acropolis in Greece and Persepolis in Iran, formerly Persia) that have also made us forget this law. Human beings keep on tinkering with and pushing the limits of what nature can do which has led us to where we are now, on the brink of a major environmental disaster, as we are warned in various media.

The fourth law is "there is no such thing as a free lunch." Everything we do, or don't do, will always have a repercussion. We may not see it in an instant, but it will somehow happen. The cost may come at a later time, and it can be at a time when there is no turning



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RUFA CAGOCO-GUIAM

back, and when things happen in confluence with each other to cause major devastation. This law sums up all the three other laws, as Commoner argues in "The Closing Circle." Since everything in nature is interconnected (first law) when something is done in one part of it, it will always go somewhere—it does not disappear (second law). When nature is left on its own, it can always heal itself after some natural mishaps or accidents happen (third law). The Chernobyl nuclear explosion in 1986 turned one erstwhile progressive city in Ukraine into a ghost city. But currently, the place is showing signs of vegetative and animal life. After a devastating accident caused by faulty human planning and decision-making, nature can still recover, over time.

In other parts of the world, we see how nature has already been exploited to the point that it will take a long time for it to recover and bring back the natural environment that has nurtured us all these years. In Somalia, for example, more than 40,000 people have died as a result of extreme weather

events, flooding in one area, and drought in another. Drought is the consequence of rapid desertification, turning erstwhile lush forests into savannahs, then ultimately into deserts.

Several local incidents demonstrated the devastating consequences of Commoner's fourth law. Government inaction, slow action, or an anomalous action or decision on an urgent climate-related impending crisis can lead to devastating results. Many tragic incidents happened largely because of government neglect (inaction), and acts of corruption (circumventing laws or policies like the environmental compliance certificates or building standards requirements, among others). The Lake Maughan-Mount Parker is one such tragedy.

In October 2019, an earthquake (intensity 6 to 7) struck many provinces in Central Mindanao, including Davao City. Several buildings collapsed, like a public elementary school building in North Cotabato. The building's collapse exposed the consequences of corruption. A report from Phivolcs after the 2019 earthquake concluded that many buildings, especially government ones, were built with "poor engineering," using "substandard construction materials ... the major contributing factors to the damages."

We can't bring back nature to its pristine form at this stage. But if we act collectively to nurture it to what ecologists call its homeostatic (balanced) state, we might be able to delay or even hopefully prevent a massive global environmental crisis in the future. It is time we nurture nature back to its stabilized state, so we are able to fully benefit from its gifts.

Comments to [rcguiam@gmail.com](mailto:rcguiam@gmail.com)



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# Manila Standard



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# Miners say ban on nickel ore exports to hurt local industry

By Othel V. Campos

**N**ICKEL miners expressed opposition to a government's plan to ban the export of nickel ore and warned that it would harm the mining industry.

The Department of Trade and Industry earlier proposed to restrict nickel ore exports to institutionalize mineral ore processing and add value to mineral exports.

Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual earlier said the agency was studying a ban or duties on export of nickel ore to encourage the development of local nickel processing which fetches higher value. The government plans to follow the lead of Indonesia which also restricted

exports of nickel ore to China and other countries.

Global Ferronickel Holdings Inc. president Dante Bravo said the move would hurt not only nickel miners but also all mining companies operating in the Philippines.

"Killing the industry will not incentivize investments in value added processing. You promote investments in value added processing by promoting mining

investments first—with a stable and predictable policy. If we cannot show protection of mining investments, how can we show protection of investments in value added processing," he said.

Imposing duties on nickel ore exports would also severely harm companies mining nickel especially as the industry is already heavily taxed, said Bravo, who is also the head of the Philippine Nickel Industry Association.

The twin proposals will only serve as added burden to the mining industry that is yet to recover from slump over years of mining ban which was lifted only in December 2021, according to the group.

The government reinstated mining as a major part of economic recovery, and taxing more than what the sector could

absorb is an antithesis to what the government purportedly aims to achieve, the miners said.

Bravo said more taxes and the proposed ban on nickel ore shipment would disincentivize investors and pull them away from putting in more investments into the local mining industry.

He said that while FNI had plans to add value to nickel ores by means of processing, the company was focused on exploration and nickel resource banking.

"We are continuously studying different technologies that can be economically viable in the Philippines," he said.

The nickel firm plans to expand its shipment from 6.5 million wet metric tons in 2022 to 8 million wet MT in the next two years.



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**DOLomite BEACH** – The Dolomite Beach at the Manila Bay is one of the favorite destinations for families in Metro Manila. (Juan Carlo de Vela)



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## LPA spotted east of PH may intensify – PAGASA

By MERLINA HERNANDO-MALIPOT

The low-pressure area (LPA) east of Visayas could become a tropical depression, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said on Monday, April 10.

PAGASA said in Weather Advisory No. 1 issued at 11 a.m. that the “weather disturbance may develop into a tropical depression as it moves generally westward towards Southern Luzon-Visayas area over the Philippine Sea.”

The State weather bureau said the LPA will “bring light to moderate with at times heavy rains” over Eastern Visayas and Caraga in the next 24 hours.

“Under these conditions, flooding

and rain-induced landslides are likely, especially in areas that are highly or very highly susceptible to these hazards as identified in hazard maps and in areas with significant antecedent rainfall,” PAGASA warned.

PAGASA advised public and disaster risk reduction and management offices concerned to “take all necessary measures to protect life and property” from the LPA.

PAGASA noted that its regional services divisions “may also issue local heavy rainfall warnings, rainfall or thunderstorm advisories, and other severe weather information specific to their areas of responsibility as appropriate.”