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Jobs for oil spill victims eyed

Marcos orders agencies to speed up response efforts

By RAYMUND ANTONIO
and ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

As the government moves to contain the remaining oil spill in Mindoro, President Marcos announced on Saturday, April 15, that the government's initiative will go beyond the cleanup operations by finding livelihood for affected fishermen and other victims.

During a media briefing, the Chief Executive noted how the cleanup operation, which has been a "cash-for-work for a while," is now concerned with the oil that is closing in on beaches and shorelines.

After the oil spill is controlled—with the operations closing all possible sources of oil leak—Marcos said the government would then tackle the livelihood problems of the affected barangays.

"Ngayon, papunta na naman 'to sa—babalik na naman tayo sa livelihood. Pero ang critical ngayon ay walang hanapbuhay pa ang tao, 'yun ang inuuna namin, na magkaroon ng livelihood (Now, we are going back to livelihood. But the most critical is people don't have jobs. That's what we're prioritizing, for them to have livelihood)," he said.

The damage and ► **6**



PRESIDENTIAL VISIT — President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' R. Marcos Jr. (second from left) is greeted by local fisherfolk in Pola, Oriental Mindoro, on Saturday, April 15, 2023, as he goes on an inspection of areas affected by the oil spill from a sunken tanker. (PNA)



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Jobs for oil spill victims eyed 1

losses due to the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro are about to breach the ₱1-billion mark, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) had earlier said.

The oil slick from M/T Princess Empress, which sank off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, on February 28, has so far damaged ₱445.33 million worth of fishing gear and produce, resulting in a ₱441.25-million loss of profit for some 26,000 fisherfolk.

It has affected the livelihood of nearby communities, with the spill reaching as far as Palawan, and impacted 1.4 million hectares of the Verde Island Passage Marine Corridor (VIPMC).

Noting that there were "many affected barangays," the President recognized how the spill impacted the livelihood of those living in the affected areas.

"We are trying to find alternative livelihood for them until they can go back to their old fishing grounds," he promised.

Marcos ordered Interior Secretary Benhur Abalos to talk to local chief executives to look for alternative fishing grounds to allow displaced fisherfolk in Oriental Mindoro to fish in their waters.

During the situation briefing, the President instructed Abalos to schedule a dialogue with the local officials of the four fishing sites within the Calabarzon and Mimaropa regions that the affected fishermen could tap.

The four alternative fishing sites include Mindoro Strait in Mindoro Oriental, Cuyo Pass in Batangas, Tablas Strait in Romblon, and Tayabas Bay in Quezon.

Marcos said the national government, through the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), will continue monitoring the situation on the ground.

"DENR will continue to monitor the situation. BFAR will continue to monitor the situation. As soon as maging—ma-clear na, makabalik na tayo sa dating normal, back to the old normal (the area is cleared, you can return to your old normal)," he said.

Marcos conducted an aerial inspection of the Oriental Mindoro coastlines on Saturday.

Following the aerial inspection, the President presided over the situation briefing with mayors in Pola town to assess the damage of the oil spill and coordinate government response.

He then instructed the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) to talk to local officials in the identified four alternative fishing grounds for those affected by the oil spill.

Speed up oil spill response — Marcos

In a speech during the distribution of various government assistance in Pola on Saturday, President Marcos said the state's response was looking good but ordered concerned agencies to speed it up.

"Maganda naman po ang naging resulta, so far, dahil lahat po ng ahensya ng gobyerno mula noong tumama 'yung oil spill, mula noong lumubog 'yung barko, ay lahat naka-alert na (The results look good, so far, as every agency are on red alert since the vessel sank)," he said. "Inistruksiyonan ko ang ating mga secretary upang gawin lahat kasi madalian, lalo na palapit na 'yung oil spill dito sa shoreline (I instructed our Cabinet secretaries to act faster, especially since the oil spill is already approaching the shorelines)."

A report from the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) showed that the oil spill had spread to other areas. Most of the impacted areas are in Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan.

Gov't assistance

President Marcos led the distribution of various government assistance to over 1,200 beneficiaries in Pola.

The President turned over 17 fishing boats with engines to the Province of Oriental Mindoro.

He also led the turnover of the following:

- One unit of post-harvest technology package (fish-smoking technology) worth ₱335,739 to Maasin Marine Protected Area Association in Bulalacao, Oriental Mindoro
- One unit of 65 HP tractor with implements to Maralitang Magsasaka ng Mindoro in Bansud, Oriental Mindoro
- Three units of pump and engine to Maralitang Magsasaka ng Mindoro and Mahabang Parang Farmers Association in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro
- Six water pumps for the municipalities of Pola, Naujan, and Pinamalayan in Oriental Mindoro
- 2.5 kilos of assorted veg-

etable seeds, 10 bags of black rice, two bags of brown rice, 300 bags of certified palay seeds, and 300 corn seeds to the local government of Pola

Other assistance from various national government agencies include:

- Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)'s Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS) and Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) programs
- Department of Labor and Employment's (DOLE)'s Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged Workers (TUPAD) Program
- Department of Agriculture (DA)'s Rice Program, Organic Banner Program, High-Value Commodity Development Program, and loan assistance
- Fishing boats, fishing equipment, and fuel subsidy from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)
- Financial assistance from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI)



Oil spill damage, losses nearing P1 B

BBM gives aid to Mindoro residents

By ROMINA CABRERA and HELEN FLORES

Damage to the fishery industry and income loss from the massive oil spill in Oriental Mindoro has neared P1 billion almost two months after the February sinking of tanker *MT Princess Empress* off Naujuan town in the province, data from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) showed.

Based on BFAR data, losses alone in terms of inputs and produce, fishing gear and paraphernalia, as well as facilities and equipment, have reached

P445 million.

These included fisheries production losses incurred by the Mimaropa Commercial and Municipal Fisheries valued at P14.1 million and some P3 million damage to 119 metric tons of seaweed production in Western Visayas.

BFAR earlier noted that income losses of fisherfolk directly affected by the oil spill have reached P441 million in 22 fishing days.

The 26,719 registered fisherfolk affected by the oil spill are each reportedly losing

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A Coast Guard vessel is positioned near an oil slick (above) as seen by President Marcos during an aerial inspection of the damage caused by a submerged oil tanker in Oriental Mindoro yesterday. Lower photo shows a resident wearing a protective suit taking part in a cleanup on the coast of Pola municipality.

Oil spill From Page 1

P714 daily or a P20 million every day. Anticipating the ongoing oil spill cleanup to take longer, President Marcos instructed yesterday government agencies to look for alternative livelihood for displaced communities.

Marcos gave the directive after a situation briefing with local officials in Pola, Oriental Mindoro town after conducting an aerial inspection of the areas affected by the oil spill. The sunken tanker was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel.

BFAR said it has undertaken measures to assist affected fisherfolk, including allotting P1.5 million for food assistance and P580,500 for displaced fishing groups.

It has also deployed P720,945 worth of cleanup assistance for coastal communities.

Meanwhile, fishing and tourism

activities may be banned in Puerto Galera, a popular tourist destination, after it failed four consecutive water quality tests.

Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerlito Dolor has asked the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to come up with a policy pronouncement following the latest results. Dolor said that the latest results were received Friday night.

"Before any declaration of fishing ban or tourism activities, let's discuss the four consecutive quality tests now that results have come out. We ask DENR and DOH to come up with an official position on what's next now that Puerto Galera has four consecutive quality tests that failed," he said in an interview.

He noted that the failed results could mean findings of oil and grease even before the Holy Week break.

Drinking water in 15 barangays in Estrella and Pola failed the quality test, prompting authorities to ration water.

Alternative sites

Meanwhile, President Marcos directed Interior Secretary Benhur Abalos to schedule a dialogue with local officials of four fishing sites within the Calabarzon and Mimaropa regions to discuss opening the sites to affected fishermen.

The four alternative fishing sites in the two regions include Mindoro Strait in Mindoro Oriental, Cuyo Pass in Batangas, Tablas Strait in Romblon and Tayabas Bay in Quezon.

"But the critical thing now is that people still don't have a job, that's what we prioritize, to have a livelihood," Marcos told reporters.

"We are trying to find alternative livelihood for them until they can go back to their old fishing grounds," he said.

Marcos, in a speech during the distribution of various government assistance in Pola, expressed satisfaction over the government's response to the oil spill but admitted the job would take a long time to finish.

"But maybe it will take a long time. So, what we do is we need to give the people jobs," he said.

The President also distributed fishing boats, fish smoking machines and relief packs to the residents of Pola.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has so far distributed P98.6 million worth of food packs to families affected by the oil spill in the province.

The DSWD is also carrying out a cash-for-work program in the

government cleanup operations in coordination with the DENR.

There are more than 25,000 families in 14 towns that are engaged in the program, with a total budget allocation of P190.1 million, according to the DSWD.

BFAR data showed more than 26,000 fisherfolk directly affected by the oil spill.

In an interview early last month, Marcos said the government aims to finish the oil spill cleanup in less than four months.

"Because during the Guimaras oil spill, it took four months before the cleanup was completed. Maybe this time, because the oil spill is a little less, we can speed it up. Even if not in a month, maybe it won't last four months," Marcos said, referring to the oil spill from *MT Solar 1*, which capsized off Guimaras Island in 2006 while transporting more than two million liters of bunker fuel.



EDITORIAL

Still waiting for running water

Water supply interruptions in Metro Manila this summer may finally end after the National Water Resources Board approved last Friday the request of the two water concessionaires for an additional allocation of 52 cubic meters per second, effective until next month, from the initial amount of 50 cms.

Across the country, however, millions of households still lack access to running water. A survey conducted by pollster Social Weather Stations from Dec. 10 to 14 last year showed that only 67 percent of households have access to running or piped water. That translates to approximately 17 million of the 25 million households nationwide.

This problem has been around for decades, aggravating public health issues since the lack of piped water means poor sanitation, which engenders the spread of germs. Basic personal health practices such as hand washing, regular bathing and toilet hygiene become difficult when one has to fetch fresh water in communal deep wells or nearby streams.

The lack of access to clean water has been blamed for the periodic

emergence of cholera – a disease that is supposed to have been eradicated years ago – all over the country including in Metro Manila. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the seriousness of the problem as millions of Filipinos found it challenging to practice the hand hygiene that is among the basic defenses against coronavirus infection.

In 2017, the Department of Health said the government was targeting the provision of basic toilet facilities for 100 percent of households nationwide by 2022. All targets, of course, were thrown askew by COVID-19. As of 2020, the first year of the pandemic, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported that around seven million Filipinos were still openly defecating or using unimproved toilets.

With pandemic restrictions lifted and the economy reopening, water and sanitation targets can be revived by the government. The SWS survey should provide additional impetus for this. The United Nations considers access to water and sanitation as a human right. Millions of Filipinos continue to be deprived of this right.



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A MINING site on Homonhon Island. PHOTO FROM ESTE NEWS

Bishop voices alarm over 'escalating' mining activities on Homonhon

BORONGAN CITY—Bishop Crispin Varquez of the Diocese of Borongan in Samar raised alarm over what he described as “escalated” mining operations in the historic island of Homonhon off Guiuan town in Eastern Samar province.

The bishop recently issued a statement, saying they are “very much disturbed” by what is happening on the island, where Christian faith first arrived in the Philippines 502 years ago.

The diocese said there are currently at least four mining companies operating on Homonhon, which is known for its vast deposits of nickel and chromite.

“Their immediate and negative effects on the communities and the natural environment are very alarming,” Varquez said.

He called on government leaders and concerned agencies to take action on the matter. *CBCP News*



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CAMPAIGN TO BECOME A PROTECTED AREA UNDER E-NIPAS ACT

Panaon Island, a rare, precious gem

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

AT the southern tip of Southern Leyte lies Panaon Island. Its surrounding waters are hosts to an excellent coral cover, while those in most parts of the country are already extinct.

What's more, nothing short of spectacular is the breathtaking beauty of the island's underwater environment.

Shared by municipalities of San Ricardo, Pintuyan, San Francisco and Liloan in Southern Leyte province, it is inhabited by close to 60,000 people, and its waters by a diverse species of mangroves, seagrasses and corals, including marine wildlife.

Threats to Panaon Island

ACCORDING to Oceana Philippines, a nongovernment ocean conservation advocacy group, close to 20 marine sanctuaries that were established and managed by local governments in partnership with local communities on the island are threatened by natural and human-induced risks and hazards.

Located on the pathway of super typhoons and other extreme weather conditions associated with the worsening impact of climate change, Panaon Island is vulnerable to natural disasters.

Aggravating the situation is the intrusion of commercial fishing operators in the municipal waters of the island, and other destructive fishing activities that are weighing down the limited resources of local government units (LGUs).

Rich coastal and marine ecosystem

THE island's coastal and marine ecosystem is rich in biodiversity.

Its coral reefs are among the three priority reefs in the Philippines, and of 50 reefs in the world.

They are funded, among others, by Bloomberg Philanthropies, because their strong and very good coral reefs are said to most likely survive the impacts of climate change and have a better chance to repopulate neighboring reefs over time.

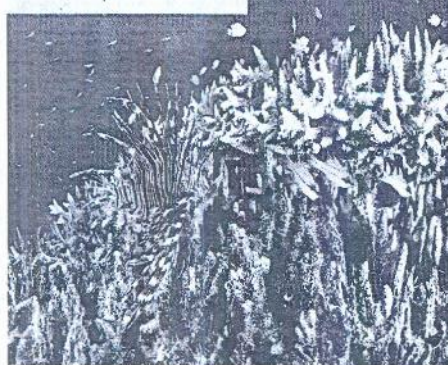
Deonel Beto, a local businessman and farmer from Liloan, Southern Leyte, told the BusinessMirror in Filipino that the island's "best-kept secret" lies beneath the surface of its crystal clear waters.

Unexplored, beautiful corals

"PANAON Island is still unexplored. On the opposite side of the island are established dive sites, which are very [popular]. Unlike here [Panaon Island], where the corals are still intact and the walls of reefs are beautiful," he said in a telephone interview on April 12.

Beto, 42, a dive master, is one of

A LIONFISH stalks small reef fishes among the lush Acropora corals found in the waters around Panaon Island in Southern Leyte. DANNY OCAÑAS/OCEANA PHOTO



the over 30 volunteers and conservation partners of Oceana who recently launched an underwater cleanup in the island's waters, specifically to remove crown of thorns that have been infesting corals.

He said other fishermen are now encroaching in marine sanctuaries around the island, and "they should be stopped."

Beto noted the slowly dwindling fish catch in Liloan and around the island. He said the island's rich coastal and marine biodiversity is threatened by unsustainable fishing.

"We need to protect Panaon Island and we need to implement rules and regulations that will protect our resources," he said.

He supported the initiative of Oceana and local government officials in the province to declare the island a protected area.

Campaign for marine protected area

IN October 2020, Oceana conducted a scientific expedition in the area and confirmed the rich biodiversity of Panaon Island's surrounding coastal and marine ecosystem.

The findings brought about a valuable cache of data and evidence that led Oceana and local and national stakeholders to launch a campaign to declare the island a marine protected area under Republic Act 11038, or the Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System (E-Nipas) Act.

Among the expedition's findings revealed a high percentage of live corals with 62 genera of hard corals; high fish diversity with 427 species, including 155 commercially important and 23 reef fish indicators of health; high diversity of marine wildlife like sea turtles, whale sharks, dolphins and sharks.

Oceana noted that the area has 18 marine species listed as threatened or endangered in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.

Lastly, there are a total of 19 mangrove species found around the island, including two species that are listed as threatened under the IUCN Red List.

Ecologically important

MARIANNE P. SANIANO, Oceana's Science and Conservation Manager, highlighted the importance of protecting biodiversity-rich areas like Panaon Island in an interview via Messenger with the BUSINESSMIRROR on April 12.

"Panaon Island is part of the 50 priority reefs identified by scientists that can highly likely withstand the devastating impacts of global climate change. The coral reefs of Panaon are still in good condition. Prioritizing these kinds of reefs can provide sources of refuge to the adjacent reefs and make these reefs recuperate," she explained.

"In 2020, we went to all the marine sanctuaries of Panaon Island for the biophysical assessment. Each sanctuary has its own unique characteristics, its own beauty. In every dive, it gets better and better," added Saniano, who stayed on the island for a month during the 2020 Panaon Island Expedition and public consultations with 84 barangays covered by the proposed protected area as part of the E-Nipas process.

"Every day, I'd get to meet and talk to fisherfolks and the community. I got to hear their apprehensions and their thirst for a better life," she said.

Panaon Island, composed of fourth- and fifth-class municipalities, "will surely benefit both the people and provide sustainable management of the marine resources there" if it is protected under the E-Nipas Act, she said.

According to Saniano, each day of the expedition was an affirmation that protecting the waters of Panaon Island is a special place that needs attention and urgent protection not only for the people of Panaon but for the rest of the country.

"As what our battle cry says, 'Panaon na ng Panaon,'" she said.

Enhanced protection

ATTY. Gloria Estenzo-Ramos, Oceana vice president in the Philippines, told the BUSINESSMIRROR that the best way to protect and conserve Panaon



A DIVER takes a peek at the spectacular view of corals in the waters of Panaon Island in Southern Leyte. DANNY OCAÑAS/OCEANA PHOTO

Island is through enhanced protection under E-Nipas Act which requires legislation.

Declaring the island as a protected area will also benefit the Filipino people who need sustainable sources of fish resources for food, nutrition and livelihood security, she explained in the interview on April 11 via Zoom.

According to Ramos, an environmental lawyer, legislators from Southern Leyte have filed separate bills seeking to declare Panaon Island as a protected seascape to safeguard the island's coral reefs and threatened and endangered species that inhabit the island's coastal and marine environment.

Proposed legislative measures

ACCORDING to Ramos, Rep. Christopherson Yap (Southern Leyte Second District) filed House Bill 4095 and Rep. Luz Mercado (Southern Leyte First District) filed House Bill 3743 at the start of the 19th Congress in 2022 to declare the Panaon Island as a protected area under the category of a seascape.

Both bills have been consolidated in a committee report that was submitted to the Committee on Appropriations for the approval of provisions on appropriations.

Similarly, in the Senate, Sen. Cynthia Villar filed Senate Bill 1690 early this year titled, "Panaon Island Protected Seascape Act of 2023."

Villar, the chairman of the Senate committee on environment and natural resources, emphasized that despite the presence of extensive coral reefs and vibrant fish communities, the abundance and biomass of commercially important species show signs of overfishing and other anthropogenic threats.

The National Mapping and Resource Information Authority had already completed the mapping that will identify the areas to be covered by the proposed measures.

'A rare and precious gem'

CITING the findings of scientists who conducted the scientific expedition in 2020, Ramos said Panaon is "a rare

and precious gem" not only for the country but for the world.

"The communities themselves realize the importance of having marine protected areas. They have 19 marine sanctuaries and they know how to protect them," she said.

If Panaon Island is declared as a protected seascape under the E-Nipas, she said there will be stronger protection measures for the entire island.

She said with the E-Nipas Act, 45 actions against illegal fishing, including commercial fishing, will be strictly prohibited, on pain of heavy penalties.

"We hope the commercial fishing in this area will stop. This is a must!" she said.

Ramos pointed out that even LGUs support the declaration of Panaon Island as a protected island with all its four municipalities have passed a resolution supporting it.

The provincial government also entered into a memorandum of agreement with the DENR to have it declared as a protected area, she said.

At the same time, the academe, the Southern Leyte State University and the University of the Philippines, "helped conduct studies that support this initiative."

According to Ramos, if Panaon Island is declared as a protected area, funding for the protection and conservation of the area will be made available, ensuring not only the sustainable development of the island but the implementation of various environmental and fisheries laws, as well.

'A protected area is like a bank'

ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity Executive Director Theresa Mundita S. Lim said that with the recently adopted Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework target of protecting 30 percent of the world's rich marine areas by 2030, and the Philippines joining the High Ambition Coalition, the proclamation of Panaon Island seascape as part of the national protected area system "would certainly be a welcome contribution towards achieving the said global aspiration."

"The designation should also be complemented with resources that will ensure effective management and proper enforcement of protected area laws, including support to the communities who are frontliners in the protection of biodiversity in the area," Lim told the BUSINESSMIRROR via Messenger on April 12.

For his part, Prof. Rex Sadaba of the University of the Philippines (UP) Visayas said there is a "need to increase our protected areas."

"These areas are usually pristine. By protecting them, we are conserving for the future generation," Sadaba told the BusinessMirror in Filipino in a telephone interview on April 13.

He added that once an area is declared a protected area, illegal and destructive fishing activities will be curbed, adding that even legal fishing that is harmful can be stopped, if not limited to the enforcement of laws, rules and regulations.

"A protected area is like a bank. You save fish stock and spend only that interest by repopulating other areas with fish from the area you protect," he explained.

Sadaba, among the 2019 Distinguished Alumni awardee for Environmental Rehabilitation and Management at the 2019 UP Alumni Homecoming at UP Diliman, added that in the Visayas, the practice of declaring areas as marine sanctuaries is for the protection and conservation of the environment and natural resources.

The Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) said that for local fishing communities, any initiative to conserve the country's marine resources and fishing waters are always welcome.

However, the group said that there should be a thorough assessment of the potential impacts of such measures on the livelihood of municipal fisherfolk.

"Will the traditional and nondestructive fishing methods of small fishers be prohibited as part of regulating the fishing activities in the area?" asked Ronnel Arambulo, Pamalakaya national spokesman during the BUSINESSMIRROR interview via Messenger on April 13.

He said these questions must be settled with the local fishing communities before placing the waters off Panaon Island a protected seascape.

"Moreover, there should be a guarantee that this will not pave the way for the conversion and privatization of fishing communities," Arambulo added.

"Small-scale fishers are always at the forefront of safeguarding their source of livelihood against any form of destructive activities, whether it be an outright threat to the marine environment or a conservation measure façade," Arambulo pointed out.



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First ecotourism travel mart features Asean's natural heritage

ECOTOURISM experts, entrepreneurs, travel professionals and environment protection advocates from 25 nations gathered at the five-day International Ecotourism Travel Mart (IETM) in Cavite. The IETM ran early this month at the International School of Sustainable Tourism (ISST). It was open to the public.

The Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), one of the major partners in the event, showcased the rich and unique natural heritage of the Asean through an interactive exhibit featuring the Asean Heritage Parks (AHPs).

AHPs are notable protected areas in the region recognised for their unique biological and ecological diversity that best represent the region. Eighty percent of the 55 AHPs are prime ecotourism destinations in the world; some of which are also declared as Unesco World Heritage Sites.

The exhibit featured biodiver-

sity-based products produced by local communities in some AHPs.

They included eco-print tie-dye scarves by the women of Timbang Jaya village of Indonesia; traditional snacks; Lampung coffee; Jore coffee from Gunung Leuser National Park; stingless bee pure honey; and Bandek krimer, or ginger milk tea, from Sumatra, Indonesia.

The manufacturing of these products was supported by a joint sustainable livelihood initiative by the ACB and the German Development Bank called the ACB Small Grants Programme.

Biodiversity, tourism sectors unite

THE last two years of lockdowns and quarantine due to Covid-19 has forced people to re-examine their relationship with nature.

"It was like the universe pressed humanity's pause button and gave

the earth a chance to breathe and heal itself. Most of us have witnessed in person or through social media, how wild animals have started to reappear and thrive in areas where they haven't been seen for a long while," said ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim.

"But then, it seems like this was centuries ago now. Vaccines and newer, less fatal Covid variants have rendered most of us immune and allowed us to physically interact once again, and increase our mobility. We are now experiencing the so-called 'revenge travel,'" she added.

Lim explained that although this is the ideal time to promote ecotourism, people need to be more mindful of how we manage our tourism and tourism-related activities to prevent irreversibly harming the main attractions—our wildlife and their natural habitats.

"Blessed with natural wonders

and unique wildlife, the Asean countries can indeed work together to make ecotourism one of the region's main drivers of growth," she said.

If implemented properly, ecotourism can contribute toward reducing the rate of biodiversity loss and become one of the region's demonstrable examples of nature-positive industries, contributing immensely to achieving other benefits such as climate resiliency, health and wellness, and food and water security, Lim added.

The ACB has been initiating efforts to mainstream biodiversity in regional tourism strategies. Its support to AHPs includes promoting biodiversity-based enterprises such as ecotourism, which not only generates livelihoods but enhances environmental awareness and contributes to management effectiveness, as well.

As reflected in this year's Asean

theme, "Asean Matters: the epicentrum of growth," the ACB stands ready to work with the tourism industry in the region in building a shared value that will transform Asean into a global hub for sustainable nature tourism," Lim said.

With the intent of working closely with the tourism sector to promote sustainable and responsible ecotourism practices, the ACB supported the IETM.

Philippines' Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco addressed the IETM opening ceremony with a call for sharing of best practices and continued learning to achieve tourism sustainability, while the country presents its ecotourism offerings to a world that seeks out responsible travel.

The IETM was organized by the ISST and was co-hosted by the municipality of Silang, Cavite, the ACB, the Departments of Tourism, and of

Trade and Industry (DTI), Philippine Exporters Confederation Inc., Tourism Promotions Board, and the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture.

It had three major components: the Travel Mart, the Ecotourism Forum and the Marketplace.

Travel Mart exhibitors were travel agencies and eco-friendly hotels and resorts. The Marketplace sold local and sustainable products that featured livelihood component of recycling efforts of participating companies.

The DTI brought regional groups to present their best products in accordance with environmental programs.

The Miss Earth 2022 queens joined the event and were the newest additions to the Asean's voices of biodiversity as part of "We Are Asean Biodiversity" campaign.



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Mt. Inayawan to be declared ASEAN Heritage Park

The Mt. Inayawan Range Natural Park in Nunungan, Lanao del Norte will be declared as an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Heritage Park.

Nunungan Mayor Marcos Mamay said the official declaration would be on June 28.

In 2007, the Mt. Inayawan Range Natural Park was declared a protected area under Proclamation 1344 issued by former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

The natural park was placed under the administrative jurisdiction of the Department

of Environment and Natural Resources.

According to the ASEAN Center for Biodiversity, ASEAN Heritage Parks are "protected areas of high conservation importance, preserving in total a complete spectrum of representative ecosystems of the ASEAN region."

"These areas are established to generate greater awareness, pride, appreciation, enjoyment and conservation of ASEAN's rich natural heritage, through a regional network of representative protected areas and to generate greater

collaboration among ASEAN member states in preserving their shared natural heritage," it said.

There are more than 50 ASEAN Heritage Parks, nine of which are in the Philippines.

These are the Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary, Mt. Apo Natural Park, Mt. Hamiguitan Range Wildlife Sanctuary, Mt. Kitanglad Range Natural Park, Mt. Makiling Forest Reserve, Mt. Malindang Range Natural Park, Mt. Iglit-Baco National Park, Mt. Timpoong Hibok-Hibok Natural Monument and Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park. **- Janvic Mateo**