

19 April 2023 Wednesday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

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**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**





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## DENR chief holds meeting with land-reclamation critics

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

@jonlmayuga

**T**HE practice of land reclamation, also called dump-and-fill, may cause irreversible damage to the coastal ecosystem.

This was stressed by international nongovernment organization Oceana Philippines and fisherfolk groups under the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, (DENR) held its first public consultation with leaders of environmental groups that oppose land reclamation in Manila Bay on Friday, April 14 at the DENR Central Office in Quezon City.

The consultation, attended by key DENR officials led by Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, was part of the "continuous policy review and outreach to stakeholders on environmentally critical issues."

Joining Loyzaga were DENR Undersecretaries Jonas Leones, Juan Miguel Cuna, CP David, and Marilou Erni; DENR Technical Adviser to the Secretary Dr. Noralene Uy; Professor Jessica Bercilla; and Atty. Gia Ibay, head of the Climate Change and Energy Programme of World Wildlife Fund Philippines (WWF).

Fernando Hicap, national chairman of Pamalakaya, Narod Eco, member of Advocates of Science and Technology for the People (AGHAM) and a former researcher at the University of the Philippines' National Institute of Geological Sciences; Atty. Rose-Liza Osorio, Legal and Policy Specialist of Oceana Philippines; Paco Perez, Campaign Officer of NILAD; Jerwin Baure, Public Information Officer of AGHAM; and Jon Bonifacio, National Coordinator of Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment attended the event.

In a statement, Yulo-Loyzaga said inputs from all sectors are valuable for the DENR to deliver its mandate.

The dialogue enables the gathering of ground-based knowledge and accelerates the collection of data and evidence from affected communities and stakeholders.

The DENR, Yulo-Loyzaga said, will likewise hold consultations with academic institutions, experts, advocates, and other civil society groups.

"We are reviewing everything—policies, processes, and the immediate actions that need to be taken in order to address this environmental issue. Your inputs today are valuable for the DENR. I am here to listen. That is the promise I am giving you.

That listening will result in what we are trying to actually achieve: changes in the process, changes in the policy, and possibly, changes in the people," the DENR chief said in the statement.

During the meeting, Hicap, however, expressed disappointment over the irreversible damage in Manila Bay caused by land reclamation, its impacts on the livelihoods of people dependent on fishing, and the alleged threats to those who oppose such.

Pamalakaya has been demanding for an audience with the DENR for several months now and held at least four pickets last year to press for their demand to stop the land reclamation projects in the area.

For his part, Eco urged the DENR to make the system and process more participatory rather than just being consultative.

He also said that the DENR should set a threshold of harm, which should serve as the basis for the denial of environmental compliance certificate application.

Eco also said a precautionary principle should also be applied at all times.

For her part, Loyzaga appealed to environmental groups to share data and evidence to help the DENR accelerate the reforms that need to be undertaken.

The DENR chief said the agency is building a constituency for resilient development through continuous consultation. It will hold an Experts Forum on Reclamation in May that will be composed of two sessions: Governance and Technical Issues.

The former will tackle processes, policies, programs, plans, and actions, while the latter session will focus on the scientific aspect of reclamation. Yulo-Loyzaga also invited Pamalakaya and AGHAM as panelists in the multi-stakeholder forum.

"The processes and policies currently being reviewed are part of a larger effort to bring integrity to the Department...we need to understand that we must be fit for our purpose and for the values that we want the Department to represent," Yulo-Loyzaga explained.

Interviewed by the BusinessMirror, Hicap said he was particularly dismayed at how the DENR officials responded to the issues and concerns they have previously raised.

"We were able to raise the issue of land reclamation but the DENR asked for data from us," he said. Hicap also noted the DENR chief made no promise to stop land reclamation activities.





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## Gov't agencies set awareness campaign on water, energy conservation

By HELEN FLORES

Government agencies will launch a campaign to increase public awareness on water and energy conservation as part of the measures to mitigate the effects of the looming El Niño.

President Marcos gave the directive during his meeting with various agencies at Malacañang yesterday as the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) warned of increasing chances of a dry spell hitting the country in the latter part of the year.

"We are expecting a reduction on our water supply. So, (Marcos) ordered earlier that we should have a public awareness campaign immediately ... and should start with government agencies, including public institutions, schools to save water before the problem gets worse," Office of Civil Defense administrator Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno said at a press briefing in Malacañang.

At the same briefing, National Irrigation Administration acting chief Eduardo Guillen said they have formulated short-, medium- and long-term solutions to the impending drought to hit the country in the next months.

"In fact, we have what is called a cropping calendar, where we plan how much we can irrigate. And here, we are prioritizing those areas that

are close to the source for rice planting," Guillen told reporters.

"We will concentrate on hybrid rice because its output is actually two times during the dry season," he added.

Aside from conserving water, the President also wants the public to conserve electricity, according to Nepomuceno.

PAGASA deputy administrator Esperanza Cayanan, who was also at the Palace briefing, said El Niño could intensify in the last quarter of the year or early next year.

Cayanan added that based on their latest forecast, the probability of the occurrence of El Niño increased to 80 percent this June, July and August. It may increase to about 86 percent in November, December and January.

El Niño brings drier than normal condition.

"By next month, we will be issuing the second level, which is El Niño alert, which means there is above 70 percent of probability of El Niño occurrence in the next two months," Cayanan said.

The PAGASA official, however, warned of extreme rainfall events before the onset of El Niño.

"For example, during Ondoy in 2009 ... before we felt the lack of water, we experienced extreme (rainfall) events," she said.

PAGASA climatologists forecast this year's El Niño to be of "weak to moderate" intensity, according to Cayanan.



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## Marcos orders whole-of-nation approach to address El Niño

By RAYMUND ANTONIO  
and ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ

President Marcos directed government agencies to come up with a "whole-of-nation" and "whole-of-government" approach in preparing for the El Niño phenomenon that could hit the country this year.

Office of Civil Defense (OCD) Administrator Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno

said in a press briefing on Tuesday, April 18, that the President asked selected government agencies to come up with a campaign to generate public awareness to conserve water and energy, among others.

"Nagbigay po kanina ng malinaw na instructions or utos ang Pangulong Bongbong Marcos na palakas in pa ho natin iyong paghahanda doon sa ▶ 4





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# Marcos orders whole-of-nation approach to address El Niño 1◀

inaasahang masamang epekto ng El Niño (President Bongbong Marcos gave clear instructions earlier to strengthen our preparations against the expected adverse effects of El Niño),” the official said.

## 80% chance of El Niño

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) projected an 80 percent chance of El Niño developing between June and August, up from the previous forecast of 55 percent last month.

PAGASA Deputy Administrator Esperanza Cayanan, in a televised briefing, said they may upgrade its advisory from “El Niño Watch” to “El Niño Alert” in May, with the increased probability of El Niño developing.

She added that the likelihood of El Niño occurring from November-December 2023 to January 2024 increased to 86 percent.

“So from El Niño watch, by next month, May, we will be issuing the second level which is El Niño Alert kung saan mayroon po tayong (where we have) above 70 percent probability of El Niño occurrence for the next two months,” Cayanan said.

## Prepare for water shortage

Nepomuceno shared that the country needs to prepare for a possible water shortage as the President also instructed for a public awareness campaign “immediately.”

Conserving water, however, must be started by government agencies and public institutions, including schools, Nepomuceno added.

Aside from conserving water, Marcos also wants the public to conserve electricity to cushion the effects of the dry spell, which could intensify in the last quarter of the year or early next year.

There are two specific instructions given by the President, the OCD official said.

One, is the adoption of a whole-of-government or whole-of-nation approach, and the other one is putting up protocol-based and scientific long-term processes that could be adopted by the country.

“So, ang gusto ng Pangulo po natin ay convergence effort po ito (The President wants this to be a convergence effort),” said acting National Irrigation Administration (NIA) Administrator Eduardo Guillen.

Through the mechanisms of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), President Marcos specifically instructed concerned government agencies to quickly form an El Niño team so they could effectively respond to the crisis, according to the OCD official.

## Rainfall event before El Niño

Cayanan said that before the country feels the effect of the El Niño phenomenon, there will still be the rainy season associated with the southwest monsoon or “habagat” season.

“From previous experience po natin, puwede po tayong maka-experience ng extreme rainfall event kagaya po ng isang example noong Ondoy noong 2009 wherein nagkaroon po kasi tayo ng El Niño 2009, 2010. Pero bago natin naramdaman iyong kakulangan sa tubig, naka-experience po tayo ng extreme [rainfall] events (From our previous experience, we had extreme rainfall events like Ondoy in 2009 where we had El Niño in 2009-2010. But before we felt that lack of water, we had extreme rainfall events),” Cayanan said.

“Ang posibleng impacts po nito [El Niño] in some areas of the country ay iyon pong drought or dry spell, but this will be felt towards the last quarter (The possible impacts of El Niño in some areas of the country are drought or dry spell, but this will be felt towards the last quarter),” she added.

Based on the PAGASA’s rainfall forecast, “near-normal” rainfall will prevail throughout the country in May.

Most of the country will have near-normal rainfall in June, except for the western section of Central Luzon where above-normal rainfall may prevail.

PAGASA said there will be a “high probability” for near-normal rainfall in most parts of the country in July and near-normal rainfall in most parts of the country with some areas

in western Luzon likely to receive above-normal rainfall and patches of below-normal rainfall in Visayas and Mindanao in August.

## PH needs ₱2 trillion

Meanwhile, Guillen said the country needs ₱2 trillion to irrigate 1.2 million hectares of potentially irrigable areas in the country.

In a media briefing hosted by press briefer Daphne Oseña-Paez, the NIA official stressed the need for more investments in irrigation to address the potential adverse impacts of El Niño in the country’s agricultural sector.

He discussed the needed budget for the irrigable areas, but admitted that NIA’s recent proposal was only for ₱200 billion a year.

“Actually, ang natitirang potentially irrigable areas natin 1.2 million hectares. Kailangan niyan ₱2 trillion lahat pero ang proposal lamang po natin is sana ₱200 billion a year para madali naman ito ma-attain. Ang proposal po namin is ₱100 billion a year na pondo sa NIA (Actually, our remaining potentially irrigable areas is 1.2 million hectares. It needs ₱2 trillion in total but our proposal is hopefully ₱200 billion a year for this to be easily attainable. Our proposal is ₱100 billion a year of funds for NIA),” Guillen said.

He revealed that President Marcos had already instructed him to “compress” the country’s irrigation plans from the supposed 80-year timeline into 10 years.

To do this, the NIA official stressed the need for an additional budget as the agency needs ₱100 billion a year, while also asking the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) to contribute.

The sectoral meeting was attended by the chiefs of the Department of National Defense (DND), Department of Energy (DOE), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Department of Science and Technology (DOST), National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Health (DOH), National Water Resources Board (NWRB), Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage Systems (MWSS) and NIA.





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## Marcos orders creation of El Niño team

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered the creation of an "El Niño Team" that will handle the government's response to the effects of the impending weather phenomenon, an official said on Tuesday.

The President gave the order during a sectoral meeting in Malacañang, where he and all concerned government agencies discussed the possible impact of the El Niño phenomenon on food, water and energy security, and public health and safety in the country.

At a Palace press briefing, Office of Civil Defense Administrator Ariel Nepomuceno said Marcos gave "clear instructions" to spur preparations for

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## Marcos

the expected negative impact of El Niño that may hit the country this year or until early next year.

"He told us to put in place a whole-of-government or whole-of-nation approach to brace for the threat. So through mechanisms of the NDRRMC (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council), he (Marcos) specifically instructed us to form an El Niño Team immediately. So the concerned government agencies that will handle the response and the mitigation activities will be immediately formed," Nepomuceno added in English and Filipino.

"The second instruction was to ensure long-term processes that will be protocol-based and scientific, it's better that we are prepared," he said.

Government agencies were also tasked to prepare for a possible water shortage and launch a public awareness campaign to conserve water and energy.

He said the President wanted the government, specifically the Department of Health, to focus on illnesses that are usually experienced during the El Niño phenomenon.

"The key here is early preparation, so we are now being asked to do that even though the possible worst effect will happen during the last quarter of the year or the first quarter of next year if El Niño hits us," Nepomuceno added.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said El Niño is characterized by unusually warmer-than-average sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific.

As an effect, below-normal rains are expected, which can cause dry spells and droughts in several areas of the country — affecting the growth of plants, crops and

even livestock.

While an El Niño is not officially underway, Pagasa last March elevated its monitoring to an El Niño Watch, which means that there is a 55 percent chance of El Niño being declared between July and September 2023.

Pagasa Deputy Administrator Esperanza Cayanan, during the same Palace press briefing, said the public should conserve water in preparation for El Niño.

Citing their latest forecast, Cayanan also said the probability of the occurrence of El Niño increased to 80 percent this coming June, July and August.

The forecast noted that the probability may also spike to about 86 percent for the months of November, December and January, she added.

"We should save water when there's rain. We could still store the water until the next wet season. We see that the serious effect could be felt in the last quarter of this year or during the first quarter up to summer of next year," Cayanan said in English and Filipino.

"Let us conserve and use water wisely so that our consumption will not increase because later on, we will not have enough water," she added.

Cayanan explained that before the Philippines experiences the phenomenon, the country can expect heavy rainfall.

If the El Niño phenomenon turns out to be "strong," she said this could be compared to the extreme rainfall that took place during Tropical Storm "Ondoy" (international name: "Ketsana").

Ondoy then combined with the enhanced southwest monsoon and hit Luzon in 2009, submerging areas like Metro Manila in floods at record-breaking levels.

"We can experience heavy rainfall events before we experience the impacts of El Niño because we are already entering the rainy season this coming June, July, August up to September," Cayanan said.

**CATHERINE S. VALENTE**





## WATER-SUPPLY INFRA, CONSERVATION EFFORTS PRIORITY

# Govt preps for worst-case El Niño

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA  
@sam\_medenilla

**T**HE government is now bracing for the possible worst impact of El Niño, which is expected to hit the country by the last quarter of the year, by prioritizing the construction of water supply infrastructure in high-risk areas and initiating early water and power conservation efforts.

## El Niño...

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Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) to discuss ways to mitigate the effects of the long dry spell from El Niño.

He ordered the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) to create a team to coordinate government efforts and create protocols on El Niño response.

### Infrastructure projects

OCD administrator Ariel F. Nepomuceno said among the President's instructions was to fast-track the construction of infrastructure projects to increase water storage capacity in high risk areas.

Citing data from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), he said there are currently over 450 such projects nationwide.

"The President wants us to identify which [projects] should be given priority after PAGASA gave the possible [areas] which could immediately suffer the worst effects [of El Niño] namely Bataan, Cavite, and maybe Ilocos Norte," Nepomuceno said in Filipino in a press conference in Malacañang last Tuesday.

National Irrigation Administration (NIA) acting administrator Eduardo G. Guillen said they are proposing the construction of high dams, which can be used both to address floods, and store water for droughts.

"If we have a series of dams in our major and principal river basins, we will no longer have any problem—when it floods as well as during El Niño. So, this is what the President is saying as a long-term solution," Guillen said.

To boost the country's preparedness for El Niño and future dry spells, he said they are also pushing for their funding to be increased to P100 billion per year, which they can use to reduce the period needed to irrigate 1.2 million hectares of land from 80 year to just 10 years.

He said they will be augmented by the initiatives of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) as well as the private sector.

### Other mitigation measures

ASIDE from new infrastructure, Nepomuceno said they are also working on a water-sharing arrangement between Metro Manila's major water concessionaires to minimize the risk of water interruption in the region during El Niño.

The President also wants the launch of a public awareness campaign on water and electricity conservation as soon as possible to ensure the country will still have reliable utilities during El Niño, according to the OCD official.

He said Marcos also tasked the Department of Health (DOH) to prepare for the ailments that can spread during El Niño.

Guillen said interventions to help farmers cope with El Niño were also discussed during their meeting with Marcos.

He said measures include encouraging the affected farmers to plant hybrid rice, which have double outputs during dry season, as well as high-value crops.

### Moderate El Niño

PAGASA deputy administrator Esperanza O. Cayanan said they expect the upcoming El Niño by this year will be "moderate."

She noted it might be similar to El Niño in 2002 to 2003 marked by rainfall during the early parts of the year followed by a drought by November and December.

Based on its forecast this year, PAGASA expects a similar trend, wherein several tropical cyclones will enter the country from June to September before the dry spell in the last quarter of the year.

"But we are not discounting the possibility we can end up with a strong [El Niño]," Cayanan said.

She noted the last recorded strong El Niño affected the country from 2014 to 2016.

Nepomuceno said they have already taken into consideration the "worst case scenario" in their evidence-based El Niño preparations.

"It is better for us to prepare for the worst-case scenario, but we need it to be a scientific approach so DOST, particularly PAGASA, will play a big role in our actions," Nepomuceno said.





# Oil, grease found in Puerto Galera waters

By BELLA CARIASO

The waters in 26 areas in Puerto Galera did not pass the quality guidelines set by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) following tests conducted as the oil spill from the sunken tanker *Princess Empress* reached the town.

The DENR said only nine of the 35 sampling stations met the criteria for water quality on oil and grease.

These are the shorelines in Small Lalaguna and Big Lalaguna, Balete, Central Sabang, Coco Beach, Batangasa Channel, Paniquian, Balatero and West San Isidro Bay.

"Based on our data, even before the oil spill, the water quality in Puerto Galera was poor. The data we have are not conclusive, whether the contamination is really due to the oil spill," DENR Undersecretary Jonas Leones said.

He said it is up to the Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Tourism whether to implement a fishing ban and prohibit tourism activities, respectively, in Puerto Galera.

"The visual appearance of the water does not necessarily mean fish in the area can be consumed or it is safe for swimming," Leones said.

In a joint statement, the DENR and DOH warned the public to avoid exposure to contaminants.

"Based on safety and health measures, occupational and recreational activities should not be allowed in these bodies of water," DOH officer-in-charge Maria Rosario Vergeire told a press briefing yesterday. "We are coming out with this advisory to warn people as these might cause harmful effects to your body."

In a statement, the DOH advised the public to avoid consumption of contaminated fish, shellfish and

other seafood.

"Subsequent monitoring of water quality in the area and other nearby water sources should be undertaken by concerned local government units and water service providers," the DOH added.

The department warned the public that contaminants may cause various skin diseases.

"Oil and grease may also result in aspiration leading to respiratory diseases while ingestion will cause gastrointestinal irritations which may manifest acutely as abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea," the DOH said.

## 'Leakage contained within the month'

DENR Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga expressed hope that the oil spill can be contained within the month.

"At this point let's take a look. Hopefully within the month or so the leakage will be contained definitely and we will actually be able

to say what kind of damage has been incurred in the ecosystems that are submerged in the water," Loyzaga said.

She said there are some ecosystems that may be impacted by the oil spill and there is a need to go into the water to see whether corals have been affected.

*Princess Empress* was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil when it sank in the waters off Naujan town on Feb. 28.

Damage to the fishery sector and income loss reached nearly P1 billion, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources said over the weekend.

President Marcos had earlier said there is no deadline for the cleanup of the oil spill as timelines may be changed by weather conditions.

The Philippine Coast Guard said up to 4.155 kilometers of the affected shoreline have been cleaned up.

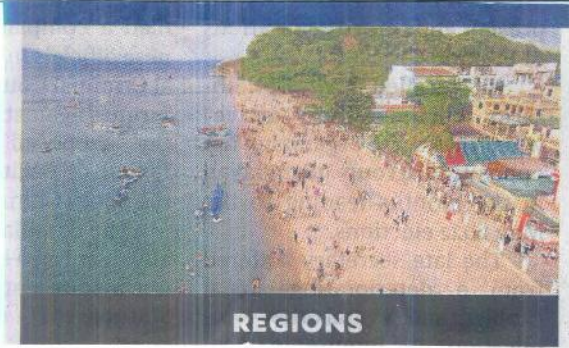
- With Alexis Romero, Rhodina Villanueva, Robertzon Ramirez





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# 26 spots in Galera fail water quality test

Only 9 of 35 sampling stations in Oriental Mindoro's top tourism spot passed a recent water quality test but there was no clear indication this was caused by the oil spill from a sunken fuel tanker, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources said. But Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco said the government would not close Puerto Galera as the nine areas that passed the test were important dive spots. —STORY BY INQUIRER STAFF

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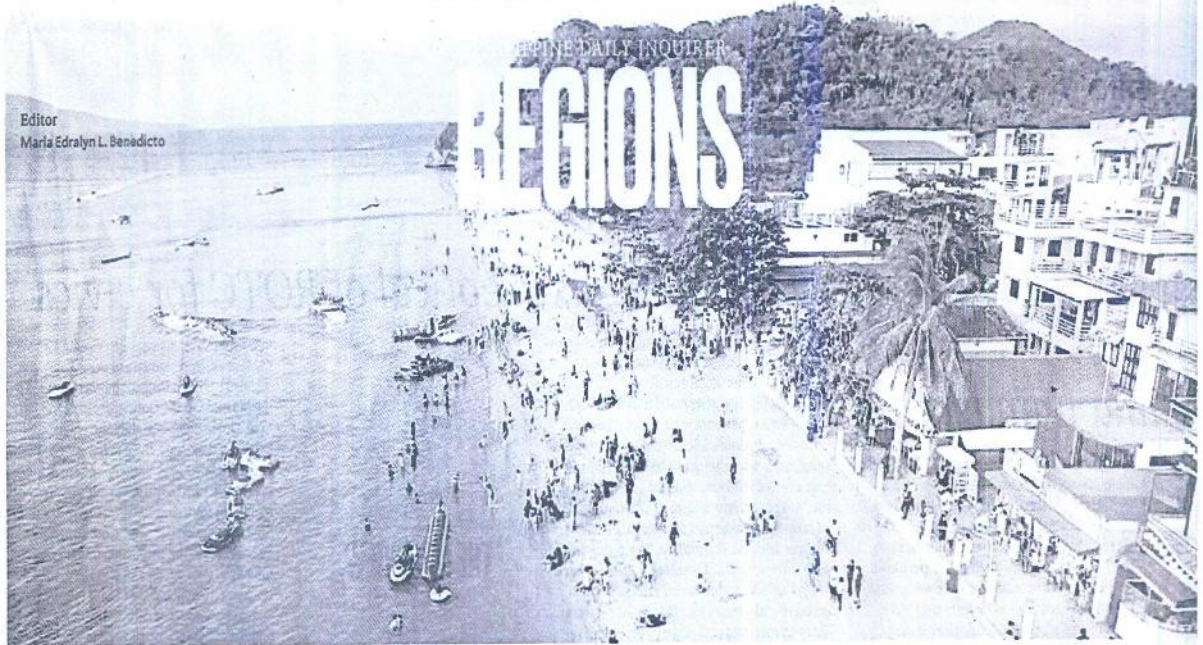
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SUN AND SEA Puerto Galera's famous White Beach plays host to hundreds of tourists enjoying the sun and sand in this photo taken on March 29. It will remain open despite the poor water quality test results and threat of oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress. —PHOTO FROM MANGYAN TRAVEL VLOG

# Despite poor water quality, Puerto Galera to stay open

**DENR: Only 9 of 35 sampling stations in Oriental Mindoro's top tourism spot passed test; no indication it's caused by oil spill**

By Jane Bautista, Nestor Corrales and Dona Z. Pazibugan @TeamInquirer

Only nine out of 35 sampling stations in the municipality of Puerto Galera, the top tourist destination in Oriental Mindoro province, passed the water quality test conducted by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Environment Undersecretary Jonas Leones, at a press briefing on Tuesday, reminded the public to be cautious as contact with the contaminated water could result in skin diseases, rashes or blisters.

In a joint statement with the Department of Health (DOH), the DENR on Tuesday said the areas that met the water quality test were the Small Lailaguna and Big Lailaguna shorelines, Baite, Central Sabang

shoreline, Coco Beach, Batangas Channel, Paniqian, Balatero and West San Isidro Bay.

Leonas stressed that the results of the test, which analyzed the oil and grease contaminants, were not yet conclusive on whether the poor water quality in the 26 other stations could be attributed to the oil spill that hit Oriental Mindoro after oil tanker MT Princess Express sank in its waters with 800,000 liters of industrial fuel on Feb. 28.

"A study is needed to further analyze the water quality because based on our data results, the water quality in those areas in Puerto Galera was not good even before [the oil spill]," he said.

Leonas pointed out that even if Puerto Galera's water was clear, it might still be contaminated.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, in

the same briefing, was optimistic that the government would be able to contain the oil spill off Oriental Mindoro within the month.

"When it comes to the waters on the shoreline, we will continuously test for the presence of any kind of contaminants and we will be there I think much longer than other agencies because the ecosystem impacts are actually long term," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

### Exercise caution

Based on the DENR's water quality tests, the DOH has warned against the health hazards of water contamination.

"In the interest of public health and safety, the DOH advises the public to exercise caution and refrain from consuming water from affected areas and when conducting water-related occupational (e.g. fishing, sea-

weed farming) and recreational activities," the DOH said in its joint statement with the DENR.

"The public is also advised to avoid consumption of contaminated fish, shellfish and other seafood products," it added, stressing that water with "detectable levels of contaminants beyond the standards" are unfit for consumption.

The DOH said exposure to contaminants could not only lead to skin diseases but "oils and grease may also result in aspiration leading to respiratory diseases while ingestion will cause gastrointestinal irritations which may manifest acutely as abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea."

### To stay open

However, Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco on Tuesday said Puerto Galera would continue to be open for tourism

despite the water quality test results, warning that Oriental Mindoro would lose P5.3 million daily if tourists would be barred from entering its top travel destination.

"Should Puerto Galera be closed to tourism, there is a projected loss of ... at least P5.3 million a day," Frasco told reporters at a Palace briefing.

Frasco stressed that even if only nine of the 35 sampling stations passed the water quality test, these areas were "very prime dive sites for Puerto Galera."

"We are also pleased to receive the Department of Health's position that the public is advised to proceed with caution but that no swimming ban has been indicated, only that concerns have been expressed in the ingestion of water," she said. "And, therefore, our perception of this joint statement is that the Puerto Galera tour-

ism continues to be open, as well as that there has been no direct attribution in terms of the direct source of the findings considering the presence of other human and economic activities in Puerto Galera."

According to Frasco, Puerto Galera is contributing at least 85 percent of the tourism economy of the province, noting that during its peak before the pandemic, Puerto Galera generated tourism receipts of over P1.2 billion.

"Notwithstanding the fact that the Philippines only reopened in February of last year, Puerto Galera had already raked in half a billion pesos," she said.

"So, what is critical really right now is the protection not just of life but also of the livelihood of the tourism workers that critically depend on the continuation of the tourism industry," she added. [dnq](#)





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# Puerto Galera brgy. fail water quality tests

By Rio N. Araja

**O**UT of the 35 sampling stations within the municipality of Puerto Galera, Oriental Mindoro and its barangays, only nine sampling stations have met the criteria for the agency's water quality guidelines.

Department of Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco meanwhile said Puerto Galera is projected to lose around P5.3 million daily should it be shut for tourism, after authorities deemed many of its water sites unsafe for swimming activities.

Undersecretary for Policy, Planning, and International Affairs Jonas Leones identified those areas that passed DENR Administrative Order 2016-08 or the Water Quality Guidelines and General Effluent Standards of 2016 as Small Lalaguna and Big Lalaguna shoreline, Balete, Central Sabang shoreline, Coco Beach, Batangas Channel, Paniquian, Balatero, and West San Isidro Bay.

Citing the Department of Health, he said potable water must not have detectable levels of contaminants beyond the standards. He said exposure to such contaminants could cause rashes and blisters.

"Do not touch the water," he said.

Oils and grease may also result in aspiration leading to respiratory diseases, while ingestion would cause gastrointestinal irritations which may manifest acutely abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

The Department of Health advised the public to exercise caution and refrain from consuming water from affected areas when conducting water-related occupational and recreational activities, Leones said. The consumption of contaminated various fish, shellfish and other seafood products is prohibited.

He said the local government, along with the DENR, is studying if the water contaminants are caused by the oil spill. On Feb. 28, MT Princess Empress carrying 900,000 liters of industrial fuel oil sank off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, causing an oil spill.





# 26 areas in Puerto Galera fail water quality test

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

**OUT** of the 35 sampling stations tested for water quality, only nine passed in the municipality of Puerto Galera in Oriental Mindoro.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said that only Small Lalaguna and Big Lalaguna Shoreline, Balete, Central Sabang Shoreline, Coco Beach, Batangas Channel, Paniquian, and West Isidro Bay have met the criteria for water quality.

DENR Undersecretary Jonas

Leones said that the majority of the stations failed to meet the water quality standard amid the oil spill from the tanker that sank near Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

"If we interpret the result, it will show that more station areas failed the test, and if we get the average, the area is really contaminated,"

Leones said on Tuesday during a press briefing.

He also said that the public should be cautious even when there is still no banning of water activities implemented in Puerto Galera.

"Because once contact with contaminated water happens, there is a possibility of having skin disease like rashes and blisters," Leones added.

While in terms of drinking water, the Department of Health (DoH) said that potable water "should not have detectable levels of contaminants beyond the standards" as exposure to contaminants may also cause skin disease.

"Oils and grease may also result in aspiration leading to respiratory diseases while ingestion will cause gastrointestinal irritations which may manifest acutely as abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea," the DoH said through a joint statement with DENR.

The DoH advises the public to exercise caution and refrain from consuming water from affected areas and when conducting water-related activities such as fishing and seaweed farming.

Moreover, the public is also advised to avoid consumption of contaminated fish, shellfish, and other seafood products.





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## No swimming ban in Puerto Galera despite poor water quality

**N**O, Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco hasn't broken out in blisters or rashes despite scuba diving recently in Puerto Galera, where some of its waters have been reported of poor quality by other government agencies.

In response to a reporter's question about possible complaints from tourists of skin and respiratory infections after swimming in the popular tourism site, Frasco said, "The Department of Tourism [DOT] is not in possession of any data regarding any such information considering that is not in our primary mandate. Nevertheless, I dove there at L'alaguna, one of the

most beautiful dive sites in Puerto Galera, and I'm still okay."

There have been concerns that the oil spill due to the recent sinking of oil tanker MT Princess Empress off the coast of Oriental Mindoro last February 28, had already reached Puerto Galera.

Frasco told a news briefing in Malacañang that despite the joint findings of the Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), "No swimming ban has been indicated, only that the concerns have been expressed on the ingestion of water, and

SEE "SWIMMING BAN," A2

## Swimming ban...

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therefore our perception of this joint statement is that the Puerto Galera tourism continues to be open."

### P5.3-M daily loss if tourist site is closed

BASED on "statistics," she noted that Puerto Galera's closure will result in an estimated "loss of P5.3 million a day" for its tourism stakeholders. She noted that 11,000 workers depend on tourism for their livelihood in the municipality.

In a joint news statement, DENR and DOH said, "only 9 sampling stations have met the criteria for water quality guidelines set by DENR Administrative Order 2016-08," out of the 35 stations sampled in Puerto Galera and its barangays. Those safe from "oil and grease contaminants" include Small and Big Lalaguna shoreline, Balete, Central Sabang Shoreline, Coco Beach, Batangas Channel, Paniquian, Balatero, and West San Isidro Bay. The DOH advised the public not to drink the waters from contaminated areas and to avoid consuming "contaminated fish, shellfish, and other seafood products."

Both agencies attributed the water contamination in 26 sampling stations to the "presence of economic and human activities." Exposure to contaminants "may also cause various skin diseases such as rashes and blisters. Oil and grease may also result in aspiration leading to respiratory diseases, while ingestion will cause gastrointestinal irritations, which may manifest acutely as abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea."

### 'Book your vacations'

FRASCO said she welcomed the report of both agencies, "especially considering that the nine sites identified [as safe from contamination], several of these are actually very prime dive sites for Puerto Galera, one of which I dove in recently... With regard to the other areas that were not seen to have complied with the threshold set in the water quality test results, we are also pleased to receive the Department of Health position that the public is advised to proceed with caution."

Last year, Puerto Galera generated over P500 million in visitor receipts, still 50 percent less than the P1.2 billion receipts of 2019, prior to the pandemic. "As far as international tourism is concerned, we want to be able to make sure that the viability of Puerto Galera as a tourism destination continues and that is why the [DENR and DOH] report indicating no direct link to the oil spill is something that we welcome positively."

The Tourism chief also enjoined the public to travel, especially this "long weekend" as Malacañang has declared Friday, April 21, a regular holiday in observance of Eid al-Fitr, or the end of the month-long Ramadan, when Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. "Any touristic activity that you do within any of our local destinations will ultimately help a Filipino family. Let's help our fellow citizens in tourism by booking our vacations with our families anywhere across the Philippines." **Ma. Stella F. Arnaldo**





STRATEGIC  
COMMUNICATION  
AND  
INITIATIVES  
SERVICE



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HOME AWAY FROM HOME

# COASTAL SHELLFISH 'COLONIZE' FLOATING OCEAN PLASTIC—STUDY

PARIS—Scientists found coastal species of shellfish and anemones living and breeding on floating islands of garbage in the Pacific thousands of miles from home, a study revealed Monday.

Environmentalists have for years been eyeing what they call the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch"—masses of plastic rubbish combining bottles, fishing nets and much more.

US researchers who sampled rubbish from the north-eastern Pacific between California and Hawaii said they found 37 kinds of invertebrates that originated from coastal areas, mostly from countries such as Japan on the other side of the ocean.

"The high seas are colonized by a diverse array of coastal species, which survive and reproduce in the open ocean," they wrote in

the study, published in Nature Ecology and Evolution.

"Coastal species persist now in the open ocean as a substantial component of a neopelagic (new, sea-dwelling) community sustained by the vast and expanding sea of plastic debris," the study said.

### Tsunami debris

More than two-thirds of the items examined had coastal species on them, including crustaceans, sea anemones and moss-like creatures called bryozoans.

Scientists had not often tracked creatures surviving dispersal across entire oceans.

The researchers noted that in one rare event in 2012, debris from the previous year's tsunami in Japan washed ashore in North America bearing living species.

Creatures can spread

quickly by feeding on the layers of slime formed on floating plastics by bacteria and algae, the study said.

Scientists must now investigate how these coastal colonists will fit into the ocean food chain.

### Interaction

"We found that coastal species are commonly observed on the same plastics as the native pelagic species (dwelling far out at sea), suggesting that these two communities are interacting with one another," the study's lead author Linsey Haram told AFP.

"These interactions could include competition for food and space as well as predation. More research is needed to understand whether the implications are positive or negative."

In a 2021 article, members

of the same research team warned that the influx of invasive coastal species "might portend significant ecological shifts in the marine environment."

### 12B tons of waste

A study published in 2017 in the journal Science Advances calculated that if current production and waste-management trends continued, there would be 12 billion tons of plastic waste in landfills or the natural environment by 2050.

G7 energy and environment ministers declared at the end of talks in Japan on Sunday their "ambition to reduce additional plastic pollution to zero by 2040."

They said they hoped to draw up an "international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution" by the end of 2024. —AFP





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PROPERTY FOLIO

# HAMILO COAST: REAL ESTATE WITH AN EYE FOR MARINE SUSTAINABILITY

The Philippines' coastal communities are relentlessly pushing for sustainable practices that are primed to help preserve marine resources. One such community, Hamilo Coast, is unwavering in its campaign to protect and preserve its picturesque sanctuary located in Nasugbu, Batangas.

A 40-ha premier leisure resort complex, Hamilo Coast is only an hour and a half commute from the Mall of Asia via the Cavite Expressway (CAVI-TEX) and Ternate-Nasugbu road. A development of Costa Del Hamilo, Inc. (CDHI), a duly recognized SM Prime company, Hamilo Coast is a master-planned community that features the idyllic Pico De Loro Cove, which integrates residential, resort, leisure, commercial, and institutional land uses.

Stepping up its game to protect and nurture the incredibly rich marine life surrounding it, Hamilo Coast renewed its partnership with the World Wide Fund of Nature Philippines (WWF). The collaboration will continue to expand and enhance the scope of its sustainability initiatives that have covered coastal resource management, ridge-to-reef management, solid waste management, mangrove reforestation, the use of renewable energy sources, and environmental awareness since 2007.

"Hamilo Coast has always made an effort to preserve our marine resources, as it is not only a responsibility but a privilege to do so. Our partnership with WWF manifests our re-



Native giant clams re-stocking, spawning and orientation for ocean nursery project of UP Bolinao Marine Lab done in partnership with DENR, Rotary Club of Nasugbu and the LGU.

solve to ensure that our community remains a safe haven for marine life, and that we continue to be a model for sustainable coastal development in the Philippines," said Imee G. Francisco, vice president and head of CDHI Projects and Operations.

To fulfill this advocacy, Hamilo Coast currently engages in several marine and environmental activities in partnership with the local government and non-government organizations.

Leading such efforts is its collaboration with the University of the Philippines Bolinao Marine Lab, which provides training in the culture and ocean rearing of giant clams through the Giant Clams Restocking and Spawning Program.

With Hamilo Coast's beautiful and well-kept beach fronts as favorite nesting grounds of Olive Ridley Turtles, the community regularly implements the Marine Turtle Conservation Program. In this undertaking, Hamilo Coast's Estate and

Sustainability teams proactively monitor and protect the turtle nests until the eggs hatch, after which the hatchlings are immediately released to the ocean.

Hamilo Coast also continues to hold the annual Coastal Clean-Up Program, a highly effective collaboration between the management and employees of Costa Del Hamilo Inc. and the local government.

"As we strive to create a more sustainable future, we are proud of what we have accomplished and continue to do here at Hamilo Coast," Francisco said. "While we are very excited to do even more to preserve our aquatic biodiversity, we hope that we may also inspire other communities to do the same."

For more information on Hamilo Coast, visit its official Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/hamilocoastph>), website ([www.hamilocoast.com](http://www.hamilocoast.com)), and Instagram (@hamilocoastph); or call (632) 7-945-8000





DANGER TO ENVIRONMENT, PEOPLE'S LIVES

# LOCAL EXECS, RESIDENTS BUCK GOLD MINE EXPLORATION IN NEGROS ORIENTAL TOWN

By Kaye Brier  
@inquirervisayas

DUMAGUETE CITY—Government officials and residents of Sta. Catalina town in Negros Oriental province were demanding from the national government to put a stop to the mining exploration in Sitio Tarog, Barangay San Francisco of the municipality.

Sta. Catalina Mayor Peve Ligan said the mining exploration was not only damaging to the environment but has also put at risk the lives of residents in area.

"My administration never gave the go signal for a mining exploration in our place. In fact, we are against it," she told reporters on Monday.

Ligan said the municipal government has formed a task force to investigate the exploration activity, which, she said, was located near the Southern Negros Fault, an active fault line.

"Our hearts bleed because the mountain that we so loved will be abused and exploited," she said.

According to Ligan, the mining exploration conducted by Midan Corp. started two weeks ago and covered 844 hectares of land in Sta. Catalina, a first-class municipality with population of 77,501 people, based on the 2020 census.

### Exploration permit

The Inquirer tried but failed to reach the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for a statement. It also sent an email to Midan Corp. but the firm had yet to respond to the request for an interview as of Tuesday.

Documents secured by Ligan showed that the firm obtained a license to explore from the DENR's Mines and Geosciences Bureau on March 12, 2018.

At that time, Ligan said she was not yet the mayor of Sta. Catalina but had already heard of the mining project.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck the country in 2020, the mining exploration did not push through but Midan Corp.'s

license to explore the area was renewed in 2021, Ligan said.

The mayor said she wrote a letter to the DENR and Midan Corp., expressing her concern over the exploration and asked them to stop the project but her plea was ignored.

"They (DENR and Midan) did not believe what we are telling them. The mining exploration still continues," Ligan said.

Local residents have been conducting rallies to express their sentiments against the exploration project, the mayor said.

Ligan also pointed out that Sitio Tarong, the subvillage where the mining operation was being conducted, had been declared by the municipal council as a tourist destination.

The area, she added, was also home to fruit and vampire bats, waterfalls and a cave system, among others.

The area is also an ancestral domain of the indigenous group Bukidnon, the mayor said. INQ





STRATEGIC  
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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS  
SINCE 1900  
**MANILA BULLETIN**  
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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**MASUNGI  
INSPECTION —**  
Sen. Nancy Binay conducts an inspection of the Masungi Georeserve in Baras, Rizal, on Tuesday, April 18, 2023. Binay was amazed at the beauty and strongly opposed the construction of any structure in the Masungi Georeserve. (Ali Vicoy)





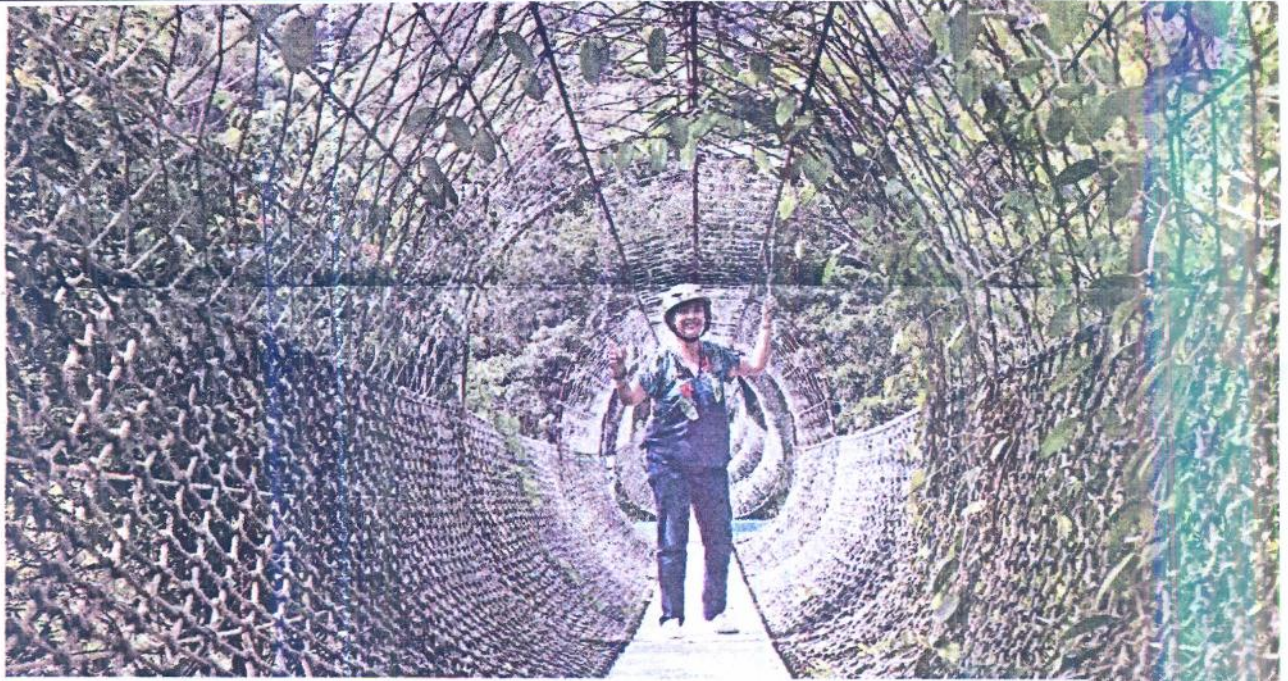


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**MASUNGI'S BEAUTY** Senator Nancy Binay, chairperson of the Senate Committees on Tourism, Cultural Communities, and Social Justice, Welfare and Rural Development, is seen during an ocular inspection and a tour of the Masungi Georeserve, a conservation area situated in the southern Sierra Madre Range in Baras, Rizal, characterized by rugged limestone karst peaks, steep slopes and surrounding lush rainforests. Binay, amazed at the beauty of the area, admitted that it is regrettable if the Bureau of Corrections continues with its plan to construct a prison in the area. ROY DOMINGO

