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Japan's deep sea device spots tanker 400 meters

deep off Mindoro



TANKER FOUND Pictures taken by the Japanese remotely operated underwater vehicle (ROV) Hakuyo spot the hull of the MT Princess Empress and the source of some of its leaking industrial fuel (inset) in the waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, around 7.7 nautical miles away from Balingawan Point and nearly 400 meters beneath the waves. PH Coast Guard photos

By Charles Dantes, Vince Lopez, Rey E. Requejo, Willie Casas, and Maricel V. Cruz

THE MT Princess Empress, which sank three weeks ago with its cargo of 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil, has been found, officials said Tuesday, as the slick reached waters known for their rich marine life.

The tanker sank on Feb. 28 off Mindoro, and diesel fuel and thick oil from the vessel have since contaminated the waters and beaches of Oriental Mindoro province and other islands.

The tanker was found by a Japanese remotely operated underwater vehicle (ROV), Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerto Dolor said.

The vessel was found 7.7 nautical miles away from Balingawan Point in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, nearly 400 meters below the waves.

Dolor said he received the first photos showing the exact location of the vessel on Tuesday morning.

The national disaster agency said the ROV would assess the hull's condition before a decision was made about how to "control the spill from its source."

The Philippines has sought assistance from several countries, including Japan, the United States and France, to help contain and clean up the slick.

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Japan's...

From A1

Thousands of hectares of coral reefs, mangroves and seaweed could be endangered, officials have said.

Department of National Defense chief Carlito Galvez Jr. said in a situational report to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. that the DND is "on top" of the oil spill crisis.

Galvez said his United States counterpart, Lloyd Austin, gave his word that the US is committed to provide aid to the country through its humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HARD) team.

The DND, through the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council and local government units in Mindoro, have raised their cleanup efforts to mitigate the effects of the spill in the region, he said.

Galvez is also the concurrent chairperson of the NDRRMC.

Oil spill booms made of hay, human hair and other materials have been deployed to try to protect coastal waters that people in the fishing and tourism industries rely on for their livelihoods.

Oil has been spotted as far away as Casian Island, off the north coast of the western island of Palawan, about 350 kilometers southwest of where the tanker sank.

As feared, oil has also drifted north to the Verde Island Passage—a busy sea lane between Mindoro and the Philippines' main island of Luzon.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Loyzaga said previously that the area was "globally recognized" for its marine biodiversity.

The Philippine Coast Guard said cleanup operations on Monday removed oil from the shores of three villages on Verde

Island, which is popular with divers.

Oil also has been spotted further along the passage at Tingloy municipality on Maricaban Island, part of Batangas province.

Residents and coast guard personnel have been removing oil-coated seaweed and other debris from affected areas.

Tens of thousands of people have been affected by the spill, with scores falling ill. The government is distributing food packs and other assistance.

Among the hardest hit are fishermen, who have been ordered to stay on shore until they can fish safely.

The number of people who have gotten ill from the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro increased to 191, the Department of Health (DOH) said Tuesday.

During a press briefing, DOH officer-in-charge Maria Rosario Vergara said 14 more cases were recorded as of March 20.



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Japanese ROV gets 'first glimpse' of sunken MT Princess Empress

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

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USING Hakuyo, a remotely operated vehicle (ROV), Japanese experts have finally spotted the sunken MT Princess Empress that sank off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on February 28.

The team that searched the vessel said it was around 9:42 a.m. when they finally got a glimpse of MT Princess Empress—at the exact spot just as where the BRP Hydrographer Ventura, the search vessel of the National Mapping and Resource Authority (NAMRIA), earlier said it would be.

According to a Facebook post in the Karagatan Patrol by Jessa Floren, the ill-fated vessel was located somewhere in Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

Pola was one of the hardest hit by the oil spill. Around 10 hectares of mangrove forests have reportedly been coated with oil as of March 17, the latest update from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources stated.

"The coordinates suggest that this is inside the municipal waters of Pola, Oriental Mindoro," Floren said.

At a hastily called news conference on Tuesday, Governor Honorato Delor said Customs, Immigration, Quarantine, Security (CIQS) was conducted early morning on Tuesday prior to the discovery of the ill-fated vessel.

Incident Management Team in Oriental Mindoro commander, Coast Guard Commodore Geronimo Tuvilla joined the authorities in conducting the CR2S procedure on board the Japanese Dynamic Positioning Vessel (DPV) Shin Nishi Maru, which is equipped with the ROV Hakuyo on Monday, March 20.

The PCG said RDC Raedil Manio Services hired the Japanese DPV equipped with an ROV to locate and assess the condition of the sunken vessel.

At the news conference, Delor showed photographs and videos of the sunken vessel, which appeared to be intact.

The two British nationals who were among the team that searched for the sunken vessel will be the ones tasked to analyze the data, Delor said.

He said that in five days, they expect the owner of MT Princess Empress to come up with a report, which will be distributed to the media.

He said the report would determine whether the vessel sustained any further damage and how it can be recovered.

According to Tuvilla, the PCG will come up with a daily update of the situation. He added that the Japanese experts would draw up the plans, together with the shipowner's other consultants.

Tuvilla also reported that a team from the United States Coast Guard arrived. An incident management meeting, he said, will be held for the benefit of the US Coast Guard.

"Of course, we will give them a



briefing first, then ask them how they can help," he added.

The underwater search for the vessel, Tavilla said, is very important because it will help them determine what appropriate hardware will be needed. "We have already seen it. We now have an eye underneath. That's very important," he explained.

Case build up

THE inter-agency task force headed by the Department of Justice (DOJ) has issued subpoenas to various government agencies for the submission of important documents that would help in the ongoing case build up in connection with the sinking of MT Princess Empress, which caused a catastrophic oil spill in Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

Among those subpoenaed were the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina), Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) in Limay, Batangas, where the loading of the cargo was done.

"We are in the process of, actually the subpoenas have already been delivered for all the documents we need from the different agencies, especially Marina, the Coast Guard and some other agencies that may be involved here," Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla told reporters.

Remulla noted that the task force has sought documents from PPA to determine the specific cargoes that were loaded to the vessel before it sank off the coast of Oriental Mindoro.

On the other hand, the documents being sought from the PCC and Marina would determine whether there was negligence on the part of the two agencies that resulted in the latest environmental tragedy.

Remulla earlier disclosed initial findings that the vessel was not new but was merely rebuilt from scrap twice and was eventually converted into an oil tanker.

Price freeze

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has enforced a price freeze on basic necessities in areas affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro.

DTI-Mimaropa said it released the price freeze bulletin after tanker MT Princess Empress caused an oil spill in areas of Oriental Mindoro.

According to DTI, Sangguniang Panlalawigan Resolution No. 6290-2023, which placed the municipalities of Pola, Naujan, Pinamalayan, Gloria, Bausad, Bongabong, Roxas, Mansalay, and Bulalacao in Oriental Mindoro under a state of calamity prompted the agency to order the price freeze of basic necessities.

Further, under Republic Act (RA) No. 7581 or the Price Act as amended, the prices of basic necessities under DTI's jurisdiction are automatically frozen at their prevailing prices, DTI-Mimaropa noted.

The trade department said the price freeze took effect on March 6, 2023, but this shall not last more than 60 days from the said date.

With Joel R. San Juan



Japanese ROV locates sunken ship

BY VICTOR REYES

A REMOTELY-OPERATED vehicle (ROV) deployed by a Japanese ship has located the MT Princess Empress that sank off Oriental Mindoro last February 28, which will pave the way for authorities to deal with the massive oil slick that has impacted livelihood and destroyed ecosystems in various areas.

"Finally, MT Princess Empress was found. It is the first time the sunken vessel was sighted through the ROV," Oriental Mindoro Gov. Hernando Dolor said in his Facebook page yesterday.

"This is going to serve as (a) basis in coming up with a concrete plan (on) how to recover the oil that may be still inside (the sunken vessel) and how to cover

the holes," he added.

The L-faced tanker, carrying 900,000 liters of industrial fuel, sank after it developed engine trouble on its way to Iloilo from Busan.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said the ship was located 7.7 nautical miles from Balinguayan Point in Naujan town. A PCG official said the vessel was about 400 meters below sea level.

The ROV Hakuyu was deployed by the Japanese positioning vessel Shin Nishi Maru last Monday shortly after it arrived in the province.

The vessel was chartered by the RDC Reelid Marine Services Inc., the owner of MT Princess Empress, to help address the oil spill problem.

Dolor showed to media mem-

See JAPANESE ► Page B5

bers some of the videos and pictures taken by the ROV during a press conference in Oriental Mindoro.

In a statement, the PCG said concerned agencies, including the owner of the sunken ship, will meet soon to discuss the next course of action.

Dolor said they expect the Japanese experts to submit a comprehensive report in three to five days.

"Some of the ways forward is to determine and analyze what's inside the vessel, if there is a hole that needs to be covered, and what additional equipment is needed," Dolor said.

Last Monday, PCG officials confirmed the oil slick has reached Verde Island in Batangas City.

US COMMITMENT

The United States government has committed to send naval units and humanitarian and disaster response teams to help clean up the oil slick that has affected parts of Southern Tagalog and Western Visayas, Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Carlos Galvez Jr. said yesterday.

In his report to President Marcos Jr., Galvez said he spoke with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin last Monday night, with Austin saying the US is committed to help in coordination with Japan and other countries.

He said Austin assured him the US will deploy naval units to help in the clean-up operation and send a Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) team "to help and provide assistance in managing the oil spill."

He said he mentioned to Austin that some of the exercise scenarios in the forthcoming Philippines-US Balikatan exercises will become "real life" and "actual HADR" as the operations would be relative to the oil spill.

Galvez said the Philippines will also continue to seek the expertise and technical support of other partner countries, such as France and the United Kingdom, in containing the oil slick.

Galvez said the PCG has been briefing foreign groups assisting in the ongoing clean-up operation while the Oriental Mindoro LGU has committed to provide daily subsistence needs (meals, medicines, and vitamins) of the PCG team conducting off shore oil spill control measures and provided the personal protective equipment (PPE).

Climate Change Commissioner Albert Dela Cruz Sr. has warned against the use of chemical-based dispersants to break down the oil and help clear the affected coastal waters, saying this could cause problems in the future by causing harm to the marine ecosystem.

Dela Cruz said dispersants will break the oil into smaller droplets which could mix with water and

push it underwater, affecting the marine environment and ecosystem.

The government is also coordinating with the International Tankers Owners Pollution Federation Limited (ITOPF) on the conduct of a massive clean-up drive, identification of the debris staging area, as well as the dumpsite.

Dela Cruz said that instead of using dispersants, a whole-of-nation and society approach should be pursued to clean the oil-spill affected areas and preserve marine biodiversity, especially in the Verde Island Passage area.

Calapan City, led by Mayor Malen Morillo, has produced more improvised spill booms made from rice straws, ropes, empty plastic bottles and sacks to protect the city's waters.

AFFECTED FAMILIES

Data from the Department of Social Welfare and Development-Disaster Response Operations Monitoring and Information (DSWD-DROMIC) showed that as of March 21, 32,661 families or 151,463 persons from 134 barangays in Marikina and Western Visayas regions have been affected by the oil slick.

A total of P46.34 million worth of humanitarian assistance from the DSWD, local government units, non-governmental organizations, and other partners, has been provided to the affected families.



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The DSWD is currently implementing a 45-day cash-for-work program involving 7,198 families (including off-site), which started last March 6 while the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) has started the 30-day Tulog Panghambuhay sa Aring Disadvantaged, Displaced Workers (TUPAD) Program in Sibola, Semirara, and Tinogoc in Cebu in Antique.

CRIMINAL LIABILITY

Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla yesterday vowed there would be criminal liability for those who had been remiss in their jobs that led to the sinking of the MT Princess Empress.

Remulla made the statement after he visited Oriental Mindoro last Tuesday along with National Bureau of Investigation Director Medardo de Lemos and other officials to talk to local officials.

He said the DOJ has delivered subpoenas for "all the documents" that the department needs from other government agencies, such as the PCG and the Maritime Industry Authority, as part of its investigation on the incident and who should be held liable.

He said the DOJ also asked the Philippine Ports Authority to furnish documents on the ill-fated vessel before it sailed off.

"All the details of the oil spill, we want to get it because we think that there should be liabilities here, there should be criminal liability

involved in this case," he said.

He said the DOJ, in coordination with other concerned government agencies, are looking at possible legal actions to be taken against the owner/operator of the ill-fated vessel.

Remulla said the government is also looking at hiring remotely piloted vehicles (ROV) to speed up the clean-up of the oil slick.

Remulla said the clean-up drive should be "more aggressive" to prevent long-term effect and damage to the marine environment in the area.

TRACES OF OIL

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said preliminary findings from its studies in relation to the effects of the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro showed traces of petroleum products in water samples as well as low-level contaminants or polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) in fish samples.

The agency said the results of the analyses are not yet conclusive as far as food safety is concerned.

BFAR said in a statement yesterday that it collected water samples from different sampling sites from March 3 to 14. During the same period, the agency also collected fish samples from the municipalities of Naujan, Pola, Pinaragayan, Bansud, Gloria, Roxas, Mansalay, Bongabong and Balabac in Oriental Mindoro.

Preliminary findings showed traces of oil and grease in water samples equivalent to 5 mg/L, which is within the standard of 3 mg/L to 5 mg/L set by the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources.

"The results of the analyses are not yet conclusive as far as food safety is concerned. Further sampling and analyses are being conducted to establish time series results on the effect of the oil spill on fish concerning food safety, taking into account the magnitude of the oil spill which has reached neighboring areas like Cebu, Antique and some municipalities of Palawan," BFAR explained.

It added that it is still evaluating contaminant levels in water and fishery resources to determine if seafood is safe for public consumption and if fishing bans should be imposed or lifted by the local government units concerned.

In the meantime, the agency recommended the continued suspension of fishing activities in affected areas in Oriental Mindoro while separate tests on water and fish samples are also being conducted in Cebu, Antique, which has declared a fishing ban.

BFAR said it was allocated an initial budget of P6.4 million for livelihood and relief assistance to aid fisherfolk and their families cope with the loss of income due to fishing bans. — *With Jocelyn Montemayor, Asbazi Hachero and Jed Macapagal*



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MANILA ABUJETA
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



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US experts join oil spill cleanup

DTI freezes prices of basic goods in Oriental Mindoro

By JOSEPH PEDRAJAS, BETHELMA UNITE,
and BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT

The United States has committed to help clean up the massive oil spill in the waters off Oriental Mindoro and other affected areas, Malacañang said on Tuesday, March 21.

In fact, experts from the US are now in the country to help in efforts to clean up the oil spill.

Among them are five members of the US Coast Guard (USCG) National Strike, who will provide subject matter expertise and assess the affected areas, the US Embassy ▶ **7**



SHIPWRECK FOUND — A fuzzy image is transmitted from the remotely operated vehicle (ROV) Hakuyo showing the bow of the sunken MT Princess Empress in the waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on Tuesday, March 21, 2023. (Photo from the Philippine Coast Guard)



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US experts join oil spill cleanup

In Manila said on Tuesday, March 27. They will determine the most effective method and equipment to contain and clean up the oil spill from sunken MT Princess Empress, it added.

Two members of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) also arrived and will work closely with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in conducting rapid environmental assessments of affected areas.

Funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the two NOAA members will also identify priority areas at risk of environmental damage, and assess needs for ecosystem restoration.

"NOAA has already provided the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) with satellite imagery to boost assessment efforts. It also provided the University of the Philippines-Marine Sciences Institute with support for scientific modeling to estimate the trajectory of the spill," the US embassy said.

A US Navy supervisor for salvage and diving completes the eight-man team. According to the embassy, he will evaluate the technical parameters required to support the possible deployment of a remotely operated vehicle.

The eight US experts, who are in the country upon request of the Philippine government, are now in Pola, Oriental Mindoro. Prior to their deployment, they received a briefing in Manila from the PCG and the Japan Disaster Relief Expert Team about oil-spill mitigation actions taken so far.

"When vessels are in deep water,

as in this case, cleaning up the remaining oil becomes a complicated issue," Commander Stacey Cressy, commanding officer of the USCG Pacific Strike Team, said.

She gave assurance that "through our incident management professionals' wealth of experience and strong expertise in oil spill response, we will assist the PCG in developing safe and efficient methods to contain and recover the oil and minimize damage to the environment."

"The USCG remains deeply committed to our relationship with the PCG," she added.

The US commitment to help in the oil spill cleanup was revealed by Defense Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr. during a meeting with President Marcos on Tuesday.

Galvez told President Marcos that he spoke with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin who committed to deploy naval units to help in the clean-up operations.

"I had a phone call last night with Secretary Austin at 7:45 p.m. They are committed to help in coordination with Japan and other countries," Galvez said on Tuesday.

Galvez said Austin assured the Philippine government that their Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) team "is now on their way to help and provide assistance in managing the oil spill."

"In fact, as I've recommended, some of the exercise scenarios of the forthcoming 'Balikatan' exercises will be 'real life' and actual HADR operations relative to the oil spill,"

Galvez said.

He further said that the government will continue to seek the expertise and technical support of other partner countries, such as France and the United Kingdom, in containing the oil spill.

"As of yesterday (Monday), the oil spill has already affected 32,601 families in Mimaropa and Western Visayas. Although P28.3 million worth of humanitarian assistance alone from the government, LGUs (local government units), non-governmental organizations, and other partners, was already provided to affected families, we will sustain these assistance to them," Galvez said.

Aside from the US experts, the Japanese salvage vessel Shin Nishi Maru, a remotely operated vehicle (ROV), arrived at the Port of Calapan in Oriental Mindoro on Monday. It was immediately deployed to the area.

Support for affected communities

Meanwhile, Marcos vowed that the government will continue to assist communities affected by the oil spill that already reached Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan in Mimaropa (Region 4-B) and Western Visayas (Region 6).

According to Region 6 Task Force on Oil Spill, the national government, local government units (LGUs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other partners have provided P28.3 million worth of humanitarian assistance so far to the affected families.



US experts join

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The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is currently implementing a 45-day cash-for-work program involving 7,198 families (including off-site), which started on March 6. It said the beneficiaries could also avail themselves of Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) and family food packs.

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), on the other hand, has started the Tulong Panghanapuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) Program in three areas of Caluya - Sibolo, 152; Semirara, 246; and Tinogbo, 66, through a 30-day work program.

TUPAD is a community-based package of assistance that provides emergency employment for displaced workers, underemployed and seasonal workers, for a minimum of 10 days, but not to exceed a maximum of 30 days, depending on the nature of work to be performed.

Meanwhile, various government agencies are coordinating with the International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation Limited (ITOPF) on the conduct of a massive clean-up drive, identification of the debris staging area, as well as the dumpsite.

A private contractor for the oil spill cleanup is hiring 100 local workers to help the community.

The provincial government of Oriental Mindoro has committed to provide daily subsistence needs (meals, medicines, and vitamins) of the PCG team conducting offshore oil spill control. They have also been provided with personal protective equipment (PPE).

The MT Princess Empress was reported to contain around 300,000

liters of industrial fuel oil when it ran aground off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28 due to engine trouble and eventually sank the following day.

Price freeze

In Oriental Mindoro

Meanwhile, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Minnaropa ordered a price freeze on basic necessities in affected municipalities in Oriental Mindoro following the massive oil spill.

In view of Sangguniang Pambalawigan Resolution No. 6290-2023, placing the municipalities of Pola, Naujan, Piamalayan, Gloria, Bansud, Bongabong, Roxas, Mainsalay, and Bulalacao in Oriental Mindoro under a state of calamity, and pursuant to Section 6 of RA 7581 or the Price Act as amended, the prices of basic necessities under DTI's jurisdiction are automatically frozen at their prevailing prices effective March 6, 2023, but not more than 60 days, the DTI-Minnaropa said.

Basic necessities under DTI's jurisdiction include canned fish and other marine products, processed milk (evaporated, condensed and powdered milk), coffee, laundry/detergent soap, candles, bread (tasty and panalasal), iodized salt, instant noodles, and bottled water.

DTI-Minnaropa rebuked establishments that violators will suffer imprisonment of one year to 10 years, or a fine ranging from P5,000 to P1,000,000, or both, at the discretion of the court aside from the applicable administrative penalties.

DTI Oriental Mindoro is currently conducting intensified price and supply monitoring of basic necessities.



US sends experts to help Manila contain spill from sunken tanker

THE UNITED States has sent eight experts to help the Philippines contain the oil spill from a sunken fuel tanker that authorities said has affected as many as 20,000 hectares of coral reefs.

The American experts arrived in Pola, Oriental Mindoro on Tuesday to support the oil spill response operations of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), the US Embassy in Manila said in a statement.

"Five members from the US Coast Guard's National Strike Force will provide subject matter expertise and assess the affected areas to determine the most effective method and equipment to contain and clean up the oil spill from the sunken tanker *MT Princess Empress*," it added.

"Through funding from the US Agency for International Development, two members of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will work closely with the Philippine Department of Environment and Natural Resources to conduct rapid environmental assessments of affected areas, identify priority areas at risk of environmental damage and assess needs for ecosystem restoration," it added.

The embassy said its National Oceanic agency had provided the Philippine Coast Guard with satellite imagery to boost its assessment efforts.

It has also provided the University of the Philippines-Marine Sciences with support for sci-

entific modeling to estimate the spill's trajectory.

"Lastly, a US Navy supervisor of salvage and diving will evaluate the technical parameters required to support the possible deployment of a remotely operated vehicle."

US Defense Secretary Lloyd James Austin III has vowed to deploy naval units to help in clean-up operations, the Presidential Communications Office said in a separate statement, citing a report from Defense Secretary Carlito G. Galvez, Jr.

"They are committed to help in coordination with Japan and other countries," Mr. Galvez said in the statement, citing a phone call he had with Mr. Austin on Monday night.

The Philippine government last week said it was trying to fast-track the arrival of a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) from Japan that will locate the source of the oil leaking from the fuel tanker.

The Transportation department and Coast Guard were also looking for an alternative local ROV, the presidential palace said.

MT Princess Empress was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil on Feb. 28 when it sank off the waters of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, which surrounds the Verde Island Passage, one of the world's most diverse marine habitats.

Marine experts estimate that as many as 20,000 hectares of coral reefs, 9,900 hectares of mangroves

and 6,000 hectares of seagrass have been affected by the spill.

Japan was the first country to help the Philippines in clean-up efforts, sending two teams of experts who have been tasked to coordinate with the Philippine Coast Guard.

Mr. Galvez said Mr. Austin had assured him their Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response team was "on their way to help and provide assistance in managing the oil spill."

The Philippines' 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the US seeks to boost the two countries' cooperation on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

EDCA also seeks to promote interoperability, address short term capability gaps, promote long term modernization and boost maritime security and domain awareness.

Some senators have said the US had not done enough to help the Philippines in disaster response.

'CONTAMINANTS'

Mr. Galvez said he had proposed to include oil spill response in some of the "exercise scenarios" in the upcoming war games between the Philippines and US.

The Defense chief said the Philippine government would continue to seek the expertise and technical support of other countries such as France and the United Kingdom in containing the spill.

Meanwhile, the presidential palace said in a separate state-

ment the government of President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. would sustain the assistance program for families affected by the oil spill, which has affected coastal provinces in the Mimaropa and Western Visayas regions.

Affected families have increased to more than 32,000, the palace said, citing a regional task force report.

The National Government, local government units and nongovernment groups have provided P28.3 million worth of humanitarian assistance these families, it added.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said it had found low-level contaminants in collected fish samples.

Traces of petroleum products were detected in water samples, while low-level contaminants or polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) were found in the fish samples, the agency said, citing preliminary findings.

"The results of the analyses are not yet conclusive as far as food safety is concerned," BFAR said in a statement.

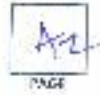
"Further sampling and analyses are being conducted to establish time-series results on the effect of the oil spill on fish concerning food safety, taking into account the magnitude of the oil spill which has reached neighboring areas like Caluya, Antique and some municipalities of Palawan," it added. — Kyle Aristophore T. Atienza and S.J.T.



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'US to assist govt in cleaning up oil spill in Oriental Mindoro'

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"After the Covid-19 pandemic, which closed our hotels, resorts and tourist destinations, resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs and livelihood, now comes the oil spill," she said.

"We can tap the resources of the Department of Labor and Employment-Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (DULF-TUPAD), Department of Social Work and Development Assistance for Individuals in Likis Situations (DSWD-AICSI), among other government funds for this purpose," said Lutism, who authored House Bill 6069, which sought to declare the Verde Island Passage as an ecotourism zone.



'US to assist govt in cleaning up oil spill in Oriental Mindoro'

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA

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DEPARTMENT of National Defense (DND) Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr. said he informed President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Tuesday that Washington will help in cleaning up the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro.

"I had a phone call last night (March 20) with (United States Secretary of Defense) Lloyd Austin at 7:45 p.m. They are committed to help in coordination with Japan and other countries," Galvez told the President.

He noted that the US will deploy a Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) team to aid in removing the oil spill, which resulted from the sinking of MT Princess Empress last February 28.

The DND chief said he had also recommended the inclusion of the clean-up activity in the forthcoming Balikatan drills next month.

The Balikatan is the annual Philippine-led bilateral exercise of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the US Armed Forces.

MT Princess Empress carried 800,000 liters of industrial fuel when it sank off the Naujan town.

The resulting oil spill from the

incident already affected 32,661 families in Mimaropa and Western Visayas.

Galvez said Manila is now seeking technical support from other countries like France and the United Kingdom to contain the oil spill in Mindoro.

CCC warning

THE Climate Change Commission (CCC) opposed the use of chemical-based dispersants in Oriental Mindoro due to its potential harm to marine ecosystems.

CCC Commissioner Albert Dela Cruz gave the warning during his meeting with the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) last Monday to discuss ongoing efforts to contain the oil spill.

"The Commissioner explained that the said droplets do not actually reduce the amount of oil entering the environment but push the effects of the spill underwater and this could have harmful effects on the marine environment and ecosystem," CCC said in a statement issued last Tuesday.

The University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) issued an advisory that the oil spill could reach the shores of Calapan City within the week.

Cruz noted the oil spill and the chemical dispersants can be more

devastating if it reaches the Verde Island Passage area located northwest of Calapan and Naujan, which is a breeding ground of a number of marine species.

Authorities are now rushing to clean up the oil spill, which is expected to spread further with the end of the northeast monsoon or "amihan."

Cruz urged the use of a "whole-of-nation and -society approach" instead of using chemical-based dispersants to address the oil spill.

Calapan City mayor Malou Morillo said residents and the local government are using improvised spill booms made from rice straws, ropes, empty plastic bottles and sacks to protect the city's waters from the oil spill.

The Japanese salvage vessel Saim Nichi Maru, a remotely-operated vehicle (ROV), also arrived at the port of Calapan in Oriental Mindoro on Monday to help in the cleanup efforts.

'Threat to tourist spots'

BATANGAS Rep. Gerville Luistro on Tuesday called for an "aggressive cleanup drive" as the Mindoro oil spill is now affecting his province's tourist destinations in Mabini, Bauan, Lobo, San Luis, San Pascual and Tingloy as well as the Verde Island Passage (VIP).

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SPILL CONTAINMENT STUDIED

SUNKEN OIL TANKER FOUND OFF POLA THRU ROV HELP

By **Madonna T. Virola,**
Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
and **Frances Mangosing**
@Team_Inquirer

CITY OF CALAPAN—The fuel tanker that sank off the waters of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, on Feb. 28 was located on Tuesday through the aid of a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) from a Japanese vessel that joined in the search for the vessel that has been leaking industrial oil in the waters between Batangas and Mindoro for almost a month.

"At last, MT Princess Empress has been located," said Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerlito Dolar, in a Facebook post on Tuesday. His message was accompanied by a photo of the sunken tanker, which was on its way to Iloilo province and carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil when it sank.

At a press conference Tuesday, Dolar presented initial underwater photos and videos of MT Princess Empress captured by the ROV. "We can use these photos to come up with a concrete plan on how to remove the oil on the ship or cover up holes if any to prevent it from further spilling into the sea," he said.

The ROV, which arrived in the province on Monday onboard its mother vessel, Shin Nichi Maru, was contracted by RDC Releld Marine Services, the sunken ship's operator,

of Balingawan Point in Pola.

The tanker is the source of the oil spill which has been affecting coastal communities in Oriental Mindoro, Palawan and Antique. On Monday, the oil spill was also detected on Verde Island in Batangas City, where the resource-rich Verde Island Passage is located.

Floren, in an online interview, said the sunken ship was found some 1.2 km away from its initial location in Naujan where it capsized and sank.

Senior Undersecretary Carlito Galvez Jr., the Department of National Defense officer in charge, said the US government, through a message relayed by US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III, had also committed to help in cleanup efforts.

Eight experts from the US Coast Guard (USCG) arrived in Pola on Tuesday to support the oil spill response, the US Embassy in Manila said.

Five members from the USCG National Strike Force will lend their expertise and assess the affected areas to come up with ways to contain and clean up the oil spill, it said.



Sunken oil tanker . . .

2/2

Water sampling

Meanwhile, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said it placed spill booms in mangroves within Barangay San Agapito on Verde Island on Tuesday morning, where traces of oil were found a day earlier. A shoreline cleanup was done in Barangay San Antonio, also on Verde Island.

Batangas City Mayor Beverly Rose Dimacuba ordered local government offices to continue monitoring the spill that already reached Verde Island.

"The city Eco (environment and natural resources office) immediately conducted water sampling from the sea around Verde Island and Barangays Iljan, Pagkilatan and Dela Paz to test if it is contaminated," the city public information office said in a Facebook post on Monday.

The PCG also placed the coastal towns of San Juan, Tingloy, Lobo and Calatagan, all in Batangas, under monitoring for signs of oil spill.

3 provinces hit

"We expect an official report from the company in three to five days," Dolor said, noting that the report would help guide government and private groups on the next steps to contain the oil spill.

Jessie Floren, Oceana's geographic information system expert, in a separate Facebook post, said the vessel's coordinates "suggest that this is inside the municipal waters of Pola, Oriental Mindoro."

According to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), citing reports by the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (Natura), the actual depth of the ship's location is 389.1 meters and 13.89 kilometers northeast



DISASTER AT SEA An expert team from the Japan Disaster Relief helps the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) in containing the oil spill from the sunken fuel tanker, MT Princess Empress, off the waters of Oriental Mindoro in this photo taken on March 16. —PCG PHOTO



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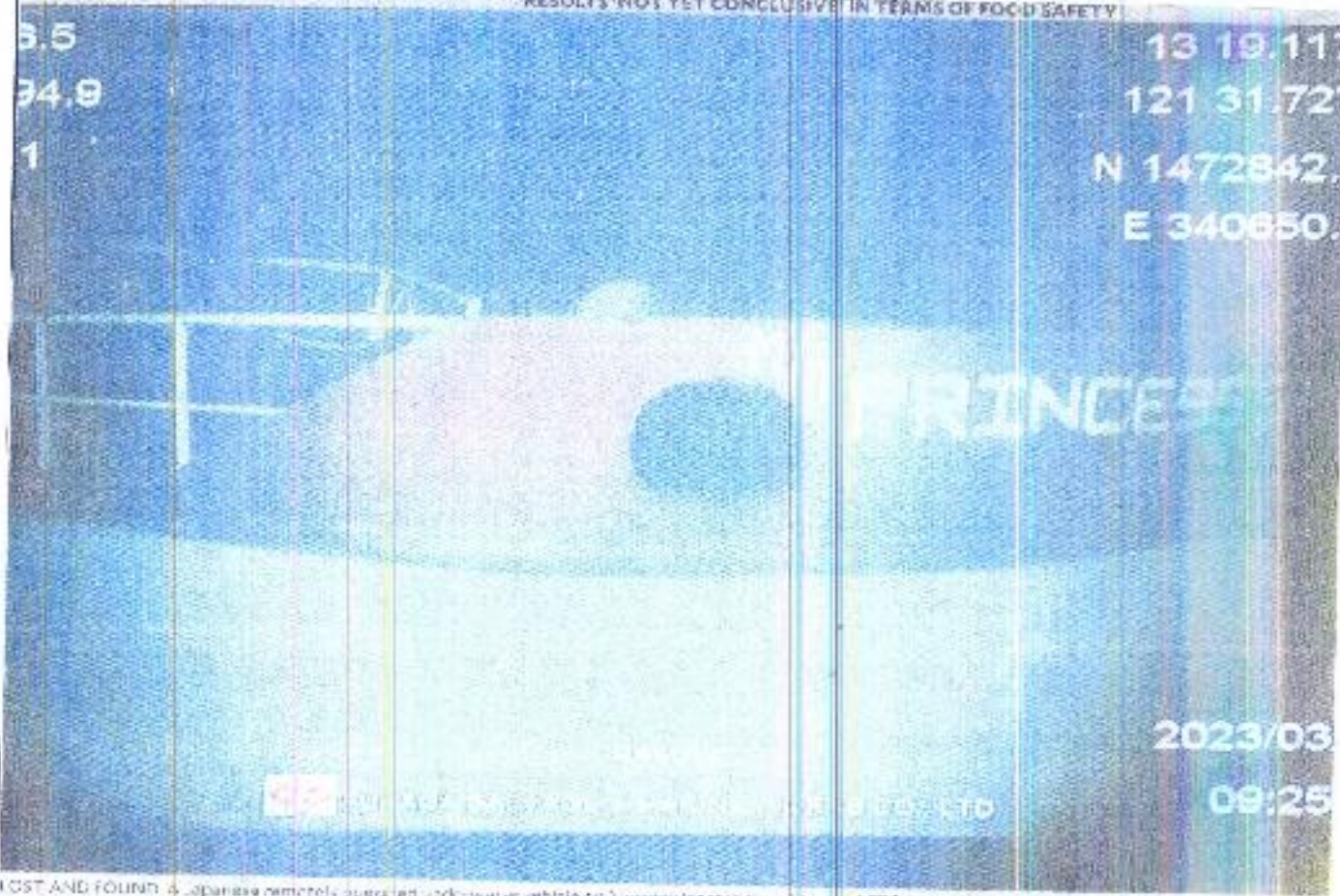
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LOST AND FOUND - Japanese remotely operated underwater vehicle on Tuesday located the wreck of MT Princess Empress at a depth of 3049 meters in the waters of Oriental Mindoro and Marinduque. The ship continues to leak oil almost a month after it sank on Feb. 25 - PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER



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Sunken tanker in oil spill located

By ROBERTZON RAMIREZ

A Japanese remotely operated vehicle (ROV) has located the motor tanker *Princess Empress* nearly a month since it sank in the waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

Gov.umerlito Dolor of Oriental Mindoro said that Japan's ROV successfully located the sunken MT *Princess Empress* before 10 a.m., capturing some photos of the vessel that will help authorities plan their next course of action.

"The photos taken by the ROV will be the basis to finally have a clear plan on how to remove if there is oil inside or what to do should there be holes in the sunken ship," Dolor said in Filipino at a press briefing yesterday.

The location of the sunken tanker was found by authorities 21 days after the Philippine government had launched its oil spill response operation on March 1.

Dolor said they are expecting the experts to come out with their reports "within a maximum of five days" about the condition of the motor tanker. The experts are expected to send their recommendations on what steps will be undertaken after the discovery of the vessel's location.

He said there are two British nationals making the analysis

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EDITORIAL



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Sunken Tanker

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FUKUDA SALVAGE & MARINE WORKS CO., LTD.

Photo taken from the official Facebook account of Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerlito Dolor shows the sunken MT Princess Empress, which was located using a remotely operated vehicle from Japan.



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EDITORIAL



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Sunken tanker

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based on material recovered by the ROV.

Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Commodore Gerónimo Tuvilla said it is important for the Philippine government to receive daily updates of the Japanese authorities, as far as the oil spill response is concerned, so that they will be able to determine their course of action.

Experts arrive

Eight experts from the US government arrived yesterday in Pola, Oriental Mindoro to assist in the oil spill response operations of the PCG at the request of the Philippine government.

The US embassy in Manila said the US expert team composed of five personnel from the US Coast Guard (USCG) National Strike Force will provide subject matter expertise and assess the most effective method to contain and clean up the oil spill.

Two members from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will provide technical support to assess the damage caused by the oil spill, while a US Navy Supervisor of Salvage and Diving will evaluate the technical parameters required to support the possible deployment of a remotely operated vehicle.

NOAA has provided the PCG with satellite imagery to boost assessment efforts.

It also provided the University of the Philippines-Marine Sciences Institute with support for scientific modeling to estimate the trajectory of the spill.

Prior to their deployment to Pola, the American experts received a briefing on Monday in Manila from the PCG and the Japan Disaster Relief Expert Team about oil-spill mitigation actions taken so far.

"When vessels are in deep water, as in this case, clearing up the remaining oil becomes a complicated issue. Through our incident management professionals' wealth of experience and strong expertise in oil spill response, we will assist the PCG in developing safe and efficient methods to contain and recover the oil and minimize damage to the environment," said Commander Stacey Crecy, commanding officer of the USCG Pacific Strike Team.

Cleanup

The US government has committed to help in the efforts to clean up the massive oil spill in Oriental Mindoro, Department of National Defense (DND) officer-in-charge Senior Undersecretary Carlito Galvez Jr. told President Marcos during a meeting at Malacañang yesterday.

Galvez said he spoke with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin on Monday night and he has committed to deploy naval units to help in the cleanup operation in the area.

"I had a phone call last night with Sec. Austin at 7:45 p.m. They are committed to help in coordination with Japan and other countries," Galvez said.

The Philippine government, Galvez said, would also continue to seek the expertise and technical support of other partner countries, such as France and the United Kingdom, in containing the oil spill in Mindoro.

Meanwhile, Climate Change Commissioner Albert dela Cruz Sr. warned against the use of chemical-based dispersants to break down the oil spill as it might harm the marine ecosystem.

Dela Cruz said that when dispersants are sprayed on a surface oil slick, the oil is broken down into smaller droplets that more readily mix with water.

The droplets do not actually reduce the amount of oil entering the environ-

ment but push the effects of the oil spill underwater and this could have harmful effects on the marine environment and ecosystem.

Various government agencies and the local government unit of Oriental Mindoro have stepped up efforts to address the effects of the oil spill from the sunken MT *Princess Empress*.

National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) executive director and Office of Civil Defense administrator Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno, Office of Civil Defense-MIMAROPA regional director Eugene Cabrera, Commodore Tuvilla and Gov. Dolor oversaw the deployment of the ROV, brought aboard Japanese dynamic positioning vessel (DPV) *Shinichi Maru*. The officials also conducted an assessment of the oil spill in Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

At a briefing held yesterday, officials from the PCG and concerned LGUs discussed the ongoing oil spill management operations, including the entry and deployment of the Japanese vessel that will assist in the operations.

Meanwhile, environmental group Oceana has urged the government to hasten its response in addressing the oil spill that has reached the Isla Verde.

Daniel Ocampo, Oceana senior campaign manager, noted that there are still a lot of unknowns hampering the response efforts to contain the oil spill from the sunken MT *Princess Empress*, which was reportedly carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil when it ran aground due to engine trouble on Feb. 28 and sank the following day.

"There are still many questions, we hope the response of government should be quick and put all the resources that we have," he said in an interview on *OneNews*' *The Chats*.

He said that "fingerprint" analysis of the oil, which will determine the contents and other characteristics, and volume of the oil spill have yet to be



Sunken From Page 1

answered.

"That question should have been answered as soon as the ship sank so that we really know if we have seen the worst or should we prepare for what's coming? That is the question that needs to be answered," he added.

Assistance

Communities affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro will continue to receive assistance from the government Malacañang said yesterday as more organizations and countries joined the massive cleanup operations.

In an interview at Malacañang, Budget Secretary Amenah Pangasinan said that government has sufficient funds for the affected families.

She said concerned government agencies such as the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) are using their current budget for disaster relief and livelihood assistance programs.

As of Sunday, the oil spill has affected 32,661 families in Mimaropa and Western Visayas, the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said, citing a recent report from the Region 6 Task Force on Oil Spill.

"Under President Marcos' directive, different government agencies are carrying out programs aimed at assisting the local population affected by the oil spill. The Marcos administration has promised to sustain the assistance being extended to the families affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro that already reached other provinces in Mimaropa and Western Visayas," the PCO said.

Apart from providing food packs, the DSWD is currently implementing a 45-day cash-for-work program involving 7,198 families while the DOLE has started the Talong Panghanspikatay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced

Workers (TUPAD) Program in three barangays in Caluya, Antique.

PCG, Marina, PPA summoned

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has issued subpoenas to the PCG, Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) and Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) for documents related to the recent oil spill.

"We have delivered the subpoenas for all the documents we need from the different agencies, especially Marina, the Coast Guard and some other agencies that may be involved here. We're also asking for documents from the PPA for the records in the Port of Lunay, Bataan where the loading was done in the boat. In loading of the cargo, we want to find out exactly the cargo that's there, the exact definition of the cargo," Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla told reporters.

"All the details of the oil spill (will surface), we want to delve into this because we think that there should be liabilities here, there should be criminal liability involved in this case," he added.

Remulla said the DOJ is meeting with various government agencies on Thursday to receive the subpoenaed documents and to determine the next course of action, including a resolution that turns the responsibility for the cleanup to the government, which would then be reimbursed by those responsible.

"The Cumaras oil spill took six days (to provide the ROVs) because Petron was involved and it took 21 days to suck out everything. Now, it has been 21 days since the oil spill and up to now we don't have ROVs that's why on Thursday, our agenda is if they can't provide the ROVs, the government will undertake it on its own by hiring the best people for this job," Remulla added. — With Pia Lee-Brago, Helen Flores, Neil Jayson Serravallo, Romina Cabrera



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LOW-LEVEL CONTAMINANTS FOUND IN FISH IN OIL SPILL AREAS

By **Jordeene B. Lagare**
and **Tina G. Santos**
@Lean_Inquirer

Low-level contaminants of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, chemicals found in crude oil that are harmful to humans and other living organisms, have been found in fish samples taken from areas affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) reported on Tuesday.

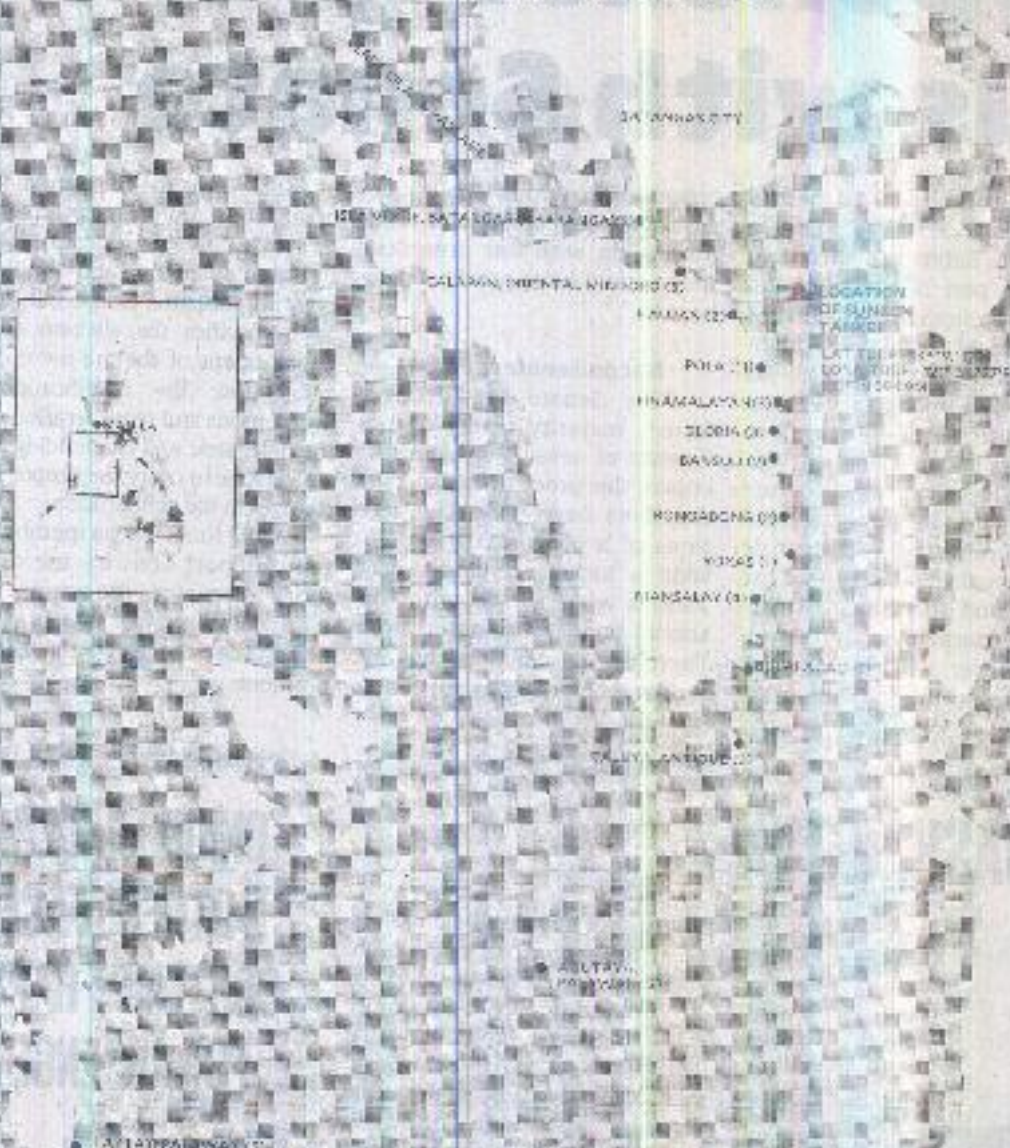
BFAR said its preliminary findings also showed traces of petroleum products, particularly oil and grease, in the water samples it tested.

The agency has not categorically advised consumers to avoid consuming seafood from the affected locations, pending the outcome of additional examinations. But fishing activities in certain parts of the province remain suspended for public safety.

"The results of the analyses are not yet conclusive as far as food safety is

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AREAS HIT BY OIL SPILL FROM MT PRINCESS EMPRESS SINCE FEB. 23



SOURCE: BIRAC P-00172, Quarterly geographic information system report



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Low-level contaminants found in fish in oil spill areas

FROM A1

concerned," BFAR said. (See related story in Regions, Page A7.)

It added: "Further sampling and analyses are being conducted to establish time-series results on the effect of the oil spill on fish concerning food safety, taking into account the magnitude of the oil spill which has reached neighboring areas like Caluya, Antique, and some municipalities of Palawan."

The bureau said it "will continuously analyze water and fish samples in affected areas to monitor the possible spread of contamination and determine the extent of damage caused by the oil spill in the fishery sector."

"Results will be shared with the public as soon as data becomes available," it added.

Turnaround period

From March 3 to 14, BFAR took water samples from different sites and also collected fish samples from the towns of Naujan, Pola, Pinamalayan, Bansud, Gloria, Roxas, Mansalay, Bongabong and Bulalacao, all in Oriental Mindoro.

It analyzed both types of samples within the standard 10-

day turnaround period for fish sample analysis, to determine contaminant levels in water and fishery resources.

The agency said it was also testing water and fish samples in Caluya, Antique, which has already declared a fishing ban.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Rex Estoperez reiterated that the oil spill would not affect domestic fish supply due to the open fishing season.

"This won't affect our supply because it's open season now. We can still catch fish elsewhere," said Estoperez, also the Department of Agriculture's deputy spokesperson.

Criminal liability

Meanwhile, Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla said various government agencies, including the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) and the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), have been ordered to produce relevant documents in the investigation of the oil spill caused by the sinking of the MT Princess Empress off the waters of Oriental Mindoro.

"Subpoenas have been delivered for all the documents we need from the different agencies. We're asking for all the documents, also records from the Philippine Ports Au-

thority," he told reporters.

"All the details about the oil spill we want to get into because we think there should be criminal liability here," he added.

Remulla visited Pola, Oriental Mindoro, on Tuesday, together with other government officials, to conduct an inspection of the extent of damage brought by the oil spill.

He expressed alarm over the oil slick reaching Verde Island Passage, saying it was "very much at risk of damage."

"It's one of the most important areas for marine biodiversity in the world. The Verde Island Passage is very important to our country," he added.

Fishesfolk group Pambansang Lakas ng Klusang Mamanlalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalalakaya ng Pilipinas) on Tuesday lamented the "inadequate" response and "negligence" of the government, which it said prolonged and increased the detrimental impact of the oil spill.

"We demand a thorough, impartial, and transparent investigation of this seemingly avoidable ecological nightmare," it said.

The incident has so far affected the livelihood of more than 15,000 fishesfolk and their families. —WITH A REPORT FROM JANE BAUTISTA INQ



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We never learn, stakeholder says

Oil slick

response pitiful

BY RAFFY AYENG, TIZIANA CELINE PIATOS, JING VILLAMEYTE AND LADE JEAN KAEGANI

A shipping industry stakeholder slammed the seemingly sluggish response of the government to the oil spill in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro — now nearing a month — that has affected the lives and livelihoods of more than 180,000 residents of the entire province.

Since the ill-fated oil tanker MT Princess Empress was totally swallowed up by the sea on 3 March, a solution has yet to be found on how to contain the maritime tragedy, prompting a Greek shipowner's representative in Manila, Capt. Edgardo Flores, to wonder why the country has not learned its lesson.

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"My God, it's been almost a month but there has been no solution to the oil slick. Our government agencies have no anti-pollution plans considering that thousands of ships register in Philippine waters," Flores, who manages oil tankers plying international routes, said in Manila.

As this developed, Agency France Press reported that the tanker oil tanker has been found by a Japanese remotely operated vehicle 400 meters below the waves. It was 37 nautical miles away from Balabagan Point, Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

On Monday, Philippine Coast Guard spokesperson, Rear Admiral Armand Balde, revealed that the country has never had an ICAO, a piece of equipment that is used to locate tanker ships.

The Japanese Coast Guard's BOV arrived on Monday and has been

deployed in Naujan to locate the MT Princess Empress.

"I suppose we don't even have the equipment and chemicals to dilute oil spills. We are pitiful. There should be the focus of an investigation. The oil slick has spread far and wide but we still don't know what to do and which government agencies are supposed to be in charge," Flores said in the interview.

Assessing damage

An 8-man contingent from the United States Coast Guard also arrived on Monday to assess the spill damage and how they can help.

A video the other day showed PCG personnel manually scooping up bits of oil using orange plastic bottles in the waters off Naujan and Pala towns in Oriental Mindoro.

This is not the first time the country suffered an oil spill. On 11 August 2005, an oil spill occurred in Panay Gulf when the tanker, MT Solar 1, sank off the coasts of Guimaras and Negros, causing what is considered the worst oil spill in the country's history.

PBBM's vow

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Tuesday promised to sustain the assistance being extended to the people affected by the oil spill that has reached other provinces in the MIMAROPA (Mindoro, Marikapan, Bantayan, Palawan) region and Western Visayas.

Malabon issued the statement after the Rajah Muzaffar VI Task Force on Oil

Spill said during an emergency meeting in Iloilo City that the spill has affected 82,561 families in MIMAROPA and Western Visayas as of Sunday.

"Under President Marcos's direction, different government agencies are carrying out programs aimed at assisting the local population affected by the oil spill," the Presidential Communications Office said.

The PCG, citing the task force, said the national government, local government units, non-governmental organizations, and other partners have provided P233 million worth of humanitarian assistance to the affected families.

Charterer has no liability

Even if some of his colleagues have said the charterer of the tanker that carried the industrial oil — identified as St. Huber Refin Terminals Corporation, a subsidiary of San Miguel Shipping and Lightering — was liable for the damage, Flores said the company has no liability since it is only the receiver of the cargo.

Flores blamed the PCG for not doing its due diligence in checking the authenticity of the Certificate of Public Convenience presented by tanker owner HCC Global Marine Services to ship the 900,000 liters of industrial oil.

"Another thing, Marcos (the Maritime Industry Authority) issued the CPC. I don't think the PCG is stupid enough to cover the leak themselves that Marcos may have issued. No need to be a rocket scientist to understand that," he said.

On Monday, Marcos said the CPC shown by the PCG appeared to have been falsified and contained many flaws.

"The signatory to the documents presented by the PCG was not the one who could have signed the papers. The name was even misspelled. It's Marc (not Mark) Anthony Paez. Also, he was never the director of the Marine Freighting Department," according to a Marcos source.

Paez denied signing any CPC amendment papers for HCC Global Marine Services.

Verde Island oil trace contained

In a related development, the PCG on Tuesday said the "microleak" traces of oil that had reached Verde Island have been contained and oil spill booms have been placed in the water.

Verde Island is a volcanic island situated in the Verde Island Passage between the islands of Luzon and Mindoro. The Verde Island Passage provides food, livelihood, and other benefits to over two million people.

According to PCG Belangas chief, Captain Vic Acosta, no fishing has yet been imposed on Verde Island even if some oil had spilled the marine ecosystem on the island in Belangas, particularly the coastal barangays of San Vicente and San Agapito.

As of Monday, a total of 12 barangays, 800 square meters of mangroves, and approximately 16.5 kilometers of shoreline have been affected.

Fish affected

The Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources on Tuesday reported finding low-level concentrations of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in fish samples. PAH, which is harmful to humans and other living organisms, may accumulate in the flesh of fish over time.

However, the bureau said the results of the analysis were not conclusive as far as food safety was concerned. Further sampling and analyses are being conducted to establish the actual health effect of the oil spill on fish, it added.

US help

Meanwhile, Malabon and the Department of National Defense said on Tuesday the United States has promised to help contain and clean up the massive oil spill.

Presidential Communications Secretary Gerry Bautista said both the DND and its US counterpart committed to a phone call between Defense officer-in-charge Carlito Galvez Jr. and US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

"I had a phone call with (Secretary) Austin at 7:45 p.m. They are committed to helping in coordination with Japan and other countries," Galvez was quoted as saying.

Galvez said Austin assured the Philippine government that a team from the US Environmental Aid and Disaster Response program was en route to the country to help contain the oil spill.

WITH A REPORT FROM AFP



Mr

Oil slick response pitiful



PHOTOGRAPHS BY HONEL VERDEZ
Oil slick spreads As of 21 March, environmental group Greenpeace Philippines says the oil slick from the sunken oil tanker MT Progress Express has affected at least 964,336 hectares of municipal waters covering 10 coastal towns of Oriental Mindoro, two in Palawan and one in Antique, including Verde Island Passage.



AFFECTED AREAS

● NAIHAN, ORIENTAL MINDORO

ORIENTAL MINDORO

1. CALAPAN
2. POLA
3. PINAMALAYAN
4. CLORIA
5. BANSUD
6. BONGABONG
7. FOXAS
8. MANSALAY
9. BULALACAO

ANTIQUE

1. CALLIYA, ANTIQUE

PALAWAN

1. AGUTAYA
2. TAYTAY

BATAAN

1. VERDE ISLAND PASSAGE

PALAWAN

PANAY

MANILA



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AND
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03-22-23

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COMMENTARY

Oil spill revelations

Recent developments suggest that San Miguel Corporation or SMC may be involved in a serious controversy regarding its operations.

For the past several months, SMC has been in the public eye for its questionable, unilateral withdrawal from a contract to provide a constant supply of electricity to the Manila Electric Company (Meralco) for about a decade.

Earlier, SMC participated in public bidding for the contract, conducted under the auspices of the Energy Regulatory Commission or ERC. SMC won the contract.

Considering SMC's corporate reputation both in the Philippines and in the world, the government, Meralco, and the general public have good reason to assume that SMC had studied its bid before submitting it. After all, SMC is expected to have a financial team that is competent enough to understand the company's financial affairs.

Surprisingly, SMC waded out of the contract on the flimsy excuse that it made an incorrect analysis of the financial pros and cons of the contract, and that the bid it submitted may lead to economic losses for the company.

Thus, SMC asked the ERC permission to back out of its contractual obligation.

To add insult to public injury, SMC refuses to pay the P255-billion

“Some revelations suggest that the MT Princess Empress was heavily insured and that its sinking would be more profitable to the owner than its continued operation.”

fine imposed by the contract on the party that wants out of the deal.

Incidentally, SMC's subsidiary through which it won the electricity supply contract was recently listed as one of the most profitable corporate enterprises in the country.

When the ERC saw the manifest injustice in the relief sought by SMC, it denied the same. This prompted SMC's subsidiaries to elevate the matter to the Court of Appeals, where it is pending at present.

A new controversy that may eventually involve SMC is the recent oil spill off the coast of Mindoro in western Luzon.

According to news reports, the MT Princess Empress, a rickety old oil tanker, sank near Mindoro, and its voluminous cargo of oil spilled into the sea.

The oil spill has caused extensive damage to sea life and coastal plant life. It has also released a foul, toxic odor in the area that is hazardous to public health. The livelihood of the fishermen in the area has ground to a halt, thus causing economic hardship for many who depend on the sea for their living.

Nearby islands are already experiencing the devastating effect of the oil spill in their areas. Tourist destination Boracay, an erstwhile polluted beach that threatened public health until its miraculous rehabilitation under President Rodrigo Duterte, is in danger of becoming polluted again.



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OIL SPILL REVELATIONS . . .

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News reports have it that the oil tanker was chartered by SMC to carry the oil the company needs for its operations. It appears that SMC has not categorically denied this revelation. The news media's questions about why SMC allegedly hired a decrepit oil tanker to deliver its supply of oil, which may lead to a maritime and environmental disaster, remain unanswered.

It was also learned that the owner of the MT Princess Empress failed to obtain the requisite permits before it embarked on the voyage to carry the oil at sea.

These revelations were enough to make the Senate panel investigating the oil spill angry, and demand the heads of the government regulatory agencies who allowed the voyage under such anomalous circumstances.

Some revelations suggest that the MT Princess Empress was heavily insured and that its sinking would be more profitable to the owner than its continued operation. The Insurance Commission should conduct its inquiry into this matter.

Right now, the owners of both the oil tanker and its cargo should be exposed to the public and compelled by legal processes to clean up the environmental and economic mess their gross inexcusable negligence has caused many Filipinos.

China's illegal aggression in the West Philippine Sea is bad enough. Now, the Philippines has an additional problem created by the oil spill.

The Senate is correct. Heads must roll for this environmental and economic mess.

“SMC waited out of the contract on the flimsy excuse that it made an incorrect analysis of the financial pros and cons.”





ATTY. JOSE DOMINIC
F. CLAVANO IV

Oily mess

Department of Justice officials, I saw first-hand the black clumps of oil on the municipality's shore. I saw the lovely resorts lined up one after the other. I saw DSWD aid being given to those whose livelihoods were essentially stripped away. Together with the Department of Natural Resources, the Philippine Coast Guard, the National Bureau of Investigation a consultant adept in marine biology, and Pola Mayor Jennifer Cruz, we explained what legal remedies could be availed of at that very moment.

One that is ripe for filing is the Writ of *Kalikasan*. Affected communities, individuals, or organizations can file a Writ of *Kalikasan* to protect their right to a healthy environment and to compel the government and responsible parties to take immediate and effective measures to address the environmental damage caused by the oil spill. The Writ can be used to demand the cleanup of the oil spill, the prevention of further

damage to the environment, and the rehabilitation of affected ecosystems.

If a Writ of *Kalikasan* is granted, the court can issue orders and directives to government agencies and responsible parties to take immediate and effective action to address the environmental damage caused by the oil spill. The court can also appoint a commissioner or a technical expert to assess the extent of the environmental damage and recommend appropriate measures for its rehabilitation. Overall, these bases for civil liability provide legal recourse for afflicted parties and ensure that responsible parties are held accountable for the environmental damage caused by an oil spill.

All told, this is about justice — environmental justice.

“If a Writ of *Kalikasan* is granted, the court can issue orders and directives to government agencies and responsible parties to take immediate and effective action.”

Ever since the sinking of the oil tanker *MT Princess Empress*, the damage to our environment has worsened day by day. As of this writing, 22 days have passed and yet the effects of oil spill devastation are widening in scope. Fish, turtles, corals, mangroves and many more elements of our marine life are and

will be affected by this oil spill. Sad to say, this incident will have far-reaching and long-lasting effects on our environment, the livelihoods of our fisherfolk, and tourism.

What then must be done to quell the effects and impute liability to those who have caused this? Three very important courses of action need to be taken immediately and simultaneously. First, we must do the necessary fact-finding investigation on the incident. Second, the government and the private sector must work hand-in-hand to clean up the oil spill. Third, a Writ of *Kalikasan* must be filed. *

* In the first course of action, all the necessary documents must be subpoenaed. Documents relating to the charter, insurance policy, permits and licenses as well as those relating to the history of the vessel will be indispensable in the investigation. Not only will we find out who are responsible for the incident, but we will also be able to peak into the seaworthiness of the vessel. This will help us determine which criminal, civil and administrative cases can be filed. It will likewise aid us to exact the damages needed to cover the damage done.

On the second course of action, the oil spill needs to be contained as soon as possible. Every second of every day is critical. Not much needs to be said about this. The environmental harm that is in some ways irreversible threatens the beauty we Filipinos often boast about in our country.

On my trip to Pola, Oriental Mindoro yesterday morning with Secretary Remulla and top

“Documents relating to the charter, insurance policy, permits, and licenses as well as those relating to the history of the vessel will be indispensable.”



OPMF SAFETY NETS IN PLACE -- MARINA

BY CARMELA I. HUELAR

THE Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) guarantees that safety nets are properly in place and that every centavo drawn from the Oil Pollution Management Fund (OPMF) is spent according to its purpose.

This was the response made by the Marina in view of the P11 million initial budget requested by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) to prevent the persistent oil from the auker oil tanker MT Princess Empress from further destroying the marine environment.

MT Princess Empress, carrying some 800,000 liters of persistent oil, sank off the coast fronting the town of Pola in Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28, 2023.

The oil spill from the tanker has already reached the shores as far as Cuyo in Palawan aside from devastating coastal towns in Oriental Mindoro.

The government is now on its toes to prevent the spill from contaminating Verde Island along the coast of batangas, one of the areas in Luzon rich in marine and natural resources.

"Considering that the oil spill is an emergency, RA 9483 provides that as soon as there is a determination that there is an oil spill, the OPMF is activated," Marina spokesman and Legal Services Director



Planning and Policy Director of Marina Luisito de los Santos (left) and Atty. Sharon Aledo, legal services director of Marina, during the press conference on Monday, March 20, 2023. PHOTO BY WILMAR ALMORA

Sharon Aledo said.

"The collection and expenditure shall be subjected to the usual Commission on Audit rules and regulations," Aledo stressed.

"It is also provided that 90 days after wrapping up the oil spill operations, the PCG shall report it with complete invoices and documentation," Aledo added.

The OPMF, provided under Republic Act 9483 or the "Oil Pollution Act of 2007," is now at approximately P70 million from the

P1.00 per liter contribution from tanker operators.

Of the amount, about 90 percent of the OPMF is contributed by members of the Philippine Petroleum Sea Transport Association (Philpesta). JDC, although not a member of Philpesta, is also contributing to OPMF for their other tankers before MT Princess Empress.

Also on Monday, the PCC said they were closely conducting an aerial inspection to determine the scope of the oil spill.

The agency is in talks with its counterparts in the United States, Japan and South Korea to help in its oil spill response.

To date, the Marina and the PCG, through the Department of Transportation (DoTr) are in the process of investigating the alleged spurious Certificate of Public Convenience (CPC) issued to MT Princess Empress.

A CPC is needed for a commercial vessel to ply the local trade.

Marina has already denied issuing a CPC to the ill-fated tanker. During the press conference held Monday, Marina said they will hold all persons involved in this mess accountable considering the effects of the oil spill on the country.

Due to this, Marina has suspended the CPC issued to the owner of MT Princess Empress RDC Beeld Marine Services, effectively stopping all operations of its vessels covered by the CPC still operating. The ill-fated tanker was locally built and commissioned only in 2022.

Aside from this, the DoTr, Marina and PCC are also looking at other measures to soften the impact of the oil spill on the country including making representation with the Protection and Indemnity Club for the insurance of MT Princess Empress, which is estimated to be at \$1 billion.



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EDITORIAL

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Hey! When incidents like oil spills happen, companies are allowed to just move on, while fishermen and coastal communities bear the brunt of the nature's depredation.



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First Gen Hydro to use part of Pantabangan watershed

BY LINDA LECTURA @lindalectura

FIRST Gen Hydro Power Corp. (FGHPC) will utilize a 36-hectare portion of the 84,000-hectare Pantabangan-Carranglan Watershed Forest Reserve for its 120-megawatt (MW) Aya pumped-storage hydroelectric power project.

The subsidiary of Lopez-led First Gen Corp. said last Tuesday it signed an agreement with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) that allows FGHPC to pursue the development of the hydroelectric facility in Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija, while preserving the status of the project site as part of a protected area.

The agreement is valid for 25 years subject to renewal for another 25 years.

The firm said its "Special Use Agreement in Protected Areas," or "Sapa," agreement with the DENR

"reaffirms [its] commitment" to pursue the Aya project in accordance with Republic Act (RA) 11038 (Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System, or e-Nipas, law). As part of the agreement, FGHPC officially remitted to the DENR a P69.1-million check as Sapa fee.

RA 11038 covers the country's ecologically rich and unique areas and hydrologically important public lands in the country, which are under DENR's management.

Optimize development

THE DENR issues a Sapa to enable

productive use of the country's protected areas by providing access to economic opportunities to indigenous people, tenured migrant communities, protected migrant communities and other protected area stakeholders. The agreement also aims to optimize the development of special-use projects, which are consistent with the principles of sustainable development and biodiversity conservation and in cooperation with stakeholders.

The FGHPC said it is pursuing the Aya project "in support of government's program" to meet the country's growing demand for electricity, while keeping carbon emissions low. The company already holds a hydropower service contract for the pumped storage project that the Department of Energy awarded in 2019.

A pumped-storage facility stores and generates electricity by moving a volume of water between two reservoirs situated at different elevations (upper and lower reservoirs).

First Sapa

ACCORDING to DENR Assistant Regional Technical Director Forester Joelito M. Blanco, the watershed

forest reserve that will play a critical role in supplying power to the Luzon grid is the first ever to be awarded a SAPA in Region III or Central Luzon.

"This is one of our most crucial permits. We are grateful for the support of our partners in DENR. We are also thankful to the [LGUs] and our stakeholders for their vote of confidence in us and for choosing us as their newest partner in protecting the watershed forest reserve," said First Gen Senior Vice President Dennis P. Gonzales.

FGHPC also manages the 132-MW Pantabangan-Masatay hydroelectric power plant, which is part of a multipurpose project that provides irrigation to Nueva Ecija's rice lands. The complex has the country's largest storage-type hydropower facility.

FGHPC's hydro facilities form part of First Gen's portfolio of power plants that run on clean and renewable energy sources. Aside from hydro, the portfolio includes geothermal, solar and wind, which are renewable energy resources; and natural gas, the cleanest form of fossil fuel.



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First Gen unit gets DENR nod on 120-MW hydro facility

LOPEZ-led First Gen Corp. said its unit had signed an agreement with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for the development of a 120-megawatt (MW) pumped-storage hydroelectric facility in Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija.

"This is one of our most crucial permits. We are thrilled to be able to continue our work on the Aya Pumped-Storage project, and we are grateful for the support of our partners in DENR," First Gen Senior Vice-President Dennis P. Gonzales said in a media release.

First Gen subsidiary First Gen Hydro Power Corp. (FGHPC) signed the special use

agreement in protected areas (SAPA) with the DENR that would allow the development of the facility while also preserving the status of the project site as part of a protected area.

The signed deal will enable the company to use a 36-hectare portion of the 84,000-hectare Pantabangan-Carranglan watershed forest reserve for FGHPC's Aya pumped-storage hydroelectric power project. The agreement is valid for 25 years and subject to renewal for another 25 years.

FGHPC said it is pursuing the Aya project to support the government's program of meet-

ing electricity demand while preserving low carbon emissions.

It added that the SAPA signing reaffirms its commitment to pursue the project under Republic Act No. 11038 or the Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act (ENIPAS).

ENIPAS covers the country's ecologically rich and unique areas and biologically public lands.

First Gen said FGHPC had remitted about a P69.1-million check to the DENR as SAPA fee. The unit also manages the 132-MW Pantabangan-Masaway hydroelectric power plant.

Ashley Erika O. Jose



IN BRIEF

FGEN, DENR forge deal for 120-MW Aya hydro

First Gen Corp. said Tuesday a subsidiary signed with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources an agreement that would pave the way for the development of the 120-megawatt Aya pumped storage hydro facility in Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija, while preserving the protected area status of the project site.

The Special Use Agreement in Protected Areas agreement enables First Gen unit First Gen Hydro Power Corp. to use a 36-hectare portion of the 84,000-hectare Pantabangan-Curtanglan Watershed Forest Reserve for the Aya pumped hydro project.

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Alena Mae S. Flores



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Alena Mae S. Flores



7 firms shortlisted over Casecnan sale

'We are still waiting for documents from the National Irrigation Administration because the facility is co-owned by NIA and PSALM'

BY MARIA ROMERO
@maria_romero_01

Seven pre-qualified interested buyers will move to the next development in the bidding out of the 185-megawatt Casecnan Hydroelectric Power Plant in Nueva Ecija.

In an interview on Monday, Dennis de la Serna, president and chief executive officer of state-run Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corporation, said the agency is still waiting for some documentary requirements from its partner before disclosing the bid documents.

"We are still waiting for documents from the National Irrigation Administration because the facility is co-owned by NIA and PSALM. We also need NIA's approval of the water protocol; we need a water protocol from NIA," de la Serna told reporters at the sidelines of the Philippine Electricity Power Industry Forum.

Fourteen bidders

The privatization of the Casecnan Plant drew interest from a total of 14 bidders, but only the following pre-qualified for the next step: First Gen's Fresh River Lakes Corporation, Aboitiz Neptune Hydro Inc., Meralco's Global Hydro Power Corporation, ACEN's GigaAce 1 Inc., Panasta Energy Inc., Belgrove Power Corporation and the consortium composed of Ekl Power Corporation, Soosan ENS Co. Ltd., Soosan Industries Co. Ltd. and Mapstad Power Corporation.

De la Serna noted that the seven other bidders either withdrew, were found non-compliant with Documentary Deliverables requirements, or did not submit Documentary Deliverables.

Bid bulletin

He also added that PSALM will schedule the release of the bid bulletin once finalized.

"As part of the process, we only disclose the bid price to interested investors. I cannot disclose this to you. We plan on disclosing it soon. I just speak to my team about when we will issue the bid bulletin. It's a minimum bid price," he said.

Last January, PSALM held a pre-bid conference that provided bidders with an avenue to inquire

and clarify the terms and conditions of the sale.

Among the key issues discussed in depth between and among the bidders were the tax laws and regulations that could impact the successor company and the role of the winning bidder to lead the crafting of the Special Use Agreement in Protected Areas with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Water permits

Likewise, water permits for power generation and irrigation, other permits currently enforced or to be secured by the winning bidder, observance of Indigenous Peoples' rights when the new owner takes over the management of the plant, and safety considerations before inspecting the plant were discussed.

Developed in the 1990s, Casecnan Plant is a "run-of-river" type of power plant with a limited impounding area located at Sitio Paran, Barangay Villarica, Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija. It was covered by a build-operate-transfer agreement, which ended on 11 December 2021.

Based on PSALM's initial privatization timeline, the completion of the plant's sale should have been completed last year.



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First Gen secures envi permit for hydro project

FIRST Gen Corp., through its subsidiary First Gen Hydro Power Corp. (FGHPC), has signed a special use agreement in protected areas (SAPA) with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The agreement allows the company to pursue the development of the 120 megawatts (MW) Aya pumped storage hydroelectric facility in Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija, while preserving the status of the project site as part of a protected area.

The SAPA also allows FGHPC to use a 36-hectare portion of the 84,000 hec-

tares Pantabangan-Carmanglan watershed forest reserve for the Aya hydro project. The agreement is valid for 25 years and subject to renewal for another 25 years.

DENR issues a SAPA to enable productive use of the country's protected areas by providing access to economic opportunities to indigenous people, settled migrant communities, protected migrant communities and other protected area stakeholders.

The agreement also aims to optimize the development of special use projects, which are consistent with the principles of sustainable development

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As part of the agreement, FGHPC also remitted to the DENR a P69.1-million check as SAPA fee.

FGHPC holds a hydropower service contract for the pumped storage project that the Department of Energy awarded in 2019.

FGHPC also manages the 132-MW Pantabangan-Masisek hydroelectric power plant, which is part of a multipurpose project that provides irrigation to Nueva Ecija rice lands. - *Jed Macapagal*



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News Briefs

Woman faces raps for endangered species collection

The National Bureau of Investigation filed charges against a female individual for collecting and possessing endangered wildlife species in Bohol.

The suspect, who was arrested after agents of the NBI Bohol District Office, was identified as Rosalie Deguino.

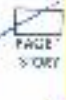
Charges for violation of Section 27 of RA 9 87 were filed against her before the Office of the Provincial Prosecutor, Tagbilaran City, Bohol.

Investigation showed the NBI-BOHDO personnel secured a search warrant after receiving information that the suspect was keeping or collecting endangered species without the proper permit or legal documents.

The NBI conducted the serving of the search warrant on 3 March 2023 for violation of Section 27 of RA 987 otherwise known as Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act.

The search warrant was served against Bohol Eucharist Zoological and Botanical Garden in Poblacion, Bilar in Bohol.

A. MURCIA



LT lease to make aquaculture more productive

FOOD producers, led by food advocacy group Tugna Kabuhayan, are asking the government to consider amending the fishpond lease agreements (FLA) for aquaculture industry to make the industry more productive.

Norbert Chingcuano, Tugna Kabuhayan co-coordinator, said in a virtual briefing yesterday a long-term permit is more conducive for production instead of the current setup that requires annual renewal.

"What we need is a long term permit. Majority of our sea cages, which is the main production unit of milkfish and tilapia, are getting yearly permit. If we have a national policy... to encourage LGUs (local government units) for sustainability to provide each grower a tenure permit at his own discretion provided they follow DOLE (Department of Labor and Employment) rules, DENR (Department of Environment and Natural Resources) rules and proper mooring, immediately it will cause a big improvement," Chingcuano said.

David Villaluz, chairperson of the Philippine Association of Fish Producers Inc., said some holders of FLAs which cover around 60,000 hectares nationwide are now either abandoned or neglected to a point that their production are barely significant.

Villaluz said some holders are getting discouraged as the current rule requires that once the FLA ends, the areas will be reverted back for mangroves or will be given to fisherfolk cooperative organizations.

"Our suggestion is if they can be renewed for another 25 years or whatever, existing FLA holders must redevelop and pour investments in these areas. Maybe we can have an arrangement or agreement for them to develop certain areas of FLA fishponds for hatcheries or nurseries to produce fingerlings for the envisioned expansion for multiculture parks' production," Villaluz added.

FLAs are issued by the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to individuals and corpora-

tions that want to use public lands for fishpond purposes which also include public lands and areas covered by the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law.

Mearofule, Chris Co, vice president for marketing of Charsen Feeds, said adjusting FLA rules can benefit the industry by allowing productive farms an extension, while assigning the unproductive ones to a new set of investors.

Dennis Calvan, a non-government organization representative from the Pangasinan Natin Gawing Tama Network, agrees with the need to review FLA guidelines especially for addressing abandoned, underdeveloped and underutilized fishponds.

"We are also pushing for the issuance of a guideline for a turnover and actual physical reversion of abandoned fishponds by DENR. The agency is yet to release a guideline and we are blind on what is happening to fishponds turned over by BFAR to DENR for mangrove reforestation," Calvan said.

- Jed Macapagal



MGB decision on Mabilo mining

CAMARINES Norte provincial officials hailed on Tuesday the decision of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Mines and Geosciences

Bureau Region 5 (MGB-5) granting co-permittee status to the Mabilo Project joint venture (JV) partners.

The Provincial Board of Camarines Norte recently passed a resolu-

tion "expressing thanks and appreciation" to the DENR, particularly the MGB Panel of Arbitrators (POA), after resolving to declare Galco Equipment Corporation as co-

project in Camarines Norte hailed

permittee and co-contractor to the Mt. Labo Exploration and Development Corporation under MPSA No. MLC-MRD-159.

The decision recognized and

gave importance to Provincial Ordinance No. 52-2017 enacted by the Provincial Board which states that in case there are JV partners in the mining projects within the province of Camarines Norte, the said JV partners should be deemed as co-permittees to ensure accountability in the implementation of mining laws and ensure responsible mining within the province.

The POA decision recognized the duties and responsibilities of local governments in the management and regulation of Minabang Bayan, small scale and large-scale mining, and all other forms of mining and related activities within the various local government units (LGUs) in Camarines Norte, known for its mineral deposits of gold, silver, iron, zinc and sulfur, quartz and its non-metallic minerals include sand, limestone, clay, and kaolin.

"This has energized the Province

to craft more legislation and institute measures that will encourage the growth of responsible mining activities in Camarines Norte. Just as we currently have a Tourism Code, I would like to champion the creation of a Mining Code to serve as a framework for all mining-related activities," Gerardo G. Quinones, 2nd District Board Member and chairman of the Committee on Environment, said in a statement.

"We are delighted with the decision as Galco has a good track record in partnership with the LGUs and other stakeholders in partnership with the LGUs and other stakeholders in Camarines Norte. The company even volunteered to rehabilitate the Verida Hill in Barangay Napsod, Municipality of Labo, averting a destructive environmental incident," Rey Kenneth N. Oaing, ex-officio Board Member, Municipality of Labo Council Member and PCB President added. *Janette L. Mojaga*



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EDITORIAL

Accelerating safe water access

Even in the National Capital Region, there are thousands of households that still rely on communal deep wells for potable water. Outside the NCR and other urban centers nationwide, nearly 11 million families lack access to clean water, according to the National Water Resources Board. As the country joins the international community in marking World Water Day today, the NWRB board said those families still rely on unsafe sources of water including deep wells, springs, rivers, lakes and rainwater for their daily needs.

Apart from the lack of safe water, many families also lack sanitation facilities and still practice open defecation, which can contaminate water and food sources, the NWRB reported. This situation is believed to have contributed to the 53,066 deaths recorded across the country between 2010 and 2019 due to water-borne diseases such as typhoid, paratyphoid fever, bloody diarrhea, viral hepatitis and leptospirosis. Even cholera, which is supposed to have been eradicated decades ago, has persisted in the country including in Metro Manila because of the lack of access to safe water in many communities.

Regular hand washing – a basic preventive measure against diseases – is not possible for many households

because of the lack of clean water and sanitation facilities. The problem became starker during the COVID-19 pandemic, when such households could not practice proper hand hygiene to ward off infection.

In the NCR, the country's most populous region needs to develop new sources of fresh water amid ever increasing demand. The problem has been felt in the past years with periodic water service interruptions across Metro Manila and neighboring areas. Many communities are forced to continue relying on deep wells – a practice that geologists have warned is causing ground weakening.

Globally, the United Nations reports that the world is "seriously off-track" in attaining its Sustainable Development Goal set in 2015 of providing safely managed water and sanitation for everyone by 2030. To get back on track, the UN is urging governments to work "on average four times faster" to meet this SDG goal on time.

With this year's World Water Day theme of accelerating change, the UN is emphasizing that the water and sanitation crisis is undermining progress on major global issues, "from health to hunger, gender equality to jobs, education to industry, and disasters to peace." The Philippines needs greater resolve and resources to address this crisis.



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Accelerate action on global water crisis

Climate change is now well established as one of the most pressing issues of our time, with the most evident impact felt through our relationship with water. Rising temperatures and changing weather patterns continue to disrupt the water cycle around the world, impacting societies, ecosystems, and economies through unpredictable water availability and quality. In response, the world committed to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) six back in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda, with the aim of providing safely managed water and sanitation for all.

Unfortunately, almost a decade later, we are still alarmingly off track. Globally, billions of people still lack safe water, sanitation, and handwashing facilities, while climate change continues to amplify water-related extremes around the world. Beyond its direct impacts, climate change reveals underlying vulnerabilities stemming from poor water governance, giving rise to calls for a more sustainable management of water.

In the Philippines, this is demonstrated in varying access to water across communities, with water security threatened by a range of interconnected pressures including population growth, urbanization, and increasing water pollution. This year's theme for World Water Day, "Accelerating Change," reflects the critical need for climate action to match or even exceed the pace of climate change. How do we increase the pace of transition?

This remains top of mind for me and other attendees at this week's United Nations 2022 Water Conference, where key decision-makers from all fronts will come together to create an agenda that "gives our world's lifeblood the commitment it deserves," as noted by UN Secretary General António Guterres. What's encouraging is that stakeholders will bring their

own unique perspectives and strengths to this crucial forum. What I hope we come away with is a bold, whole-of-society approach that significantly accelerates action across governments, businesses, and the public.

COMMENTARY

POUL DUE JENSEN

Governments have taken a lead with policies that provide impetus for the sustainability transition. The challenge is to ensure that decision-makers in other sectors that rely on water, or impact water management, understand and come on board too. The Paris Agreement has been a landmark initiative in the multilateral climate change process, bringing together the world's nations to support a common strategy to cut greenhouse gas emissions. It is now the leading framework for key discussions and dialogues.

While the Science Based Targets initiative mobilizes the private sector to take urgent climate action by providing guidelines on how to set ambitious targets to reduce emissions, consensus on water is proving more elusive. We need to take a similar approach to climate by building a stronger consensus on frameworks, goals, and guidelines for water, with nuances to reflect local conditions and resources. The Water Action Agenda, a main outcome of the conference, is set to accelerate progress by guiding both governments and businesses to better manage water and tackle related challenges.

As well, the private sector must "walk the talk" and embed water stewardship in their businesses, by leveraging innovation and collaboration to achieve collective change.

One approach is advancing water reuse and recycling so that wastewater is effectively treated to a quality that makes it safe to feed back into our water cycles. A leader in this area is Danish multinational brewer Carlsberg, which aims to cut its water use by half by 2030. In its production facility in Fredericia, Denmark, Carlsberg has developed a total water management treatment plant with consultants, universities, and technology providers like Grundfos. The onsite facility purifies used process water from being used for mainly cleaning purposes to drinking water quality, sending 90 percent of it back to the brewery to be reused as process water.

The public also has a big role to play in accelerating change. More than just driving home the message about climate change and highlighting the importance of strength in numbers, it must mobilize on climate action. Aided by data and knowledge shared by key stakeholders, the public can take more informed and effective individual action. In the Philippines, initiatives like the British Geological Survey's Philippine Groundwater Outlook project, which piloted borehole sensors in Pangasinan province and Iloilo City, provide residents with access to automated and real-time monitoring of groundwater levels and quality to encourage shared responsibility in water management.

While the SDG drawn up in 2015 have yet to be fully realized, it's crucial that we don't lose momentum. World Water Day reminds us that by channeling the efforts of government, business, and individuals toward addressing the water crisis, we can be the change we want to see, and collectively close the gaps in other global challenges.

Poul Due Jensen is CEO of Grundfos.



UNITED NATIONS WORLD WATER DAY CELEBRATION:

Averting a global water crisis with policy, awareness and public-private collaboration

BY DR. SURESH K. SURESH

Water is almost always scarce, and we live with problems of access, availability, and sanitation. It is also essential for economic growth through the use of biomass, agriculture, and domestic, transportation, and industrial purposes. It is also essential for the health of people and the environment.

In a world where water is becoming increasingly scarce, it is essential to ensure that the world's population has access to clean, safe drinking water. This is a challenge that requires a combination of policy, awareness, and public-private collaboration.

Water is a finite resource, and its availability is declining in many parts of the world. This is due to a combination of factors, including population growth, climate change, and over-extraction of water resources.

One of the most significant challenges is the increasing demand for water in urban areas. As populations grow, the demand for water for domestic, industrial, and commercial purposes increases.

Another major challenge is the impact of climate change on water resources. Rising temperatures and changing precipitation patterns are leading to more frequent and severe droughts and floods.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. This includes implementing policies to conserve water, raising public awareness of the importance of water, and fostering collaboration between the public and private sectors.

One key policy is to encourage water conservation through incentives and regulations. This can include promoting water-efficient technologies and imposing penalties for excessive water use.

Another important policy is to invest in water infrastructure. This includes building new water treatment plants, upgrading existing infrastructure, and improving water distribution networks.

Public awareness campaigns are also essential for promoting water conservation. This can be done through education, media, and community outreach programs.

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Aerial view of a dry, cracked landscape, illustrating water scarcity.

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'Act now': IPCC climate report appeals to all to salvage 1.5°C goal

OSLO — Climate scientists on Monday appealed directly to everyone on the planet to seize a dwindling chance to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) or risk harming people living today and their descendants for thousands of years.

With graphics showing individuals — from babies to pensioners — set to suffer ever more from rising heat, the report by the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) gives a more personal twist to findings about looming threats than its past studies directed at governments.

"There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all," the report said. "The choices and actions implemented in this decade will have impacts now and for thousands of years," it added, pointing to long-term risks like desertification and rising sea levels.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed the report as a guide for defusing what he called a ticking "climate time bomb." "Our world needs climate action on all fronts — everything, everywhere, all at once," he said at the report's launch.

Governments have fallen far short of pledges in the 2015 Paris Agreement to limit heating of the climate by shifting off fossil fuels,

amid crises including COVID-19, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, food shortages and strained ties between China and United States, the top two greenhouse gas emitters.

The IPCC summary for policymakers, condensing thousands of pages of climate science in six mammoth reports published since 2014, is sprinkled with references to healthier lifestyles, such as cycling, walking and diets rich in fruits and vegetables with less high carbon meat.

It also outlines the surging risks to mental health from a warming climate.

"We brought in the human side" of climate change, Hoesung Lee, chair of the IPCC, told a news conference, saying it was a major shift since the last IPCC policy document in 2014 which had few references to individuals and their behavior.

Peter Thorn, one of the IPCC authors, said it was time for everyone to accept a share of responsibility.

"We at all levels — governments, communities, individuals — have made climate change somebody else's problem," he added.

The report was approved after a week-long meeting of scientists and governments in Interlaken, Switzerland, to negotiate the text.

It reiterates previous IPCC findings that it is "unequivocal"

that humanity is to blame for climate change.

But notably, in a difference from earlier reports, it shows "high" or "very high" confidence from scientists about the scale of coming risks and the shrinking opportunities to address them.

The IPCC also appeals to people's self-interest, saying that action to combat climate change by shifting to clean energy makes sense for health and wellbeing, in what delegates said was partly an attempt to win over those who doubt the science or economics.

WALKING, CYCLING

"Access to clean energy and technologies improves health, especially for women and children; low-carbon electrification, walking, cycling and public transport enhance air quality, improve health, employment opportunities and deliver equity," the report said.

"The economic benefits for people's health from air quality improvements alone would be roughly the same, or possibly even larger than the costs of reducing or avoiding emissions," it added.

It said the planet has warmed by 1.1°C above pre-industrial times and is on track to breach 1.5°C — a threshold for ever more disastrous impacts — between 2030 and 2036 on current trends.

The Paris Agreement seeks to limit warming to "well below" 2°C while "pursuing efforts" for 1.5°C.

"Limiting warming to 1.5°C and 2°C involves rapid, deep and in most cases immediate greenhouse gas emission reductions," the report said, warning that overshooting 1.5°C could trigger impacts such as an irreversible thaw of ice sheets that would push up sea levels.

One illustration in the report shows how risks — including droughts, fires, sea level rise and heatwaves — will climb steadily during a person's lifetime.

A colored background shows low risks with a cool blue, through beige and orange and ending with red and purple at the hottest, riskiest future in the second half of the century.

Someone born in 1950, for instance, is shown living mostly in a benign beige, for instance, only facing an orange level of risk in 2020, while holding a walking stick at 70. A baby seen crawling in 2020 will quickly move from orange to a lifetime of red and purple risks as they age to 70 in 2090.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

FUEL STORY

Read the full story by scanning the QR code with your smartphone (copying the link: <https://www.bbc.com/news/energy-62222222>)



World on 'thin ice' as UN climate report gives stark warning

By SETH BOBINSKIN &
FRANK JORDANS
The Associated Press

BERLIN—Humanity still has a chance, close to the last, to prevent the worst of climate change's future harms, a top United Nations panel of scientists said Monday.

But doing so requires quickly slashing nearly two-thirds of carbon pollution by 2035, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said. The United Nations chief said it more bluntly, calling for an end to new fossil fuel exploration and for rich countries to quit coal, oil and gas by 2040.

"Humanity is on thin ice — and that ice is melting fast," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said. "Our world needs climate action on all fronts — everything, everywhere, all at once."

Stepping up his pleas for action on fossil fuels, Guterres called for rich countries to accelerate their target for achieving net zero emissions as early as 2040, and developing nations to aim for 2050 — about a decade earlier than most current targets. He also called for them to stop using coal by 2030 and 2040, respectively, and ensure carbon-free electricity generation in the developed world by 2035, meaning no gas-fired power plants either.

extinction, including coral reefs, irreversible melting of ice sheets and sea level rise of several meters (several yards).

"1.5 is a critical critical limit, particularly for small islands and mountain (communities) which depend on glaciers," said Mukherji.

"The window is closing if emissions are not reduced as quickly as possible," Johnson said in an interview. "Scientists are rather alarmed."

Many scientists, including at least three co-authors, said hitting 1.5 degrees is inevitable.

"We are pretty much locked into 1.5," said report co-author Malte Meinshausen, a climate scientist at the University of Melbourne in Australia. "There's very little way we will be able to avoid crossing 1.5 C sometime in the 2030s" but the big issue is whether the temperature keeps rising from there or stabilizes.

Guterres insisted "the 1.5-degree limit is achievable." Science panel chief Hoesung Lee said so far the world is far off course.

If current consumption and production patterns continue, Lee said, "the global average 1.5 degrees temperature increase will be seen some time in this decade."

Scientists emphasize that the world or humanity won't end suddenly if earth passes the 1.5-degree mark. Mukherji said "it's not as if it's a cliff that we all fall off." But an earlier IPCC report detailed how the harms — including even nastier extreme weather — are much worse beyond 1.5 degrees of warming.



That date is key because nations soon have to come up with goals for pollution reduction by 2035, according to the Paris climate agreement. After contentious debate, the U.N. science report approved Sunday concluded that to stay under the warming limit set in Paris the world needs to cut 60 percent of its greenhouse gas emissions by 2035, compared with 2019, adding a new target not previously mentioned in six previous reports issued since 2018.

"The choices and actions implemented in this decade will have impacts for thousands of years," the report said, calling climate change "a threat to human well-being and planetary health."

"We are not on the right track but it's not too late," said report co-author and water scientist Aditi Mukherji. "Our intention is really a message of hope, and not that of doomsday."

With the world only a few tenths of a degree away from the globally accepted goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times, scientists stressed a sense of urgency. The goal was adopted as part of the 2015 Paris climate agreement and the world has already warmed 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit).

This is likely the last warning the Nobel Peace Prize-winning collection of scientists will be able to make about the 1.5 mark because their next set of reports may well come after Earth has either passed the mark or is locked into exceeding it soon, several scientists, including report authors, told The Associated Press.

After 1.5 degrees "the risks are starting to pile on," said report co-author Francis X. Johnson, a climate, land and policy scientist at the Stockholm Environment Institute. The report mentions "tipping points" around that temperature of species

"It is certainly prudent to be planning for a future that's warmer than 1.5 degrees," said IPCC report review editor Steven Rose, an economist at the Electric Power Research Institute in the United States.

If the world continues to use all the fossil fuel-powered infrastructure either existing, now or proposed, Earth will warm at least 2 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times, the report said.

Because the report is based on data from a few years ago, the calculations about fossil fuel projects already in the pipeline do not include the increase in coal and natural gas use after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It comes a week after the Biden Administration in the United States approved the huge Willow oil drilling project in Alaska, which could produce up to 180,000 barrels of oil a day.

The report highlights the disparity between rich nations, which caused much of the problem because carbon dioxide emissions from industrialization stay in the air for more than a century, and poorer countries that get hit harder by extreme weather. Residents of poorer climate-vulnerable nations are "up to 15 times more likely to die in floods, droughts and storms," Lee said.

If the world is to achieve its climate goals, poorer countries need a four- to six-times increase in financial help to adapt to a warmer world and switch to non-polluting energy, Lee said. Countries have made financial pledges and promises of a damage compensation fund. *Follows* *Maisonneuve in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, contributed to this report. Borenstein reported from Kensington, Maryland.*



Global energy use and emissions hubs set to shift by 2050

LITTLETON, Colorado- The Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa will overtake China, North America and Europe as the key drivers of world energy use through 2050, with implications for global emissions potential and accountability.

China, the United States and Europe have been the main sources of economic growth and pollution for the past century, accounting for over half of all historic carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and energy use, but also the majority of spending on renewable energy and emissions abatement.

In contrast, the emerging markets in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa currently account for less than 20 percent of worldwide energy use and emissions, data from Norway-based risk assurance firm DNV shows, and have less funding available for energy transition efforts than larger peers.

Even so, thanks to strong investment and demographic trends

with several key countries including India, Indonesia, and Nigeria, these regions will boost their collective consumption of primary energy supplies - which includes transport fuels - by nearly 60 percent through 2050, according to DNV data.

This collective rise in energy use across emerging Asia and lower Africa will more than offset the expected contraction in energy consumption in China, Europe and North America through 2050, DNV data shows.

Combined primary energy use in the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa will grow from roughly 115,000 petajoules in 2023 to nearly 194,000 petajoules by 2050, an expansion of more than 78,000 petajoules.

Over the same period, China, Europe and North America are expected to trim their collective energy use from around 326,000 petajoules to 250,000 petajoules, or by around 76,000 petajoules.

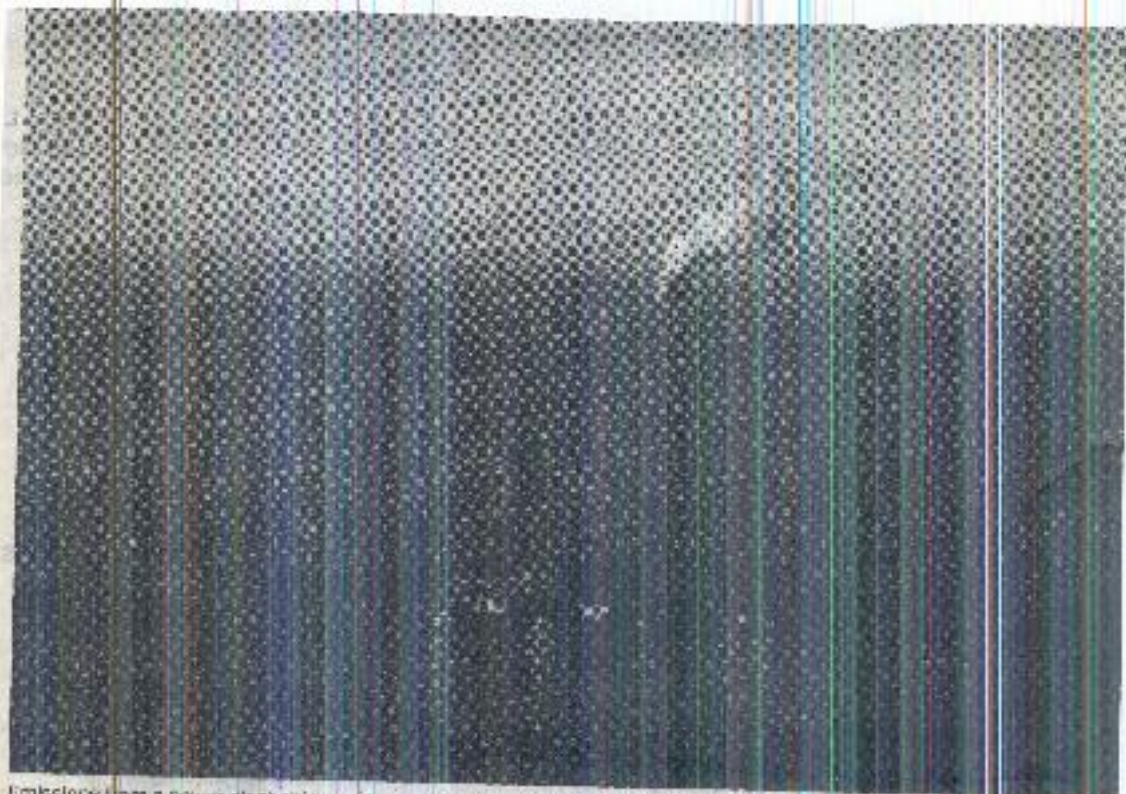
This means that global energy consumption will continue to grow

through the end of 2050, despite the efforts of current energy transition leaders to reduce energy use by mid-century, DNV data shows.

In addition to growing overall energy use, most Asian and African countries will remain overwhelmingly reliant on fossil fuels for at least the next decade, due to the slow roll-out of green energy and underdeveloped electricity grids that will struggle to accommodate intermittent renewable energy supplies.

This will likely result in a widening in the number of heavy emissions hubs from mainly in China and South Asia currently to parts of Southeast Asia and lower Africa, underpinning efforts to cap pollution loads in all areas.

South Asia's largest economy, India, is expected to rely on coal, natural gas and oil for more than 70 percent of primary energy needs through 2040, after which solar, wind and other clean energy supplies will emerge as the dominant sources of power. - Reuters



Emissions from a power plant chimney rise over Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. (Reuters Photo)