

24 March 2023 Friday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

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## DENR chief pitches call for global water sector resilience agenda at UN summit

**T**HE Philippines is ready to commit to a global water sector resilience agenda that ensures a reliable and equitable access to safe water sanitation, improved health, and gender equality.

This was affirmed by no less than the country's chief steward of the environment and natural resources, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga in a speech delivered during the ongoing United Nations 2023 Water Conference happening in New York from March 22 to 24.

According to Yulo-Loyzaga, such commitment requires the country to address not only the physical risks through engineering solutions but the ecological, socio-economic, and governance challenges we face as

well, pitching that the UN water agenda prioritizes climate resilience through robust, equitable, and sustainable nature positive development pathways.

Yulo-Loyzaga further called for deeper integration of the water agenda into key agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biodiversity, and the Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction.

She said such would render the water sector a globally important entry point to scaling up commitments to adaptation financing for reliable and safe water supply, management, and use.

"The Philippines commits to foster knowledge, innovation and just partnerships in watching

governance, access to science and form equitable and sustainable financing and engagements with the private sector academia, multilateral development banks and other stakeholders in climate action are being strengthened while recognizing the vital importance of traditional and local knowledge," she said.

Meanwhile, the official said the Philippines is further advocating the transfer of knowledge through science, technology, engineering, and innovation that addresses the water needs of developing countries while advancing global goals.

### Increased support

"In this light, we endorse increasing support for the Global Water Operational program, which addresses the

vulnerabilities and capacity-building, needs of water and water sanitation service providers, especially in Asia, Pacific, and Africa," she said.

"The water sector has the opportunity to lead change and deliver transformative solutions in our quest for climate resilient and sustainable development. Let us all unleash the potential for this today to ensure that no person, no community, no ecosystem is left behind," she said.

In her speech, the DENR chief said attaining universal, adequate and equitable access to safely managed water and sanitation services are at the core of inclusive and sustainable development.

Yulo-Loyzaga said integrated water resource management approaches that overcome barriers to water

and sanitation access and improved health "are therefore imperative."

"Moreover, risk-informed and transformative governance that increases access and affordability of safe drinking water and sanitation services must be sustained in order to advance health, livelihoods, and the dignity of all while preserving ecosystem integrity for the benefit of generations to come," she said.

### Climate change disruptions

CLIMATE change has disrupted the world's hydrological cycle, as extreme rainfall, and temperature changes amplify existing social vulnerabilities and threaten biodiversity.

Yulo-Loyzaga said more than ever, there is now a critical need for nexus governance for climate and disaster

resilience. "One that pursues a strategic balance between supply and consumption of water for health, food, energy, and environmental security," she added.

According to Yulo-Loyzaga, the Philippines is moving decisively in this direction.

"Our President has directed the creation of a water resource management office other than the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to achieve water security by integrating the functions of all agencies with water-related mandates," she said.

She said the Water Resource Management Office is a first in the country's history, and it's aligned with new legislation creating an apex body for comprehensive water resource management. *Amelita L. Magsaysay*



President Marcos speaks during the opening of the sixth edition of the Water Philippines Conference and Exposition in Pasay City.

ERIC PANGRICO

## Phl facing water crisis - Marcos

President Marcos has signed an executive order creating a water resource management office (WRMO) as part of efforts to address what he called a "water crisis" threatening the country.

"When they say water is life, it's not just a cliché, it's a truism. And it is something that we must always keep in mind especially now. And that's why, I just signed an executive order wherein we have created the Office of Water

Management," the President said yesterday at the opening of the sixth edition of the Water Philippines Conference and Exposition in Pasay City.

He said a water supply problem would have a "debilitating" effect on the economy if it persists, noting that the resource is also used in agriculture and power generation. Malacañang has yet to release a copy of the EO.

"There are many agencies  
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## Phl facing From Page 1

that are involved in water supply and water management and it has just evolved that way. But what we are going to try to do is to make it a more cohesive policy so that there is planning at the national level and in that way we can maximize the management of what water we have," he added.

Marcos noted there are pending bills in Congress that seek to create a Department of Water Management. The Office of Water Management will handle water-related matters until the bills establishing a water department are passed.

Last month, Marcos approved the creation of a water resource management office to ensure sufficient water supply in the country and to address environmental challenges. He cited the need for a plan that would serve as a roadmap for agencies involved in water management.

In a previous statement, the Presidential Communications Office said an EO would enable the National Water Resources Board (NWRB), Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS), Local Water Utilities Administration and the other water-related agencies of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to have a collaborative mechanism to implement programs.

The office will be under the DENR and will be tasked to formulate and ensure the implementation of an integrated water management plan. It will also work closely with all relevant agencies, local governments, the private sector, civil society and communities on water-related matters.

In the same speech, Marcos cited the need to bring water management strategies down to the grassroots level.

"I was very surprised in the past years, even as senator, even as governor, that no one was speaking about water problems. Whereas every single urban community and even some rural communities in the Philippines have a water crisis," the Chief Executive said.

"And it's something that we have continually postponed. We do not examine it

We do not look at it, just find other ways and put up with the idea that once in a while we'll have to pull out our buckets and fill our bathtubs with water because there's not going to be water for the next 24 hours," he added.

Despite the water issues confronting the country, Marcos expressed optimism that the problems would be solved because of the availability of technologies and the desire of the government and the private sector to ensure enough supply of the resource.

"We are facing some serious challenges and we really need to work very hard together," Marcos said.

"I know that you are all experienced and are all committed to making, giving our people the water supply, fresh water supply that they need, and we'll work together on that. It will not be the work of a day or of a week, but we will start now and we will continue until it's done," he added.

### MWSS welcomes EO

With Marcos' signing of the EO, the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System said it now sees faster implementation of its water security roadmap.

"We support the WRMO created by the President. Somebody will now be able to help us implement our water security roadmap," MWSS administrator Leonor Cleofas said in a phone interview.

"The WRMO will be able to help us in the permits and clearances, and also assistance from DENR will help us expedite project implementations," Cleofas said.

Maynilad Water Services Inc. said the WRMO will allow entities to coordinate water projects with a single entity.

"Maynilad has always been supportive of the creation of a single office that can oversee water resource management, which is currently handled by more than 20 government agencies," Maynilad corporate communications head Jennifer Ruffo said in a text message.

- Alexis Romero, Danessa Rivera, Bella Carliso



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**PBBM AT WATER CONVENTION** — President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. observes as Global Membrane Kin-Reactor marketing manager Gorth James demonstrates the functions of SM-1, a low-cost water filtration solution, during the Water Philippines and Ph Energy Convention 2023 on Thursday, March 23, 2023, at the SME Convention Center in Pasay City. Also in photo are Philippine Water Works Association vice president for national affairs Edgar C. Lopez and Pasay City Mayor Imelda Calixto-Rubiano. SM-1 requires no electrical power and is specifically designed for situations such as natural disasters where water supplies can be contaminated or interrupted. (All Viccy)



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# Water crisis is real – PBBM



## Grassroots-level solutions, use of technology pushed

By BETHENA UNITE

**P**resident Marcos stressed that many communities in the country have been under water crisis that an urgent step must be taken to address it.

Speaking at the 6th Water-Philippines Conference and Exposition on Thursday, March 23, Marcos reiterated that the country can tap several technologies to address the crisis.

And so, these are the kinds of

stratagems that we have to employ, that we have to bring down to the grassroots level because the water crisis in the Philippines—and I call it a water crisis because it is," Marcos said.

I was very surprised in the past years, even as senator, even as governor, that no one was speaking about water problems. Whereas every single urban community and even some rural communities in the Philippines have a water crisis."

The President emphasized ▶5



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## Water crisis is real – PBBM

that while the lingering water crisis in the country's communities are yet to be addressed, technologies that could potentially solve this are already available.

"I happened to—have been given the opportunity to walk around a little bit and see some of the exhibitors. And it is very gratifying to note that in fact the technologies that are being used, that are being employed in terms of water treatment, in terms of water management are well-known technologies," he said. "And so, I am very optimistic that the solutions that we need to formulate are out there, the technologies are out there. What has continued to change in the light of climate change is the management, the stratagems on how we manage our water."

Marcos pointed out that providing a solution to the problem is something that has been "continually postponed."

"And it's something that we have continually postponed. We do not examine it. We do not look at it, just find other ways and put up with the idea that once in a while we'll have to pull out our buckets and fill our bathtubs with water because there's not going to be water for the next 24 hours," he stressed.

Marcos said the majority of water in the country is still taken from underground aquifers, but "if you manage your surface water properly, then there would be no need for us to be digging wells and starting to affect the water table that is under us" that affects agriculture, construction, infrastructure, among others.

He said the government must think in a very different way now in terms of water management, adding that it is no longer just about flood control but expanding it to irrigation and water treatment.

"When I was still governor, when you said water management, it generally meant flood control. And we would put dikes, we would put dams to be able to control the flooding," he said. "However now, we must think in a very different way. Flood control, although many of the projects that the government has undertaken is categorized as flood control, these flood control projects are no longer just exclusively for that.

We take the water and we use it for irrigation, we use it for drinking water if we have a treatment plant. We also take the water and hopefully if there is enough of a gradient that we are able to produce some power with the mini hydros."

Stressing that the "Philippines is not a dry place" not to have enough water for its people, he said

the government needs to employ available technologies and make a cohesive policy and plan for the entire country.

Marcos also stated that the conference is necessary and an urgent step towards attaining water security and providing safe, adequate, affordable, and accessible drinking water for the Filipino people.

"We are facing some serious challenges and we really need to work very hard together," he said.



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## PBBM admits there's water crisis in Ph

BY KATHRYN JOSE

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Thursday admitted the Philippines is in the middle of a water crisis as he urged the development of technologies to address the recurring problem.

Mr. Marcos said the country is facing

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"serious challenges" in its water supply amid growing concerns about climate change and the old ways of water management.

"What has continued to change in the light of climate change is the stratagems on how we manage our water," Marcos said at the Sixth Water Philippines Conference and Exposition in Pasay City.

In reminding people that "water is life," he stressed water is not just a drink but can also be used for irrigation to farms and energy

through hydroelectric plants.

However, climate change that causes extreme drought and floods are threatening the country's water supply, he said.

To address this, Marcos said Filipinos should take lessons from Israel, a desert country with highly salty, undrinkable water.

Israeli technologies for desalination, sewage treatment, and water reuse, however, sustain the nation, and it even exports water to neighboring countries, the President said.

"They are able to collect the



GERIN James (left), Marketing Manager of Global Membrane Bio-Reactor, shows an SM-1 to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. during the Water Philippines and PhilEnergy Convention 2023 at the SMX Convention Center in Pasay City yesterday, 23 March. The SM-1 is a low-cost, easy-to-operate water filtration solution requiring no electrical power.

water through dams during the rainy season, whatever is available. They put fish in it to grow fish. When the summer comes, they take out the water, harvest the fish, and then that goes to irrigation and so forth," Marcos recalled from his visits to Israel.

Marcos said government agencies must adopt this creative thinking in increasing the water supply for households and agriculture. There are around 11 million families without potable water, according to the National Water Resources Board.

Last month, Marcos approved

the creation of a Water Resource Management Office which consists of 10 government agencies to streamline measures for water security.

The office acts as a transitory body pending lawmakers' approval of Marcos's proposal to establish the Department of Water Resources.

"We all know the Philippines is not a dry place. And why do we not have enough water? So we have to employ technologies and make a cohesive policy and a cohesive plan not only in the National Capital Region but for the entire country," Marcos said.





## ORDER CREATING NEW WATER AGENCY SIGNED

**P**RESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. finally signed the Executive Order creating the new government office to tackle the country's "water crisis."

Gracing the 6th edition of Water Philippines Conference and Exposition (WPCE) at the SMX Convention Center in Pasay City on Thursday, Marcos disclosed the Office of Water Management (OWM) will help address the shortage of reliable water supply in some parts of the country.

"It is something that we must always keep in mind, especially now. And that's why, we in the government—I just signed an executive order wherein we have created the Office of Water Management," Marcos said.

Left unresolved, the crisis will have detrimental effects on the economy, particularly agriculture, the President said.

"And so these are the things that we really have to attend to. So it really—it impacts the area of food supply, in a food crisis," Marcos said.

The creation of the OWM, Marcos said, will help plug the gaps in the government's water policies.

"There are many agencies that are involved in water sup-

ply and water management and it has just evolved that way," Marcos said.

"But what we are going to try to do is to make it a more cohesive policy so that there is planning at the national level and in that way we can maximize the management of what water we have," he added.

In February, Marcos already approved in principle the creation of the OWM to coordinate the initiatives of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) and Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) through the creation of an Integrated Water Management Policy (IWMP).

He said he hopes the OWM will be eventually institutionalized into the Department of Water Management (DWM) through legislation.

Aside from the IWMP, the President is also eyeing new technologies to help address local water supplies issues, which are being worsened by climate change.

"I happened to—have been given the opportunity to walk around a little bit and see some of the exhibitors.

CONTINUED ON A5

And it is very gratifying to note that in fact, the technologies that are being used, that are being employed in terms of water treatment, in terms of water management, are well-known technologies," Marcos said after touring the exhibits at the WPCE.

"We have of course fine-tuned it so that the filtration systems become better and better, our pumps become more efficient, our connections—water connections are more resilient to typhoons, to earthquakes and the other calamities that might happen along the way," he added.

Over 300 exhibitors from participating international countries joined the WPCE, which will run from March 22 to 24, 2023.

### Senators relieved

SENATORS sitting in the Pub-

lic Services committee conveyed consumers' expectations that the newly created water management office will "hopefully alleviate the creeping water crisis" in the country.

Sen. Grace Poe, who chairs the committee, said the creation of a water management office is most welcome while the related bills in Congress are being thrashed out.

"This is a timely intervention from the Executive which will hopefully alleviate the creeping water crisis in the country," said Poe.

She pointed out that "as an archipelago surrounded with water, it is ironic that we have a water crisis in our hands due to a fragmented resource management."

She added that currently, at least 30 line agencies are tasked with the

administration of water in the country, and this has "resulted in policy and regulatory conflicts" among these agencies.

"We expect that this development lays down the groundwork for a more integrated and holistic approach to the water problem," said Poe, suggesting that "a whole-of-government approach is also necessary to tackle the issues of sourcing and misuse of water in the country."

At the same time, the senator acknowledged that both the Executive and Legislative departments are "working hard at a more lasting solution" in the form of a new water reform bill to ensure sufficient, clean, and affordable water for all Filipinos.

Samuel P. Medevilla, Buick Fernandez



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## Marcos issuing EO to address 'water crisis'

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said on Thursday that he will issue an executive order (EO) creating an interagency that will manage what he described as the "water crisis" until Congress passes a law establishing the Department of Water Management.

The text of the EO nor its number has not been released. The agency created by the EO, the Water Resource Management Office (WRMO), will ensure the implementation of "more cohesive policy" to address the water crisis.

In February, the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said the WRMO's first action will be to reduce reliance on groundwater and deep wells, and manage the supply of surface water.

"The WRMO would be under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and will be a transitory body pending the creation of a Water Resources department," the PCO said.

The new office will have the authority to make binding recommendations to state-owned corporations providing water

services such as the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, Local Water Utilities Administration, and the DENR's water resources board, the Palace said.

The PCO said the new office's main functions also include formulating and ensuring the implementation of the Integrated Water Management Plan, which will integrate the plans of various agencies.

In his speech on Thursday at a water industry convention, Mr. Marcos described the Philippines as being in a "water crisis," noting that "every single urban

community and even some rural communities" experience water shortages.

"I call it a water crisis because it is," he said in a speech. "It is something that we have continually postponed. We do not examine it."

"We all know the Philippines is not a dry place, and why do we not have enough water?"

The President called for innovation in addressing the water crisis, citing the experience of Israel, a desert country that has revolutionized water recycling.

He said the water treated for reuse in Israel is also used for irrigation and other purposes.

"They use water three times. Every bit of fresh water is used more than once," Mr. Marcos said. "This is the kind of thinking that we have to apply to the Philippines because of the crisis that we are facing and how debilitating it will be to the entire economy, to the entire society if our water supply problem continues to become more dependent on what we have been doing in the past," he said.

"The creation of a water management office is most welcome

while the bills in congress are being thrashed out," Senator Mary Grace Natividad S. Poe-Llamanzares said in a statement. "This is a timely intervention from the Executive which will hopefully alleviate the creeping water crisis."

She said the EO lays down the groundwork for a "more integrated and holistic" approach to the water problem.

About 11 million Filipino families still have no access to clean water, the National Water Resources Board said earlier this week. — Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza



# Marcos: Brace for a water crisis

PRESIDENT Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Thursday admitted that the country is facing a water crisis and reiterated the need for the government to ramp up efforts to head it off.

Speaking at the 6th Edition of the Water Philippines Conference and Exposition in Pasay City, the President also announced the creation of the Office of Water Management to deal with the water supply problem.

"When they say water is life, it's not just a cliché, it's a truth. And it is something that we must always keep in mind, especially now. And that's why I just signed an executive order wherein we have created the Office of Water Management," he said.

Malacañang has yet to issue a copy  
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## WATER FROM A1

# Marcos: Brace for a water crisis

of the circular, which will be in effect until pending bills in Congress seeking to create a Department of Water Management are signed into law.

Marcos said he finds it ironic that the Philippines, being an archipelago, is being confronted with a water supply problem.

"We all know the Philippines is not a dry place, and why do we not have enough water?" he said.

The country must look at other countries like Israel that have efficient systems for water filtration, storage, and distribution, the President said.

Despite mostly being desert, Israel is able to harvest water during the rainy season in collection ponds where fish is also grown. "When the summer comes, they take the water, harvest the fish, and then that goes to irrigation efforts," he said.

Israel is able to harvest fresh water thrice a year. "Every bit of fresh water is used more than once," he added.

The President is pushing for the government to employ modern technology and strategies in managing water resources.

"I happened to have been given the opportunity to walk around a little bit and see some of the exhibitors. And it is very gratifying to note that in fact the technologies that are being used, that are being employed in terms of water treatment, in terms of water management are well known technologies," he said.

On Thursday, Sen. Mary Grace Poe said the creation of a water management office is a timely intervention to the "creeping water crisis."

Poe said at least 30 line agencies of the government deal with the administration of water, resulting in policy and regulatory conflicts.

"We expect that this development lays down the groundwork for a more integrated and holistic approach to the water problem," the senator, who heads the Senate Committee on Public Services, said in a statement.

"A whole-of-government approach is also necessary to tackle the issues of sourcing and misuse of water in the country," she said.

Sen. Pilar Juliana "Pia" Cayetano appealed to fellow sena-



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# The Manila Times



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tors to ensure people's access to clean water.

In a privilege speech on Wednesday, Cayetano cited the connection of lack of access to clean water to the country's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

She was referring to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Cayetano said the Philippines, being a signatory to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, is committed to integrating the SDGs into the national development plans and policies.

"So it is important that when we think of clean water and sanitation, we must also see it through a gender lens. Like most crises, the effects are never gender-neutral, and the effects on women are proportionally higher than men," she said.

Parts of southern Metro Manila and Cavite serviced by the Maynilad are already experiencing water cut-offs because one of its water treatment plants is being repaired.

On Thursday, the water concessionaire announced that the interruptions will continue even after the Holy Week.

Maynilad Spokesman Jennifer Rufu said the water supply is expected to normalize by mid-April when the Puratan Treatment Plant gets back in operation.

Residents in the affected areas complained that they had been experiencing water interruptions since December.

Maynilad said the problem is partly due to the northeast monsoon or amihan.

Rufu said that the amihan pushes the water of Laguna Lake towards the treatment plant. Because the lake has become shallow due to heavy siltation, sediments on the lake bed are stirred up and clog up the treatment plant.

Rufu said Maynilad is preparing for the dry season when water consumption rises by as much as 6 percent.

Deep wells will help ease the shortage and modular treatment plants are also being built, she said.

**KRISTINA MARALIT,  
BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO  
AND FRANCIS EARL CUETO**



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WATER DEPLETED  
**MARGOS OKAYS NEW WATER MANAGEMENT OFFICE**

By Nestor Corrales  
@NCorralesINQ

President Marcos on Thursday announced that he signed an executive order creating the Water Resource Management Office pending the passage of the Department of Water Resources as he admitted that the Philippines was facing a water crisis.

In his speech during the Water Philippines Conference and Exposition in Pasay City, the President cited that there were many agencies involved in the water supply and water management in the country.

"What we are going to try to do is to make it a more cohesive policy so that there is planning at the national level and in that way we can maximize the management of what

water we have," he said.

He acknowledged that there were bills filed in Congress seeking the creation of the Department of Water Resources but have yet to be passed by lawmakers.

The creation of the Department of Water Resources was among the priority bills pushed by the President during his first State of the Nation Address.

"So until those bills are passed, until the department is created, we have this Office of Water Management now," he said.

He said the Philippines was facing a water crisis because the government had not addressed the water shortage in the country.

He said the Philippines should emulate the best practices of other countries in terms of water

management, citing that he has been to many desert countries like Israel where they have "excellent water management."

"These are the kinds of thinking that we have to apply to the Philippines because of the crisis that we are facing and how debilitating it will be to the entire economy, to the entire society if our water supply problem continues to get greater," he said.

He warned that the water shortage in the Philippines would have an impact on the country's food supply and could further worsen the country's food crisis.

"It impacts into the area of food supply, in food crisis. And so when they say water is life, it's not just a cliché, it's a truism," he said.

In terms of agriculture, he cited that "the secret to a good crop is irrigation," etc.



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## 'Vampiric overconsumption' draining world's water — UN

**UNITED NATIONS** The United Nations (UN) used its first conference on water security in almost half a century on Wednesday to exhort governments to better manage one of humanity's shared resources.

A quarter of the world's population relies on unsafe drinking water while half lacks basic sanitation, the UN said. Meanwhile, nearly three quarters of recent disasters have been related to water.

"We are draining humanity's livelihood through vampiric overconsumption and unsustainable use, and evaporating it through global heating," said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

Ensuring access to clean drinking water and sanitation is part of the 17-point to-do list the UN has set for sustainable development, alongside ending hunger and poverty, achieving gender equality, and taking action on climate change.

The three-day conference beginning on Wednesday in New York is not intended to produce the kind of binding accord that emerged from climate meetings in Paris in 2015, or a framework like the one set for nature protection in Montreal in 2022.



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Instead, the aim is for a "Water Action Agenda" that will contain voluntary commitments and create "political momentum".

The United States said it would invest \$49 billion in water and sanitation at home and around the world.

US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said this money would "help create jobs, prevent conflicts, safeguard public health, reduce the risk of famine and hunger, and enable us to respond to climate change and natural disasters". She gave no timeline for the investments or de-

tails on how much money would be spent where.

Hundreds of action plans were sent to the UN before the conference started, but the World Resources Institute research group said that while "some commitments offer inspiration, more of them miss the mark," variously lacking funding or performance targets, or neglecting to address climate change.

WRI singled out two projects for praise: one to spend \$21.2 million through 2029 on "climate-smart" agriculture and wetland restoration in the desertifying Niger River basin, and another from 1,729 companies that calculate they can make water-related investments worth \$125 billion.

Scientists, economists and policy experts grouped together by the government of the Netherlands in the Global Commission on the Economics of Water recommended phasing out some \$700 billion in agricultural and water subsidies and facilitating partnerships between development finance institutions and private investors to improve water systems.

— Reuters



NEWS  
Philippines ranked 69th in latest air quality report





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# Empress sister ships grounded

## U.S. Navy tapped in salvage ops

US Coast Guard says PCG doing an 'amazing job' containing the oil spill from the San Miguel-chartered *MT Princess Empress*

BY RAFFY AYENB AND JOM GARNER

The operator of the sunken *MT Princess Empress* has been ordered by the Maritime Industry Authority, or Marina, to cease operating its three remaining vessels — two tankers and a

passenger liner.

Marina issued cease and desist orders on Thursday to RDC Reelid Marine Services as the marine regulator revealed the possibility of the company's Certificate of Public Convenience or CPC being canceled.

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Marina issues two cease-and-desist orders to RDC Reelid Marine Services that would be in effect pending the result of the DoJ-led investigation

From page 1

The *MT Princess Empress* was found to have sailed nine times without its operator's CPC having been updated to reflect the addition of the vessel to its fleet.

Marina Administrator Hernani Fabia said two CDOs were issued against RDC Reelid.

"One was for the cancellation of its franchise or the CPC, the other was to cease and desist in its operations," Fabia said, after coming from a meeting of the Oil Spill Inter-Agency Committee at the Department of Justice.

The CDOs will be in effect unless lifted and while the results of the investigation into the ship's sinking are pending.

**Like it's done in U.S.**

Meanwhile, the United States Coast Guard said the oil spill containment operation being conducted by the PCG was well-organized.

USCG Commander Stacey Crecy said the interventions being done by the PCG were in line with what America does when cleaning up oil spills.

"Our initial assessment is that the Philippine Coast Guard has organized and has done an amazing job — very similar to how we do it in the US. What we have observed here [has] been a phenomenal

job of formation and action taken," Crecy said.

The USCG also lauded the efforts of the local government units and ordinary people in helping in the cleanup.

"That was very impressive to us. [You have] done many actions to incorporate the citizens and show much ingenuity. The cooperation between all seems to be working very well," Crecy added.

The USCG commander said they are coordinating with the US Navy to request experts and necessary equipment for salvage operations.

"We are in coordination with the US Navy Supervisor of Salvage who is currently reading their equipment and technical experts on the salvage portion," Crecy said.

San Miguel Corporation reportedly chartered the *MT Princess Empress* to ferry 900,000 liters of industrial oil despite questions on the vessel's classification as an oil tanker and its seaworthiness.

SMC has not denied contracting the sunken vessel, but it has not commented on demands by environmentalists that it compensate those affected by the massive oil spill.

The ship sank off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on 28 February, affecting the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of fisherfolk and workers in the tourism sector.

**Marina, PCG lapses**

Fabia yesterday denied a statement by Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Bernulla, who cited reports, that the *MT Princess*

*Empress* was an old vessel or had been rebuilt using scrap materials from an old ship.

Bernulla said they were investigating possible lapses by Marina and the Philippine Coast Guard that allowed the *MT Princess Empress* to operate despite its incomplete papers.

A high-ranking Marina official this week admitted to *Daily Tribune* the agency lacked engineers to do continuing seaworthiness checks on vessels plying Philippine waters.

The checks were conducted by private firms in the past but a previous Marina chief canceled their accreditation on allegations of corruption. The firms were allegedly taking grease money and not doing actual seaworthiness checks.

Aside from the US and Japan, the Republic of Korea is helping the cleanup effort by sending four experts from its coast guard.

South Korea's embassy in Manila said, "this is the first time Korea has provided assistance for the prevention of marine pollution."

"Korea highly values the importance of restoring areas affected by environmental disasters and accidents," it added.

Arriving on 27 March, the four Korean experts are bringing in 20 tons of sorbet pads and snares, 1,000 meters of solid flotation curtain boom and 2,000 sets of personal protective equipment.

"The items are expected to arrive here in Manila on 5 April," the Embassy said.

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STRATEGIC  
COMMUNICATION  
AND  
INITIATIVES  
SERVICE

# Tribune

by COMMITTES OF THE OFFICIALS AND  
STAFF OF THE DENR



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CARTOON

THE *EMPERESS* SISTER...

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TRASH covered with oil is seen along the shoreline in Pola, Oriental Mindoro on 21 March. Oil slick from sunken tanker *MT Princess Empress* continues to spread to coastal town waters rich in marine life.

JANETA ROSANGENDE FRANCE PRESS



## Legal office tapped to process oil spill claims

BY JIM VILLAMENTE

Oriental Mindoro Governor Humerto "Bonz" Dolor on Thursday said the filing of "compensation claims" over the ill effects of the oil spill from the San Miguel Corporation-chartered *MT Princess Empress* will start on Monday.

Dolor said the claims for damages will be filed with the Protection and Indemnity Club, or P&I, a non-governmental, non-profit mutual association of marine insurance providers serving ship owners, operators, and member companies. P&I is based in England and has offices in many countries, the nearest one to the Philippines being Singapore.

In a press briefing, the governor said the Vera Law Office in the Philippines has been tasked by P&I to accept and process all claims from individuals, corporations, and local governments affected by the oil spill.

The *MT Princess Empress* went under last 23 February off Napari, Oriental Mindoro, while carrying 200,000 liters of oil reportedly owned by a subsidiary of SMC.

Atty Valeriano del Rosario said they will establish claims offices or hold "claims caravans" in the localities affected, starting with one in the provincial capitol building of Oriental Mindoro.

A claims team composed of Filipinos has been sent to P&I's office in Singapore for training.

The claims compensation, Del Rosario said, will be governed by mechanisms under the 2001 International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution

Damage, as well as the 1992 International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund.

"Claims are expected to be coming both from individuals and the government. And we want to let the people of Mindoro know that we will be putting [up] local claims offices or claims caravans which will open in Calapan on Monday," Del Rosario said.

### 20,882 claimants

The claim forms to be filled out by the affected individuals will be handled by document processors now being trained in Singapore, Del Rosario said.

According to Dolor, they have 20,882 affected individuals on their list so far, aside from 61 tourism establishments and 750 community organizations with thousands of affected workers.

He said they were also seeking compensation for the cost of the oil cleanup, the economic and livelihood losses in the fishery and tourism sectors, and the damage to tourism properties.

The claims should include proof of the damage sustained for the review of experts. Payment amounts will vary on a case-to-case basis and the processing may take up to 30 days, Del Rosario said.

Dolor said he has ordered the provincial legal office to help the residents in filing their claims, including translating the documents into Filipino from English.

To help his constituents, the governor said the cash-for-work program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development will run for 45 days, while the Department of Labor will allot P100 million for livelihood generation for those affected by the oil spill.



## Oil spill mega-disaster



QUG QUGS  
DARREN M. DE JESUS

**“** A lingering question is whether insurance companies will be made to pay the claims of the insured shipowner.

Two weeks ago in this space, we wrote about the Oriental Mindoro oil spill and now it appears that nothing has happened aside from reports of the oil spreading toward Batangas and Palawan. More and more people are being affected by the oil spill as the days pass by, and it seems there is no sense of extreme urgency from the authorities. The arrival of Japanese and American aid, as well as the visit of Justice Secretary Crispin Remulla to Pola, Oriental Mindoro, is comforting. But all these will be reduced to mere theatrics if the oil spill is not contained.

It is tragic for an archipelagic country composed of over 7,100 islands to be ill-equipped for

such a disaster. We appear to be helpless in containing an oil spill, something that has happened before, most notably in Guimaras in 2006. While Guimaras was said to have recovered from the oil spill by 2010, the life-changing effects on the local folks cannot be quantified. Now, in Oriental Mindoro, we have a similar case, albeit on a smaller scale, but still of utmost significance.

Just as in Guimaras, San Miguel Corporation is in the picture as one of the parties involved. It is common for a huge conglomerate to be involved in big businesses that would require the shipment of oil. There was a report that the oil was to be used in infrastructure development. Considering the influence of the corporate entities involved, the public must keep a close watch on the propriety and whether individuals would be made liable.

As for reports on the lack of permits and a certificate of public convenience, the Philippine Coast Guard and Maritime Industry Authority appear to be at odds with each other. Regardless, these remain afterthoughts that would never have been raised had there been no oil spill, to begin with. The government entities must instead work closely together to contain its spread and to prevent similar incidents from happening again.

President Bongbong Marcos Jr.

**“** The issue here is whether the ship was allowed to sail on the condition it was seaworthy, meaning it had full and complete authority to do so.

has spoken on this, saying there is no need to come up with a task force on the Mindoro oil spill. This contrasts with what former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo did in 2006 when she immediately constituted Task Force Guimaras to oversee the cleanup and retrieval of 1.5 million liters of fuel oil. With precision, President Marcos Jr. said the PCG shall oversee the entire operation.

A lingering question is whether insurance companies will be made to pay the claims of the insured shipowner. The issue here is whether the ship was allowed to sail on the condition it was seaworthy, meaning it had full and complete authority to do so. As has been reported, there may be problems with the documentation of the ship that the insurers may validly raise to refuse to pay any claims. Should this happen, the shipowners themselves, EDC Reelf Marine Services, must be made liable for the damages and injuries caused to the affected local townfolk and the environment.

Several concerned environmental lawyers have already issued their solidary statement, which is usually a precursor to a Supreme Court case. These lawyers, who include Tony La Viña, Chel Diekno, among others, are no pushovers. Couple this with Secretary Remulla's warning that a writ of *kulikasan* is being prepared by the DoJ, and the companies and individuals involved must lawyer up in what could be a landmark case in the making.

For comments, email him at darren.dejesus@gmail.com



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# Scrap heap of trouble

They say oil and water don't mix, but now Philippine waters off Mindoro are dangerously close to being infused with the oozing black substance.

They still won't mix, of course, but the oil will coat marine life and choke the life out of them.

With every passing minute, the liquid that can't be contained is damaging our marine environment.

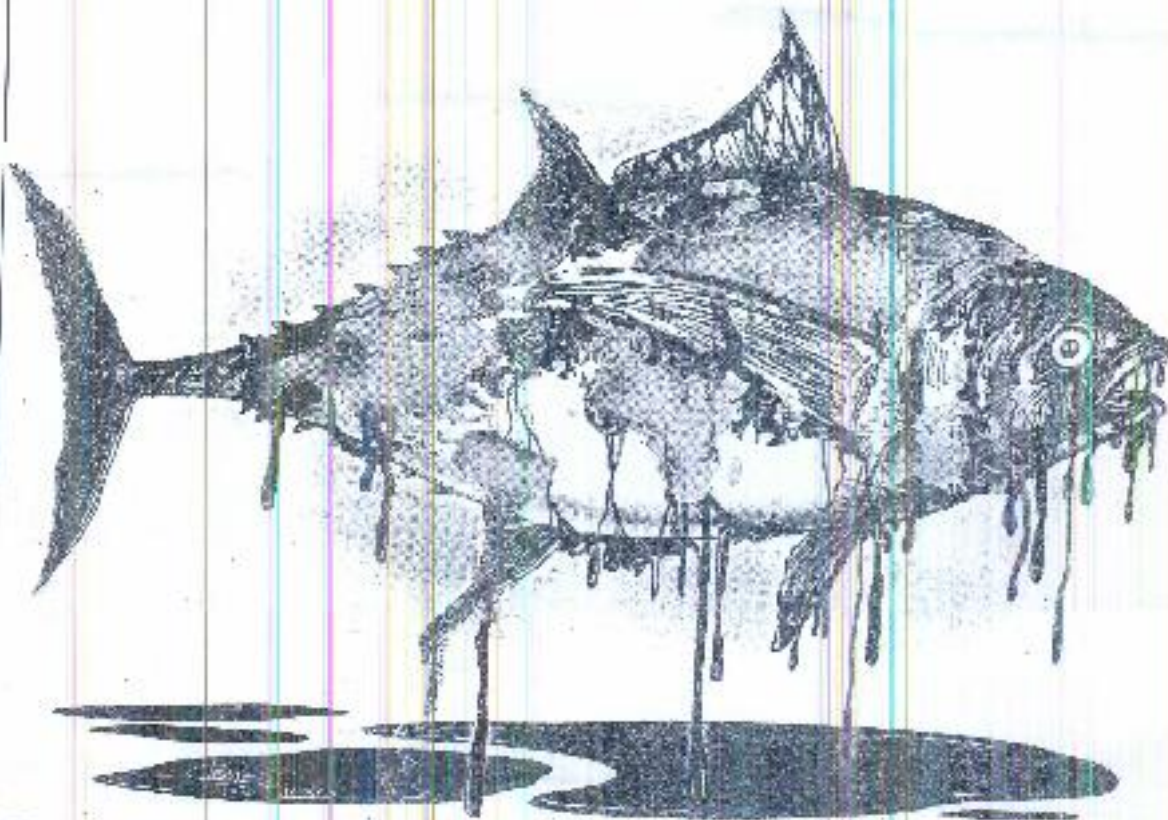
The Japanese remotely operated vehicle that spotted the sunken *MT Princess Empress*, unfortunately, "is not capable of plugging or siphoning oil from the tanker," according to the Philippine Coast Guard this week.

PCG Commandant Artemio Abu told a TV news show that "the ROV *Hakuyo* is not the tool that can plug the oil spill or siphon the oil from the tanker."

Time is of the essence as the spill from the sunken tanker carrying 900,000 liters of industrial oil "could affect 21 marine protected areas," goes a dire warning from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

PCG, which is tasked to lead response operations in the affected areas, has its hands full trying to prevent bigger damage that could encompass global marine ecology. Based on assessments by environmental advocates and locals, the spill poses a serious threat

“The list of damaging human activities might as well include ‘negligence and nonfeasance’.”





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Scrap heap

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to the precious Verde Island Passage, located in our country.

The Verde Island Passage is "considered by scientists as the center of marine biodiversity in the world."

This means the Philippines houses an "area of exceptional importance," says the *Frontiers in Marine Science* website.

The same paper mentions numerous challenges our country continues to face to conserve its marine biodiversity.

Some of these, *Frontiers* adds, include "overfishing, destructive fishing practices and mariculture-derived eutrophication and coastal acidification, among others. These human activities coupled with climate change pose serious threats and possible decimation of its marine biodiversity."

The list of damaging human activities might as well include "negligence and nonfeasance", to borrow Senator Elissa Hontiveros's words on officials' role in the maritime disaster. How on earth could anyone release an allegedly decrepit vessel out to sea carrying a potentially dangerous substance of that bulk?

To think it was plying a route close to a most significant area in global biodiversity studies. The richness of marine biodiversity in the area has given scientists valuable knowledge in sustaining marine life, which is more important than ever considering the effects of climate change.

The government needs to increase and speed up efforts to address this impending disaster. Actions should be two-pronged – save what should and can be saved of the environment, and make those responsible for this accident accountable.

There are five provinces surrounding Verde Island Passage, including Oriental Mindoro. Livelihoods in these localities are at stake, but more than that, the possible destruction of the fragile, life-giving environment underwater, the seagrass beds, coral reefs and mangroves. The cycle of marine life hangs in the balance.

*“Actions should be two-pronged – save what should and can be saved of the environment, and make those responsible for this accident accountable.”*



# Reparation, an obligation

“*Accountability must be contained in law since in a tough situation, the institutions that advertise themselves as messiahs of public service suddenly disappear from view.*”

Congress must come up with a law that will compel companies that evade and even downplay investigations into their culpabilities in large-scale disasters, such as the Oriental Mindoro oil spill, to pay reparations.

The lack of such a law has led to the total silence that big business concerns have opted to take despite the outcry for help among the affected communities.

In terms of logistics, the corporations that are in some way involved in the spread of the toxic fuel — in the worst circumstances near the marine crown jewel called the Verde Island Passage — have the means to immediately react to the deplorable incident.

Being made answerable for the catastrophe are the owner of the tanker, RDC Reichl Marine Services, Inc., and of fuel, it was transporting, San Miguel Corporation Shipping and Lightage's subsidiary SL Harbor Bulk Terminal Corporation, the reported charterer.

Environment groups are demanding that both firms immediately put up an initial \$70 million cash bond to cover the cost of containment, mechanical removal of the oil, and damage to communities.

Likewise, both companies are being asked to commit to the long-term rehabilitation of the affected communities and ecosystems.

Accountability must be contained in law since in a tough situation, the institutions that advertise themselves as messiahs of public service suddenly disappear from view.

Ecology advocate and lawyer Tony La Viña said the country with its many laws does not have a corporate environmental liability act requiring compensation from companies that figure in disasters.

Corporations are made to pay fines and for cleanups under current laws, but they are not obligated to compensate affected communities for losses.

In the Oriental Mindoro incident, both the vessel owner and the charterer should compensate the fishermen for their loss of livelihood.

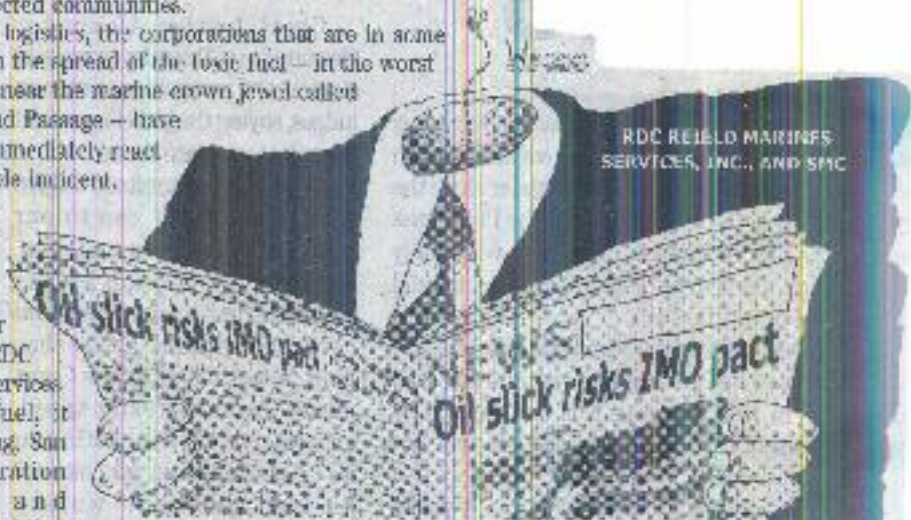
La Viña said reparation should also be made to the local governments for loss of revenue.

“Every time there is an oil spill, it is the ordinary Filipinos who suffer, particularly those living in coastal areas whose livelihoods depend on fisheries and coastal tourism.”

Despite suffering backlash from the damage to their environment, affected communities rarely get anything from the insurance payments made to the companies involved.

The law limits liability in an oil spill to the vessel owner and not the charterer, but La Viña said it's time that Congress passed a law that will make polluters pay.

Ecologists said the bunker oil has spread from the site of the sinking to several coastal communities, depriving thousands of fishing families of their livelihood.



RDC REICHL MARINE SERVICES, INC., AND SMC

“*Notably, the Court said the laws likewise do not limit the scope of the services falling under 'funeral and burial services'.*”



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The tourism industry in the affected areas has also suffered as the disaster happened near the peak travel season.

The oil spill has spread to almost a million hectares of municipal waters covering 10 coastal towns of Oriental Mindoro, two of Palawan, and one of Antique.

Based on data as of 17 March, the tragedy has struck the waters of Bansud, Bongabong, Bulalacao, Calapan, Gloria, Mansalay, Naujan, Pinamalayan, Pola, and Roxas in Oriental Mindoro; Agutaya and Taytay in Palawan, and Caluya in Antique.

Hearings being held at the Senate may staged seemingly to deflect the issue rather than to get to the bottom of the incident and extract accountability.

Government agencies have buried their severe shortcomings in allowing the refurbished vessel to carry hazardous substances without proper documents, while the companies involved had flouted regulations to get the industrial oil, used in the operation of power plants, to leave port.

It is suspicious enough that most of the senators have kept from mentioning the charterer of the tanker, citing the law that limits penalties to the vessel owner, but no time has been spent on the lack of due diligence to ensure the safe delivery of the crude oil.

The *MT Princess Empress* sank and the oil of SMC that it carried is seeping out, requiring an international effort to retrieve it and stop it from causing further damage to the Visayas region and nearby provinces.

The mere indication that Filipino lives are suffering makes those companies mentioned liable and they must pay for the massive environmental damage they have caused.



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# Marina grounds vessels of oil tanker owner

By NEIL JAYSON SERVALLOS

The Maritime Industry Authority (MAINA) announced yesterday that it has issued two cease and desist orders against RTC Reisd Marine Services, the company that owns the MT *Princess Empress* which sank off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

MAINA administrator Herman Fabia revealed this during a meeting of the Oil Spill Inter Agency Committee at the Department of Justice, the agency conducting the case building against those responsible.

He said one order was issued to initiate the cancellation of the company's Certificate of Public Convenience (CPC), while the other was issued to halt its remaining three vessels' operations, two of which are tankers and one a passenger vessel.

Fabia added that the cease and desist order will remain in effect pending the result of the investigation into the oil spill caused by the tanker that sank Feb. 28.

"We issued two cease and desist orders. One is for purposes of cancellation of the franchise or the CPC, the other is to cease and desist in the operations. We will conduct investigation on all the documents of competence, safety documents," he told reporters during a charter interview after the meeting.

The sinking of *Princess Empress*, which carried around 800,000 liters of industrial fuel, caused an oil spill that has affected the livelihoods of fisherfolk and raised harm to marine life in the area.

Asked about earlier findings that the vessel was a scrap ship that was rebuilt twice to become a tanker, Fabia said it was "newly constructed."

Earlier, Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla said the approvals on MT *Princess Empress*, which has been reconstructed from scrap, and then into a carrier and later on as a tanker, make it 151 years old by transportation standards.

Fabia said this wasn't true based on their records. "If you bought that a-then new steels it is being - it's already existing. But this is newly constructed, new from scratch. Based on our records, this is new construction. We shall submit that to the NBI (National Bureau of Investigation) today. We have an investigation we conducted on that," he added.

## Claims caravan

Residents, tourism establishments and the local government units affected by the

ongoing oil spill in Oriental Mindoro can start filing for their compensation claims as the insurer of the aulokis MT *Princess Empress* will start its "claims caravan" on Monday in Calapan City.

"In response to the oil spill incidents, plans are also underway for local claims offices to be opened in the affected areas. On the week of 27 March 2023, the first claims office, also known as 'claims caravan' will be opened in Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro," P&F Club lawyer Waterloo del Rosario said. The P&F Club is the insurer of RTC Reisd Marine Services.

Del Rosario said the claims caravan will initially open at the provincial legal office of Oriental Mindoro and serve as a collecting point of completed claim forms that will be made available by Monday. He also emphasized that only "valid claimants" or those who will be able to provide the required "specific supporting documents" to prove their loss can get compensation.

And if claimants are unable to provide such evidence, they are advised to visit the local claims offices for advice on the most appropriate method of presenting their claim... once the claimants have completed the claim forms, they have to submit the completed forms to the local claims offices," he added.

Del Rosario reminded affected individuals that their claims will be reviewed by experts who may also personally visit them. Claimants unable to receive updates within 30 days are advised to contact their claimants' offices.

Oriental Mindoro Gov. Mimerito Dela Cruz said that the massive oil spill caused by the *Princess Empress* has affected 21,032 families, 67 worken establishments and 710 community-based organizations for tourism and thousands of individuals.

## Cancer from tainted fish

An official of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) on Thursday warned that contaminated fish from areas affected by the oil spill could cause cancer and the presence of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH), a chemical found in crude oil or petroleum products.

"Although this number is still within the standard of three milligrams per liter of the DENR (Department of Environment and Natural Resources) Administrative Order, just the same, traces of petroleum prod-

ucts were detected," BFAR spokesperson Nazapo Briguera said in a radio interview.

Briguera said fish samples tested positive for low levels of PAH, which is considered carcinogenic. He said PAH - harmful to humans and other living organisms - may accumulate in the flesh of the fish over time.

"PAH is considered carcinogenic and can cause cancer if ingested regularly. Let me clarify that it could happen if the intake of fish contaminated with PAH accumulates in your body," he said.

The University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute said that a 37.84-square kilometer oil slick, larger than Las Pinas, was observed in the latest US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) report based on a satellite image taken on March 21, 2023.

## Monitoring

The Philippine Space Agency (PhilSA) continues to monitor the progression of the oil spill in the waters off Oriental Mindoro with satellite maps it was getting from foreign groups and space agencies.

Engineer Roel dela Cruz, PhilSA Space Data Mobilization and Applications Division supervising science research specialist, said that the satellite maps so far can only identify areas with thick oil slicks as these are captured or can be identified by the images.

"Thinner oil cannot be detected specially in wavy conditions. You need significant amount of oil to dampen the waves for such areas to be detected in SAR (synthetic aperture radar) images," Dela Cruz told The STAR.

Dela Cruz said that there are no satellite images yet in other areas where the slick has already been reported to be present or visible.

So far, the satellite images received by PhilSA were provided by Sentinel Asia, the US NOAA, International Charter Space and Major Disasters, Canadian Space Agency's RADARSAT-2 and the US Geological Survey's LANDSAT-9 OLI satellite, the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency's ALPS-2 satellite retrieved from Sentinel Asia, and Taiwan Space Agency's FORMOSAT-7.

PhilSA said that all of the maps are still subject to field validation.

- With Roberton Ramirez, Bella Carfano, Roel Pareño, Raimier Allan Ronda





# Damage claims on oil spill set

## Processing of pay demands of affected sectors starts on Monday

By Charles Dantes  
and Willie Casas

**P**EOPLE affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro may begin applying for compensation on Monday, March 27, the insurer of the sunken MT Princess Empress said Thursday.

In a press briefing, Valenciano de Rosario, a lawyer with the insurer, P&I Club, said local claims offices will be set up in affected areas.

"On the week of 27 March 2023, the first claims offices, also known as claims caravans, will open in Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro and it will act as the collecting point for the claimants to submit their completed claim forms," he said. "Subsequently, we will also see the opening of local claims offices in the

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### Damage...

From A2

other affected barangays as well."

Ahead of the insurance claims, more than P38.1 million in humanitarian assistance has been given to families affected by the oil spill.

DSWD spokesperson Assistant Secretary Rommel Lopez said aid has been given to families in Oriental Mindoro, in Agutaya town in Palawan, and in Caluya in Antique.

He said the amount covered at least 47,000 family food packs as well as cash aid for some 5,961 beneficiaries.

A food pack consists of 5 kilos of rice, 4 cans of corned beef, 4 cans of tuna flakes, 4 cans of sardines, 5 sachets of coffee and 5 sachets of cereal malt.

Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerlito Dolor said P&I Club had confirmed in a meeting on Thursday morning that they will begin accepting applications for compensation.

Del Rosario said claimants include individuals, corporations, and local government units affected by the oil spill.

The categories of claims are the cost of cleanup and preventive measures, economic loss in fisheries and marine culture, economic loss in the tourism sector and related businesses, as well as property damage.

Claimants are advised to send accomplished claim forms to the designated offices with supporting documents and proof of their loss, which will be reviewed, Del Rosario said.

He added that the computation of claims will vary depending on the claimants and the categories of their claims.

He said, for example, if a fisherman earns P450 a day and stopped fishing for 23 days due to the oil spill, the amount of financial loss will be multiplied by the number of days of his interrupted livelihood. Based on this computation, the fisherman may get about P10,000.

The MT Princess Empress sank near Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, with its cargo of about 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil, causing a massive oil spill that has reached the provincial capital city of Calapan and that has threatened nearby provinces.

As of Wednesday, a total of 163,508

people or 34,555 families in Mimaropa and Western Visayas were affected by the oil spill, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said.

A state of calamity was declared in 10 cities and municipalities, the agency added.

At least 192 people fell ill due to the oil spill.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) on Thursday said the tanker, which was spotted by a Japanese remotely operated vessel (ROV) this week, suffered extensive structural damage after sinking, and oil was seen leaking from eight compartments.

It said the remaining oil inside the capsized vessel was as yet undetermined.

The wreckage of the MT Princess Empress was found 7.7 nautical miles away from Baligawan Point in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro by the Japanese vessel Shin Nishi Maru, which deployed an ROV to find it.

Insurance representatives were doing the rounds in searching for a service provider to conduct oil patching, bagging, and removal.

Dolor said that the Japanese salvage vessel should be asked to stay while they awaited the arrival of new equipment.

Fishermen from affected communities along the Verde Island Passage called on the government to serve justice and ensure that the livelihood and welfare of affected communities get priority in its disaster response efforts.

The call was made as fishing community leaders from Calapan, Pula, Naujan, Pinamalayan, Burigabong, Bufalacao, Mandaluy, Roxas, Bansud, and Gloria in Oriental Mindoro joined together to launch the Koalisyon ng Mangangisadang Apektado ng Oil Spill (KMAOS).

A spokesperson for the group, Dindo Melaya, said each fisherman affected by the oil spill should be compensated at a rate no lower than P500 a day.

The calls were backed by the Bukluran ng Mangangisada sa Batangas (BMB), who expressed solidarity with fishermen in the oil spill's ground zero in Mindoro and raised the alarm over the trajectories of the slick moving west and northwards to Batangas due to shifts in the wind pattern.



# Owner of sunken tanker told to stop operations

BY ASHZEEL HACHERO

THE Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) yesterday said it has issued a cease and desist order against the company that owns the MR Princess Empress tanker which sank last February 28 and caused an oil spill in the waters off Oriental Mindoro.

Maritime Administrator Hernani Fabia said the cease and desist order against RDC Reifid Marine Services covers the certificate of public convenience issued to it and its remaining three vessels, which include two tankers and a passenger vessel.

"We issued two cease and desist orders, one is for purposes of cancellation of franchise or the certificate of public convenience, and the other one is to cease and

desist in the operations, pending investigation and inspections," Fabia told reporters in an ambush interview at the Department of Justice (DOJ) after he attended the meeting of the Oil Spill Inter-Agency Committee.

Fabia said the cease and desist order will remain in effect pending the conclusion of the ongoing investigation into the February 28 sinking of the MT Princess Empress off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

The ill-fated tanker was carrying 900,000 liters of industrial fuels when it sank.

The incident has threatened the ecosystem and coastal communities in southern Luzon as well as the livelihood of fishermen in the affected areas.

Environment Undersecretary

Ignatius Rodriguez said the ship owner will be fined P471,000 per day from March 1 until the oil spill is cleaned up.

Rodriguez, who attended the inter-agency meeting to represent the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, said this may go higher as it covers only eight of the 10 samples taken by the department and examined for contamination.

In the same interview, Fabia insisted the MT Princess Empress was not a "rebuilt scrap" as earlier claimed by Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla. "It is newly constructed. Not new (but) newly constructed," he said.

Asked to explain, the MARINA chief said new means it's already existing. "But this one is newly constructed, new from scratch,"

he said, adding that "based on our records, this is new construction. We will submit that to the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI)," which the DOJ has tapped to determine the liability of the ship owner and other personalities involved in the mishap.

Lawyer Valeriano Del Rosario on Thursday said authorities will begin accepting on Monday applications for compensation from those affected by the oil spill.

Del Rosario is the managing partner of Veralaw, a correspondence company of P&G Club which is the insurer of the owner of the ill-fated vessel.

In a joint press conference with Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humeroso Dolor, Del Rosario said the first

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## OWNER

claims office or claims caravan will be put up in Calapan City, the province's capital.

"It will act as the collecting point for the claimants to submit their completed claim forms," said Del Rosario, adding similar claims offices will also be established in other areas affected by the oil spill.

He said individuals, corporations and local governments affected by the oil spill may file their claims under four categories: "The first category is coastal cleanup and preventive measures; category two, economic loss of those in fisheries and mariculture; category three, economic loss for those in the tourism sector and related businesses; and category four, property damage."

"Claimants will be guided by the claim form as to the specific supporting documents required in support of each category of claim and claimants will have to prove their loss by providing appropriate evidence. Once the claimants have completed the claim forms, they are to submit the completed forms to the local claims offices," he said.

He added the applications will be reviewed and assessed to de-

termine the veracity of the claims.

Del Rosario said "experts" who will review the claims may visit the claimants for verification of their application.

He said the claimants will be later informed as to the outcome of their application.

If claimants do not get an update within 30 days upon submission of their claims, Del Rosario said they should go to the claims offices and inquire.

"Claimants can also be assured that their claims will be given the best attention to ensure that the assessment of claims are being done as fairly and as accurately as possible," he said.

Del Rosario said there is no fixed amount in terms of compensation to be given to those affected as these would depend on the assessment that will be conducted by experts.

On the case of fishermen, if a fisherman earns P450 a day, this will be multiplied to the number of days that he was not able to fish due to the oil spill.

"As of today, it's been 23 days (since the incident occurred), multiply that (to P450), that will be around P10,000, that's the compensation," said Del Rosario.

"There is a (fishing) ban. BFAR (Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources) said it's not yet safe to fish, so while they are unable to fish, they'll have a claim. Today is day 23," he also said.

Del Rosario assured the people of Oriental Mindoro that the government, international oil spill experts and contracted test orders "have been working together to minimize the impact of the oil spill."

Dolor said there are around 20,932 fishermen, 67 tourism establishments, 750 community-based organizations for tourism, and thousands of tourism employees affected by the oil spill.

Dolor said families living in far municipalities such as Calapan City need not go to the city to file their claims as claims hubs will be put up in their area.

"To expedite this process, claims offices will also be established in the different municipalities and different barangays," he said.

Dolor appealed to his constituents not to submit false documents or make multiple claims to avoid encountering problems in their application for compensation.

Dolor, in a press conference on Wednesday afternoon, said it appeared that all the operational oil



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**OIL SPILL PROBE**  
**MARINA ORDERS  
MT PRINCESS  
EMPRESS OWNER:  
STOP OPERATIONS**

By Tina G. Santos  
and Krizia Subingsubing  
@Team\_Inquirer

The Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) has issued cease-and-desist orders (CDO) against the owner of MT Princess Empress, the oil tanker that sank and caused a massive oil spill that wreaked havoc on the fishing villages and the marine ecosystem in Oriental Mindoro.

According to Marina Administrator Hernani Fabia, the agency issued two CDOs last week on RDC Reield Marine Services.

"One is for purposes of cancellation of the franchise or the certificate of public convenience, while the other one is [for the company] to cease and desist operations," Fabia told reporters on the sidelines of the Oil Spill Inter-Agency Committee meeting held at the Department of Justice on Thursday.

He added that the orders would remain in effect pending the result of the investigation of the oil spill.

Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla earlier said that MT Princess Empress

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# MARINA ORDERS MT PRINCESS EMPRESS OWNER: STOP OPERATIONS

## FROM A1

was a "rebuilt scrap" that was not intended to transport oil "from the very beginning."

But according to Fabia, the sunken tanker was a newly constructed vessel built "from scratch."

"Based on our records, this is a new construction. We have conducted an investigation and we will submit that to the NBI (National Bureau of Investigation)," he added.

### Favorable weather

Meanwhile, marine scientists from the University of

the Philippines said on Thursday that weaker winds and calmer seas have opened up a "window of opportunity" to collect the massive oil spill off the coast of Oriental Mindoro province.

In an interview with the Inquirer, Dr. Irene Rodriguez of the UP Marine Science Institute said the changes in the prevailing winds—such as the weakening of the northeast monsoon or "amihan," and the shift to easterly winds—"favor calmer waters and prevent the further spread of oil in the area."

These conditions, she noted, concentrated the spill into one area, forming a 37.8-square kilometer slick—larger than Las

Piñas—very near the suspected location of the sunken MT Princess Empress that caused the spill on Feb. 28.

Rodriguez urged the government to ramp up cleanup efforts while the wind conditions "favor easier deployment of vessels, skims and booms for the retrieval of oil while it is still offshore."

Among others, she recommended the use of industrial booms and isolated burning of the oil to contain the slick.

### Verde Island threat

For oil that has reached the shores, she urged local people to deploy "indigenous" cleanup solutions, such as do-it-your-

self booms made of coconut husks, in coordination with the Philippine Coast Guard.

Delayed action, she warned, could see the slick travel further into the Verde Island Passage, a strait that traverses Batangas and Mindoro often considered the "center of the center" of global biodiversity.

The oil slick is threatening thousands of endangered and threatened species in the passage, which is known to have the world's highest concentration of coastal fishes, corals, crustaceans, mollusks, seagrasses and mangroves.

Rodriguez said they based the spill estimates on recent satellite images and weather

reports from the government's Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, as well as from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Satellite and Information Service.

### Slow response

MT Princess Empress was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel when it sank in the waters off Pola, Oriental Mindoro, due to engine trouble. The vessel was located by a remotely operated vehicle 394 meters underwater on Tuesday.

The accident led to an oil spill, where slick reached the coastlines of Oriental Mindoro,

Palawan and Antique, moving further north toward Batangas.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development reported that as of Tuesday, 3,469 families (148,382 people) from 119 barangays in Oriental Mindoro, eight in Palawan, and four in Antique were affected by the oil spill.

A group of 91 lawyers had earlier criticized the supposed "lackluster response" of the government in addressing the oil spill.

They decried the lack of permits of the shipowner, and the lack of clear coordination among the government agencies supposed to be responding to the disaster. ■



## Marina finally issues CDOs vs MT Princess Empress owner

By JOEL R. SAN JUAN  
\* *joelsanjuan123*  
& JONATHAN L. MAYUGA  
\* *jonathansan*

**T**HE Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) disclosed on Thursday that cease and desist orders (CDOs) have been issued against the company that owns the sunken MT Princess Empress, which had caused a massive oil spill in Oriental Mindoro and its environs.

Marina Administrator Hernandez Fabia said a CDO was issued for the cancellation of RDC Reido Marine Services' certificate of public convenience (CPC) and another CDO enjoining the operations of its remaining vessels.

The ill-fated tanker was carrying 900,000 liters of industrial fuels when it sank.

"We issued two cease and desist orders, one is for purposes of cancellation of franchise or the certificate of public convenience and the other one is to cease and desist in the operations, pending investigation and inspections," Fabia told reporters in an ambush interview at the Department of Justice (DOJ) after attending the meeting of inter-agency task force tasked to control the oil destructive spill.

He said the CDOs would remain in force pending the result of its investigation on the February 28 sinking of the vessel. Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla earlier said the task force had issued subpoenas to various government agencies, including Marina and Philippine Coast Guard (PCG).

The documents being sought from the PCG and Marina would determine whether there was negligence on the part of the two agencies that resulted in the latest sea tragedy.

The DOJ is leading the case build up for the possible filing of appropriate civil and criminal charges to be lodged in connection with the massive environmental consequences following the sinking of the ill-fated vessel.

Remulla earlier vowed there

would be criminal liability for all those involved in the sinking of the oil tanker.

"All the details of the oil spill we want to get it too, because we think that there should be liabilities here, there should be criminal liability involved in this case," Remulla said on Thursday.

Fabia, however, denied that the agency is among those being investigated for possible negligence that led to the sinking.

"We were asked for cooperation. We are cooperating in fact because this is a whole-of-government approach," Fabia said.

He added the filing of charges was discussed during the meeting. "We are not focused on accusing somebody, we are doing a cleanup, everything is ongoing," Fabia added.

When asked why the agency did not send a representative during the first meeting of the task force, Fabia said they did not receive any invitation.

Fabia also contradicted Remulla's initial statements that the MT Princess Empress was a rebuilt scrap.

"It is newly constructed. Not new but newly constructed," Fabia explained referring to the sunken vessel.

Asked to explain further, the MARINA chief said new means it already exists.

"But this [MT Princess Empress] is newly constructed, new from scratch," Fabia pointed out.

"Based on our records, this is new construction. We will submit that to the National Bureau of Investigation," he added.

The DOJ earlier directed the NBI to probe the liability of the shipowner and others involved in the sinking.

### 'Improved weather'

AS the Philippine government races against time to contain what's left of the industrial oil from the sunken MT Princess Empress, scientists from the University of the Philippines Diliman Marine Science Institute (UPD-CS MSI) have noted a "window of opportunity" to step up efforts to clean up the oil spill from the ill-fated vessel.

"Weaker winds and calmer seas allow for larger oil slicks to form because of less disturbance from waves," the researchers noted in their latest update.

Satellite data from the US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as of March 21 showed that the floating oil had accumulated into a 37.84-square-kilometer slick—"larger than Las Piñas," the scientists noted.

The unmitigated oil, along with the improved weather, may be a boon to cleanup efforts. "Calmer seas and larger slicks should be taken as an opportunity to collect the oil in slicks near the sunken tanker using booms and skimmers and ramp up cleanup efforts to prevent the oil from spreading further," the UPD-CS MSI said.

The researchers also warned that with the seasonal weakening of the Amihan Northeast Monsoon, the subsequent strengthening of easterly winds may push the oil further westward through the Verde Island Passage (VIP), one of the most biodiverse regions in the world and home to thousands of unique species.

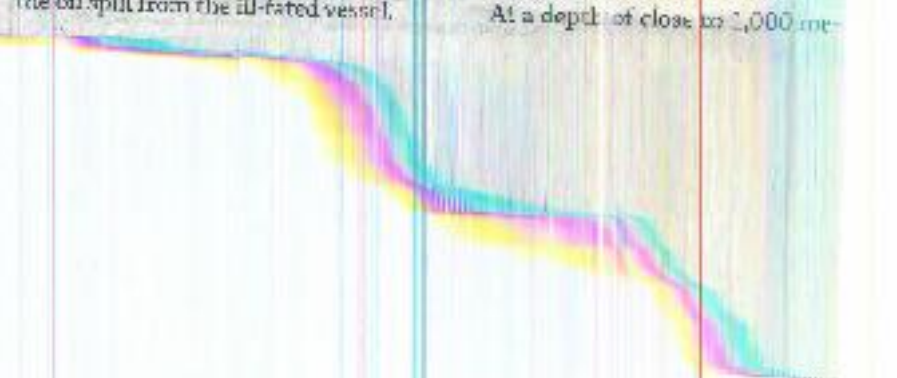
With some of the highest concentrations of coastal fishes, corals, crustaceans, mollusks, seagrasses, and mangrove worldwide, VIP is the main source of food and livelihood for millions of Filipinos.

### 'No immediate solution in sight'

UNFORTUNATELY, no immediate solution is in sight to contain the thick black oil being released by the sunken vessel as oil spill responders, led by the PCG, are still weighing their options.

Based on the videos and photographs produced by the remotely operated vehicle (ROV) *Hakuyo*, the tanker that sank off Naujan, Occidental Mindoro, last February 28 continues to spill oil from its cargo. Authorities have no idea how much oil was left to salvage but there are a total of 23 holes that need to be plugged to stop oil from seeping out of the vessel.

At a depth of close to 1,000 me-





Maring family issues...

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08 24 23

ters, Oriental Mindoro Governor Hermerito Dolor told reporters during an online news conference that it is not possible for divers to reach the vessel to plug the leaks.

The ROV, on the other hand, is not equipped with the necessary accessory to plug or bag the oil and salvage it and prevent further environmental damage. The special bags, he said, will have to be imported and one of the closest sources of the bags specially designed for bagging oil from under the water is in Singapore. Likewise, he told reporters that an accessory to the ROV Hakuyo will be shipped along with the bag to attempt oil bagging or if possible, plugging the leaks.

But it will not happen in the immediate term as operators of the ROV may need to ensure the compatibility of the bag or the accessory of the ROV that would be attached to make it work as proposed by the team composed of Japanese experts, PCC and consultants hired by the owner of the vessel to address the problem.

A robotic arm would have to be attached to the ROV or another ROV with the capability may have to be flown to Mindoro, along with the specialized bag for the oil to make it happen.

Dolor said in the meantime, the decision is to contain the oil from ground zero, while waiting for the ROV with the capacity to bag the oil, or plug the leaks, to contain it.

Dolor also said floating the sunken vessel is not an option because there is a risk that the process will break the vessel which has shown signs of physical damage due to water pressure and strong currents nearly four weeks after its sinking.

Incident Management Team in Oriental Mindoro commander, Coast Guard Commodore Geronimo Tavilla said the cleanup operation will be intensified in affected areas and more oil spill booms will have to be readied to prevent the oil from affecting VIP.

So far, the oil spill has affected nine towns in Oriental Mindoro, two towns in Palawan, and one in Antique Province. In Pola, Oriental Mindoro alone, around eight

hectares of mangroves have been affected by the oil spill. There are over 20 marine protected areas in Oriental Mindoro that are at risk.

In the last several days, scientists at UP-CS NSI said the oil has already reached Calapan, Oriental Mindoro, and is making its way into the vast water body called Verde Island Passage, the center of the world's shore-fish biodiversity and one of the most economically productive marine ecosystems in the world.

### 'Oil spill could have been avoided'

THE Panhansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) blamed the concerned government agencies that allowed the vessel to sail.

The group said the Mindoro oil spill could've been avoided if only these concerned government agencies strictly enforced the maritime protocols based on the vessel's seaworthiness.

Panalakaya noted that the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) insists that it did not issue an amendment to the certificate of public convenience (CPC) to the owner of the MT Princess Empress to include the sunken tanker in its fleet.

"It is clear that the oil spill that ravaged many coastal towns and waters could have been avoided had the concerned authorities been strict in enforcing its rules. It is therefore only right to hold the owner of the vessel and concerned government agencies that have been remiss of its duties by allowing MT Princess Empress to sail," the group said.

According to Panalakaya national chairman Bernardo Hicap, in the last three weeks, over 18,000 fishermen were affected by the oil spill.

"We are calling for immediate action from the government by providing economic support to the fishermen affected by the spill. More importantly, the government should ensure to hold those behind the oil spill accountable to prevent this from happening again in the future," Hicap, a former party-list lawmaker and a fisherman based in Rosario, Cavite said.



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low-level contaminants, in fish samples from the oil spill-affected areas of Oriental Mindoro.

It noted that PAHs is "harmful to humans and other living organisms," adding that it may accumulate in the flesh of fish over time.

With this, ISPAR recommended that fishing operations in the oil spill-affected locations in Oriental Mindoro be permanently suspended for the sake of public safety.

#### P45-M aid to oil spill victims

Meanwhile, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, local government units, and the private sector have so far provided P45.6 million worth of food and non-food items to individuals and families affected by the oil spill.

Based on the report of the DSWD's

Disaster Response Operations Monitoring and Information Center, as of March 23, P45,674,787.08 worth of assistance was provided to affected families.

Of this amount, P38,120,250 came from the DSWD, P1,008,289 from the local government units, P675,286 from non-government organizations, and P5,870,957.08 from other partners.

The DSWD said the oil spill has affected 34,553 families (163,498 individuals) from 151 barangays in Mindanao (27,358 households) and Western Visayas (7,195 households).

It assured that it has P671.31 million quick response fund (QRF) at its central office, and P10 million available at its field offices in Mindanao and Western Visayas, which may support the relief needs of displaced families.

There is also P64.7 million available

fund in other DSWD field offices that can be tapped through inter-field office augmentation.

Moreover, the DSWD has 96,783 family food packs available in its disaster response centers, of which, 30,636 packs are at the National Resource Operations Center (NROC) in Pasay City and 66,147 packs are at the Visayas Disaster Resource Center (VDRC) in Manila City.

There are also 135,750 family food packs available in DSWD field offices in Mindanao and Western Visayas, while 403,820 family food packs are available in other DSWD field offices, which may support the relief needs of the displaced families.

The DSWD added that there is P865.35 million worth of other food and non-food items in the warehouses of the NROC, VDRC, and DSWD field offices.



## Sustained probe, effective oil spill containment measures sought

By JEL SANTOS

Sustained investigation as well as "immediate and effective measures" to contain the Oriental Mindoro oil spill which has spread to Verde Island in Batangas City should be implemented to prevent further damage to the environment and loss of livelihood.

Oceana Philippines, Greenpeace Philippines, and the Center for Energy,

Ecology, and Development (CEED) made the call during a recent public forum as they warned of the continued spread of oil slicks from the sunken motor tanker (MT) Princess Empress.

The oil spill was triggered by the sinking of MT Princess Empress off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28. The tanker was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) reported. ▶

## Sustained probe, effective oil spill containment measures sought ◀

To date, the country's fisheries sector has been losing P5 million a day as 19,000 fishermen were prohibited to go fishing in oil spill-affected areas, according to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR).

"Immediately contain and remove the oil spill, with full transparency on the status of containment and removal towards affected communities and the Filipino public, and streamlined leadership in overall disaster risk reduction and management efforts," the groups urged. "We have yet to see decisive leadership on the necessary steps among concerned national government agencies. A next hearing has yet to be called for by Congress."

In a separate statement issued during the public forum, 90 lawyers from around the country urged for a "thorough investigation."

"We demand a thorough investigation into this disaster and hold accountable those responsible, including those in agencies who were in dereliction of their duties." There should be transparency and strict accountability in the conduct of the impartial investigation and full disclosure of parties involved in this mess," the lawyers said in a statement.

Fishers' group Pambansang Lakas ng Klusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) stressed that efforts

should be expedited to prevent the oil spill from further ravaging marine resources that could pose long term ecological disaster, raising alarm on the oil slicks reaching Verde Island or Isla Verde.

"The Verde Island Passage is a highly productive fisheries corridor. Hundreds of thousands of fisherfolk from its littoral provinces rely on its abundant and pristine marine resources. The oil spill reaching one of the country's significant ecosystems should highly alarm the government and compel them to undertake decisive and effective measures to prevent further ecological damages," Pamalakaya Chairperson Fernando Hicap said in a statement.

As such, the fisherfolk group called for a "transparent investigation" on the incident.

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

Pamalakaya said it is closely coordinating with fishing communities, as well as the stakeholders and environmentalists, to promote the protection of Isla Verde to "thoroughly assess the impacts of the oil spill to marine resources and socio-economic rights."

On March 21, the BFAR disclosed that it found polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH), which are





EDITORIAL

# Slip and slide on oil spill

**A** remotely operated vehicle (ROV) on Tuesday finally located the underwater grave of the MT Princess Empress, almost a month after the ship containing 800,000 liters of industrial oil sunk off Mindoro, spilling on its waters the toxic cargo that has spread as far as Palawan, Batangas, and Antique.

Hopefully, it won't take as long to surface the accountability of several government regulatory agencies whose job it is to prevent this mishap that has a long-term impact on the delicate marine life in the area, the health of residents in coastal towns, the livelihood of fisherfolk, the tourism prospects of affected provinces, and their environmental sustainability.

The recent Senate hearing on the oil spill led to finger-pointing between the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina), and showed how carelessly the two agencies have implemented their respective mandate all these years. Such complacency also indicates how little we've learned from similar incidents, the worst being the Guimaras oil spill in 2006.

That incident saw the surken oil tanker spilling more than 21 trillion liters of bunker fuel, which affected 1,500 hectares of the local ecosystem. It prompted the government to review and revise the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan promulgated in 2008, which identifies the PCG as the lead agency in the response, clean-up, and other contingency measures, and the Marine Environmental Protection Command as the point of contact. On top of that, Republic Act No. 9483 was enacted in 2007 to establish the oil pollution management fund in anticipation of similar incidents. But 16 years since and the law still lacks implementing rules and regulations. Could this partly explain the headless chicken response of the government to the Mindoro mishap, with the people frantically stepping in with improvised oil spill booms?

With the Senate hearing raising doubts about the competence and integrity of the government's regulatory agencies, the Department of Justice has subpoenaed the PCG, Marina, and the Philippine Ports Authority of Mindoro to attend a case buildup meeting on the incident. Still, shouldn't that have taken place the first week of the oil spill?

Marine experts have also asked why commercial vessels loaded with toxic cargo have been allowed to pass through the Verde Island Passage (VIP), which is considered the center of marine biodiversity in the world. Aside from fast-tracking Senate Bill No. 518 filed last year, seeking to declare VIP a protected area under the National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 1992, given the threats to its biodiversity, the government should ban oil tankers from this passage and demand strict compliance to environmental safeguards among commercial vessels using this route.

And while the accountability of the company that contracted the MT Princess Empress remains a gray area, shouldn't it take responsibility for failing to check the seaworthiness of the vessel carrying such a toxic load? It may not be legally liable according to current laws, but shouldn't the contractor exercise its corporate sense of responsibility to recompense people adversely affected by its lack of due diligence?

Sen. Risa Hontiveros has meanwhile called out PCG and Marina officials for their "undeniable negligence and non-feasance" in allowing the vessel, described as "rebuilt scrap," to operate despite its less than seaworthy condition and, reportedly, its lack of permit to operate. Amid the shipowner, BDC Refuel Marine Services' claims about its amended certificate of public convenience, the conflicting statements of the PCG and Marina, and allegations of forged signatures on the permit to sail, what emerges are the appalling lack of coordination among government offices tasked to oversee navigational safety, their confusing accreditation process, and the apparent duplication of functions that may allow unscrupulous shipowners to play off one regulatory agency against another: Did the Marina and the PCG "lock the other way," as one senator hinted? And for what consideration?

Given the agencies' possible complicity with the offending vessel's owner, the Senate committee on environment, natural resources, and climate change should not only look into the administrative liabilities of both the PCG and Marina officers but ensure that the officers involved would be held to account.

And while local officials in the affected towns—knowing how a court case could drag on for years—are looking at a negotiated settlement with the shipowner, our legislators might want to look into plugging the gaps in the country's laws that only extract fines from companies that cause environmental nightmares. On top of possible jail time for company officials, why not require erring companies to pay damages equal to the cumulative cost of the long-term effects of their negligence, especially since they're bound to collect hefty insurance claims?

The extent of the damage in the Mindoro oil spill has yet to be fully determined so that just compensation can be negotiated, but nothing stops the government from revisiting and updating maritime regulations and tightening current safety mechanisms, to at least ensure that such preventable mishaps never happen again.



# 93% of Pinoys experienced impact

## of climate change – SWS

By JANVIC MATEO

Nine in every 10 Filipinos have personally experienced the impacts of climate change in the past three years, a survey conducted by Social Weather Stations (SWS) showed.

Results of the Dec. 10 to 14 survey

released on Thursday showed that 93 percent of respondents said they experienced little to severe impact of climate change.

Some 17 percent said they experienced severe impact, 52 percent moderate and 24 percent little impact. Only six percent said they did not experience

the impact of climate change in the past three years.

Compared to a similar survey conducted by SWS in 2017, the overall number of those who said they experienced the impact of climate change increased by six points from 87 percent (20 percent severe, 42 percent moderate

and 25 percent little).

Awareness of climate change also increased from 74 percent in 2017 to 81 percent in the December 2022 survey.

Some 76 percent of the respondents believed that humanity could do something to stop or slow down climate

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## 93% From Page 1

change if everyone really tried, while 23 percent said it is beyond humanity's control.

A large majority of 88 percent also agreed that people like themselves can do something to reduce climate risk.

### Solutions

Most of the respondents in the recent survey are aware of various solutions that can be taken to reduce the impact of climate change, including saving energy (95 percent), planting trees in the right places and protecting forests (95 percent) and walking, cycling or taking public transportation (93 percent), reducing, reusing, repairing and recycling (91 percent) and throwing away less food (86 percent).

SWS then asked those who were aware of each solution if their family does them to reduce the impact of climate change.

Engagement was highest in terms of saving energy (88 percent doing, seven percent might do, four percent does not do), followed by walking, cycling or taking public transportation (81 percent doing, 13 percent might, six percent not).

It was followed by throwing away less food (75 percent doing, 14 percent might, 11 percent not), reducing, reusing, repairing and recycling (74 percent doing, 17 percent might, eight percent not) and planting trees and protecting forests (63 percent doing, 24 percent might, 13 percent not).

The survey had 1,200 adult respondents and an error margin of plus/minus 2.8 percent.

### El Niño by Q3

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said that there is an increased probability of El Niño phenomenon setting in by the third quarter this year.

PAGASA has raised the alert level to El Niño Watch as the probability of occurrence has reached 55 percent or more.

El Niño will likely develop from July to September 2023, following a transition from the current neutral conditions in the phenomenon's southern oscillation.

Ana Solis, chief of PAGASA climate prediction and monitoring section, said that recent conditions show that the El Niño phenomenon could last until the first few months of 2024.

El Niño, which increases the likelihood of below-normal rainfall conditions, is characterized by unusually warmer than average sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific.

The phenomenon could bring negative impacts such as dry spells and droughts in some areas of the country, with forecasters expecting early impact on Visayas and Mindanao.

PAGASA administrator Vincent Maleno urged farmers and government agencies to prepare and get ready for the possible adverse effects of El Niño.

### Caritas for renewable energy

Meanwhile, Caritas Philippines vowed to work for Catholic schools and church buildings to shift to the use of renewable energy.

In a statement issued yesterday, Caritas Philippines and Social Action Network committed itself into working toward eight goals in line with its call to "Declare Climate Emergency Now of the Rights of Nature Movement."

Since 1988 the Catholic Church has already been saying that the country was in peril and asked the government and civic and church leaders to save our "beautiful land." However, 35 years later, they are still making the same appeal.

Over the years, the country has seen and experienced the effects of climate change such as the rise in sea levels three times the world average, destruction of naturally rich ecosystems, and forests steadily vanishing. Typhoons, while less in number, have become more destructive.

"We cannot be business as usual. While we have institutionalized programs on agroecology, invested millions in natural farming, and strengthened our advocacies on environmental protection, we feel that these are still not enough. More intentional and synodal actions need to be in place to mitigate climate impacts, especially in vulnerable communities," the group said.

-With Romina Cabrera, Evelyn Macairan



## 93% of Filipinos experienced effects of climate change — SWS

By ELIZABETH OLIVERA-RUIZ

A Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey conducted in December 2022 found that 93 percent of Filipinos have personally experienced the effects of climate change in the past three years.

Of this, 47 percent said they have experienced severe impact of climate change in the past three years, 52 percent said moderate impact, and 24 percent said little impact.

Meanwhile, only 5.6 percent did not experience any impact.

According to SWS, the proportion of those who reported personally experiencing the impacts of climate change can be compared to previous surveys on the topic.

"Those personally experiencing the impacts increased by six percentage points from March 2017 and eight points from March 2013. Those who experienced severe impact of climate change decreased by three points but was offset by an increase of 10 points among those who experienced moderate impact," it pointed out.

Most Filipinos agreed they can do something to reduce climate risk.

The SWS survey also found 86 percent agreeing (75 percent strongly agree, 57 percent somewhat agree) with the statement: "People like me can do something to reduce climate risk or risks resulting from climate change."

Meanwhile, 10 percent were undecided and three percent disagreed (two percent somewhat disagree, one percent strongly disagree).

"This gives a net agreement score (percentage of those who agree minus percentage of those who disagree) of +83, classified by SWS as 'very strong' (150 and up). This indicates a very strong personal efficacy to do something to reduce climate risk," SWS said.

When shown two statements that might best describe one's outlook on humanity's control of climate change, SWS found that 76 percent of Filipinos think that humanity could do something to stop or slow down climate change if everyone really tried, while 23 percent think climate change is beyond humanity's control.

Only one percent of Filipinos are unsure.

### High awareness

The survey also found that 81 percent were previously aware of climate change, while 15 percent knew of it only at the time of the survey interview, SWS pointed out.

It noted that those who were previously aware of climate change increased by seven percentage points

from March 2017 and 15 points from March 2013.

SWS also said that there is a "very high" awareness of selected solutions to reduce the negative effects of climate change.

It tested public awareness of selected solutions to reduce the negative effects of climate change by selecting items from the United Nations Act Now website about tackling the climate crisis.

SWS crafted them into localized questions for the Filipino experience, and added a question about tree planting and forest protection.

"Percentages of those aware of solutions to reduce the negative effects of climate change were very high: 95 percent for planting trees in the right places and protecting forests, 95 percent for saving energy or electricity at home, 93 percent for walking, cycling, or taking public transportation, 91 percent for reducing, reusing, repairing, and recycling, and 86 percent for throwing away less food," SWS said.

"Majorities of those who are aware of each solution reported that their families engage in the solutions to reduce the negative effects of climate change: 88 percent save energy or electricity at home, 81 percent walk, cycle, or take public transportation, 75 percent throw away less food, 74 percent reduce, reuse, repair, and recycle, and 63 percent plant trees in the right places and protect forests," it added.

The survey found that those aware of each solution who reported that their families might do the solutions are 34 percent for planting trees in the right places and protecting forests, 37 percent for reducing, reusing, repairing, and recycling, 34 percent for throwing away less food, 33 percent for walking, cycling, or taking public transportation, and 7 percent for saving energy or electricity at home.

Meanwhile, those aware of each solution who reported that their families are not engaging in the solutions are four percent for saving energy or electricity at home, six percent for walking, cycling, or taking public transportation, eight percent for reducing, reusing, repairing, and recycling, 11 percent for throwing away less food, and 13 percent for planting trees in the right places and protecting forests.

The Fourth Quarter 2022 SWS survey was conducted from Dec. 10 to 14, 2022, using face-to-face interviews of 1,200 adults, 18 years old and above.

The survey items reported here were non-commissioned. It was done on SWS's own initiative and released as a public service.



## The climate crisis is coming for your children

By Lara Williams

I DEARLY HOPE to have children of my own some day. What they do with their time on Earth is theirs to choose, but the type of world they'll inhabit will be determined by me and all of us — now — while they're still a figment of my imagination. It's a simple concept, but that doesn't keep it from becoming increasingly dire.

That seriousness was brought home to me by a graphic\* in the latest UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Synthesis Report. The illustration is one of the first in the document — an update of the warming stripes first concocted by Ed Hawkins, professor of climate science at the University of Reading.

The color bars are dramatic, moving from cool blue to deep purple; they portray the changes in global temperature since 1900. The newly tweaked version in the IPCC report version projects several scenarios out to the year 2100 based on what we might do about our global emissions.

The revision that's stuck in my head is the illustration with human silhouettes at the bottom of the graphic, courtesy of IPCC graphic officer Arlene Birt. It shows the lifespans of people born in 1950, 1980, and 2020 color-coded to their chronological place in the warming of the planet. Each generation has a completely different relationship to the Earth's crisis.

"The warming I have experienced up to present day is much larger than the warming my parents experienced up to the same

age," says Alex Ruane, a member of the IPCC core writing team and co-director of the climate impacts group at the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies. "And when you look at the same sequence of icons for the present-day generations, you can see that the warming is much steeper."

It also reveals just how much the decisions made today will have huge effects on the world of tomorrow. By the time a baby born in 2020 becomes a septuagenarian, the difference in the potential temperature change is larger even than the warming we have experienced up to the present day. In a scenario in which our emissions remain high, a 70-year-old in 2090 could be living on a planet that's 4°C warmer than pre-industrial levels. If we're successful in making deep, rapid and sustained cuts to our emissions,

the planet will be only about 1.5°C warmer. That's a difference of 2.5°C. The planet is currently 1.1°C hotter than the average between 1850 and 1900 — and that surge has already had substantial impacts on water availability, heat, and the health of both humans and animals.

The IPCC doesn't just highlight intergenerational climate injustice. It also focuses on injustice and the unequal suffering inflicted by global warming. Between 2010 and 2020, human mortality from floods, droughts, and storms was 15 times higher in highly vulnerable regions — typically developing countries without access to technology and other measures to mitigate and adapt to the rising temperatures. Global heating's adverse impacts will continue to disproportionately affect these populations.

The unjust thing? They've barely contributed to the climate crisis but are bearing the consequences.

Unless policies are more effective, the IPCC suggests we're on track for 3.2°C of warming by 2100. It's hard to say exactly what that world will look like. What we do know at this point doesn't sound good. One study suggests an increase in the chances of major heatwave across the world. It was around 5% between 1981 and 2010. If we get to 3°C by the turn of the next century, it will be 50%. Cities such as Amsterdam and Bangkok would likely disappear beneath rising seas, alongside practically all of the Maldives and the Seychelles. Billions of people in the most exposed areas would become climate refugees.

Ruane is keen to emphasize that we still have agency here. The future doesn't have to look like that

at all. But avoiding the nightmare scenarios will greatly depend on what we do in the next decade.

Dr. Hoesung Lee, chair of the IPCC, said in a press conference that the report's overall message was one of hope. There are feasible, effective and low-cost tools available to us right now that would enable us to meet Paris goal of a 1.5°C increase. But to do that, we'll have to slash emissions by 50% by 2030. It's technically possible, but it won't be easy, as my colleague David Pickling has laid out.\*\*

However, it's hard to keep hope alive when governments — including ones who claim they are committed to slashing emissions to net zero — are still approving new fossil fuel projects. According to the IPCC, existing carbon-heavy infrastructure already exceeds the remaining carbon budget for



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limiting warming to 1.5°C. Projects such as ConocoPhillips' Willow oil drilling project in Alaska and the newly approved coal mine in the UK are baffling — perhaps even criminal — in the face of all that we know about the harm they would inflict on generations yet to be born. Indeed, two lawsuits have already been filed against the Willow project — alleging the Biden administration broke federal law to approve it — and many expect to see a wave of stakeholders — especially children and marginalized groups — use the courts against governments and companies to fight for their future.

Governments, banks, and fossil fuel companies aren't ready for these lawsuits. So here's a suggestion to help them avoid litigation: Put an end to funding and subsidies for such projects and redirect the money towards climate action, paying special attention to places that currently lack the resources to decarbonize.

That is a no-brainer. And the bounty is immense. The IPCC report cites dozens of co-benefits including improved human health, increased agricultural productivity, gains in innovation and cost savings from avoiding the worst climate-related damage and catastrophes.

At the press conference, climate scientist Peter Thorne referenced the late author Douglas Adams, saying: "We are beyond the point that climate change can be 'somebody else's problem.' It's our problem, and it's time we start acting like the lives of our children are at stake. They are."

#### BLOGGERS OPINION

View the graphic here: *Figure SPM.1: AR6 Synthesis Report (open)* (<https://bit.ly/378rQV0>)

Now for the hard part: *Fixing our climate — BusinessWorld Online* (<https://bit.ly/Climale08-2223/>)



# South Cotabato tribal leaders laud CA's 'pro-mining' ruling

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA [@jlmayuga](#)

**A** LEADER of the Blaan tribe in South Cotabato on Thursday lauded a judicial ruling setting aside a provincial anti-mining ordinance that prohibits open-pit mining in Tampakan, South Cotabato.

"We are happy with this stand of the Court of Appeals [CA] on the issue," Indigenous People's mandatory representative to the Tampakan Municipal Council Domingo Collado said.

The CA ruling recognized the validity of the provincial ordinance that bans open-pit mining in any town in the province, but emphasized that it cannot be applied on large-scale mining operations allowed by Malacatang, Collado added.

The ruling will pave the way for the operation of Sagittarius Mines Inc. (SMI), whose copper and gold mining project in South Cotabato has been previously delayed by the open-pit mining ban method enacted by the Province of South Cotabato.

The ban, which has been in effect

since 2010, was eventually lifted in May last year.

A resolution from the CA dated August 22, 2022, stating that the South Cotabato Provincial Environmental Code that bans mining in the province cannot be applied to firms permitted by Malacatang, particularly SMI, has further paved the road for the reopening of the mining operation.

"It is clarified that the ban on open-pit mining does not apply to large-scale mining operations of the said province, particularly the Tampakan project," the CA said in its ruling.

Pro-mining tribal leaders and members released copies of the CA ruling to the media last Tuesday.

Dalena Samling, a popular tribal leader, was also quoted in the same



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statement as saying that they "have long yearned for the exploration of the copper deposits in Tampakan."

"It can improve the municipality via revenues and the costly corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects of the SMI that Malacnang had contracted to mine for copper in our homeland," Sauling said.

It was the B'laan tribal councils in South Cotabato and prominent members of local business communities that sought the position of the CA about the extent of the applicability of the provincial ordinance prohibiting open-pit mining in the province. Mining experts believe copper deposits in the B'laan's ancestral lands could reach as much as \$200 billion in the mineral-rich mountain municipality of Tampakan.

### 'No action from LGU'

THE provincial government has decided not to appeal the case, citing that the decision did not invalidate the ordinance banning open pit mining, it was learned. The provincial government, apparently, will adjust the ordinance to reflect the CA's decision that the ban on open-pit mining is only applicable to small-scale mining.

The anti-mining group Alyansa Tugil Mina (ATM) has expressed

dismay over the inaction of the Provincial Government of South Cotabato over the CA ruling exempting large-scale mining from the ban.

"We are extremely disappointed at the Court's decision, which virtually curtails local autonomy by modifying the applicability of the ban on open-pit mining. Yet, we are also deeply frustrated at the local government for keeping mum about the CA decision which was issued last August 22, 2022, it's seven months since the Court handed down its ruling but it is only now that we've heard of it," said Jaybee Garganera, ATM National Coordinator.

"Being party to the case, the local government must have certainly known about the decision. But why did they choose to be quiet? Why did they not inform the public about this, especially the advocates against mining in Tampakan? We feel deceived and betrayed," Rene Pamplona, ATM Chairperson and one of the local leaders opposing large-scale mining in Tampakan said for his part.

There are eleven (11) Mineral Production Sharing Agreements (MPSAs) and one (1) Financial or Technical Assistance Agreement (FTA) in South Cotabato.





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## Tampakan project not covered by open pit ban

BY GILBERT GORGONZO JR.

GENERAL SANTOS CITY – The Court of Appeals in Cagayan de Oro City has declared that the Tampakan Copper-Gold Project in South Cotabato is not covered by the existing open pit ban ordinance in the province.

In its recent ruling of the case filed by the B'laan Indigenous Cultural Communities, SouthCot Mining Corporation and Tampakan Mining Corporation against the provincial government of South Cotabato, the CA said that "Section 22, Ordinance No. 04, Series 2010 is hereby declared valid, but its application is limited to small-scale mining operations in the Province of South Cotabato only."



## Top 100 beaches: El Nido ranks 4th, Boracay 19th

By GHIO ONG

For beach lovers who are still undecided on where to go this summer, the ranking of two Philippine beaches among the "Top 100 beaches on Earth 2023" might help.

The *worldbeachguide.com* — a website based in England that rates beach spots around the world — placed in its list the Hidden Beach in El Nido, Palawan in fourth spot and Boracay's White Beach in 19th.

It described El Nido as "(comprising) around 50 beaches," including Hidden Beach, "set

among a series of small islands, towering marble cliffs, lush tropical vegetation, ancient caves and enchanting lagoons."

"Hidden Beach takes its name from the fact its soft pale sands are all but invisible to passing boats. Situated within a small cove guarded by sheer cliffs, this tropical idyll provides a fantastic contrast to streets that roar with motorbike engines," it wrote.

Visitors that avail themselves of El Nido's island-hopping tours can reach Hidden Beach by a "quick swim, some of it over corals, adding to the feeling of

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arriving somewhere truly special," it added.

As for Boracay's White Beach, the website said it "still has plenty of charm."

Although a number of tourists claimed Boracay has been "spoiled" because it is the country's most popular beach destination, the website simply disagreed.

The whole island was ordered closed to tourists in 2018 by former president Rodrigo Duterte, who described it then as

a cesspool due to its poor sewerage and overdevelopment.

Divided into three stations, visitors can enjoy various activities in Boracay like snorkeling, wind surfing, and watching the sunset by the shore filled with white powdery sand.

Koh Kradan in Thailand was declared tops among 100 beach destinations by *worldbeachguide.com*.

The municipal tourism offices of El Nido, Palawan and Malay in Aklan, which hosts Boracay, posted on their Facebook pages the recognition given by the website.



## Strong quake jolts Cagayan

A 5.6-magnitude earthquake struck off the northern coast of Cagayan at around 7:31 a.m. yesterday.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said the epicenter of the quake was recorded 18 kilometers west of Dalupuri island in Calayan.

Phivolcs said damage and aftershocks are expected from the quake.

The tremor was felt at Intensity 5, which is classified as strong, in Calayan.

It was felt at Intensity 4 or moderately strong in Bangui, Burgos and Pagudpud in Ilocos Norte and

Clateria and Santa Praxedes in Cagayan.

The shaking was felt at Intensity 3 in Luna, Apayao, Adams, Bacarra, Dumalneg, Pasuquin and San Nicolas in Ilocos Norte as well as in Abulug, Aparri, Pamplona, Peñablanca and Sanchez-Mira in Cagayan.

The quake was also felt in Kabugao, Pudtol and Santa Marcela in Apayao; Batac City, Laoag City, Sarrit and Vintar in Ilocos Norte, and Allacapan, Ballesteros, Buguey, Comalmaniugan, Lal-Lo, Santa Ana and Santa Teresita in Cagayan.

- Rorrina Cabrera