

25 March 2023 Saturday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

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**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**



## DENR to Pinoys: Join Earth Hour tonight

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) yesterday called on Filipinos to join the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)'s Earth Hour from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. today, as part of global efforts to protect the planet and fight

climate change.

The DENR also enjoined its regional and field offices, bureaus and attached agencies nationwide to switch off their lights for one hour.

An initiative of the WWF, Earth Hour is a global movement held annually, encour-

aging individuals, communities and businesses to turn off non-essential electrical lights for one hour on the last Saturday of March, as a symbol of commitment to the planet.

The one-hour lights off action significantly lowers

energy consumption, thus reducing carbon emission and harmful greenhouse gases, whose biggest source is electricity.

According to the DENR, regional offices have lined up other Earth Hour activities

Turn to Page 2

### DENR From Page 1

including posting infographics of the event, inviting high schools, universities and colleges to participate and for netizens to post their Earth Hour photos on the agency's Facebook pages with a short description of their experience.

"Aside from these, the DENR urged Filipinos to support WWF's invitation to go an extra mile and give an hour for Earth or to spend 60 minutes doing something or anything positive for Earth to raise awareness on the climate crisis," it added.

It said these include watching documentary or educational films on environmental issues, such as the WWF Entangled Series of three-minute videos on biodiversity loss, deep seabed mining, planet plastic, nature-based solution and other topics; listening to podcasts or talks of the WWF, British Broadcasting Corp. and TED Talks and joining Earth Hour events near them.

At the same time, the DENR reminded the public to properly manage their solid waste as it is also a source of greenhouse gases.

"Proper waste disposal and reducing, reusing and recycling

will cut down waste and pollution from homes, schools, offices and the manufacturing sector," it added.

The Philippines' Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) has committed to a projected reduction and avoidance of greenhouse gas emissions of 75 percent from 2020 to 2030 for the agriculture, transport, energy, waste, industry and forestry sectors, of which the last three are sectors from the DENR.

The NDC is the country's action plan to help achieve the goal of the Paris Agreement to limit the rise in global temperature to below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

### MM temperature rising

Meanwhile, temperatures in Metro Manila may soar to a sizzling 37.9 degrees next month over the dry season, according to state forecasters.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said the temperature max range in the National Capital Region will be around 35.9 to 37.9 degrees Celsius.

PAGASA forecasters said that temperatures could peak at 40 de-

grees Celsius in parts of Northern Luzon.

The actual heat index, or human discomfort index – the temperature felt by the body relative to high humidity – may be about two degrees higher.

PAGASA said that extreme caution should be taken in these temperature ranges.

The agency warned that high temperatures could have adverse effects on the body, such as fatigue, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

From March 1 to yesterday, the highest heat index recorded by PAGASA was 46 degrees Celsius in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro last March 17.

It also urged the public to conserve water, especially as there is a higher probability that El Niño could develop from July to September.

PAGASA said the easterlies are currently affecting the eastern sections of Southern Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao. Metro Manila and the rest of the country may see partly cloudy skies with isolated rainshowers due to the easterlies and localized thunderstorms.

— Bella Cariaso, Romina Cabrera, Rhodina Villanueva



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TITLE:

PAGE

March 25, 2023  
DATE



## Earth Hour: An 'hour of darkness' brings hope for Planet Earth

**L**ights out! That could be the most crippling predicament that residential consumers and businesses will have to wade through especially in the heat of the summer months.

But today, March 25, there will be a "moment of darkness" - but instead of triggering Filipinos to be hot under the collar, it will usher in hope for the future, especially in abating climate change risks and in viably preserving Planet Earth for the generations to come.

The spotlight will on the "Earth Hour," which calls on all citizens of the world to switch off their lights and electronic gadgets for one hour - from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. - and will embrace that as an opportunity for action as well as to ponder on the significant contributions they can make to concretize the goal of taming global warming for humanity's survival.

Framed under the theme "Biggest Hour for Earth," WWF-Philippines, the prime mover for this movement, is also advocating for the "Earth Hour Virtual Run 2023" from March 25-April 30 this year. It is aimed at sustaining the momentum reinforcing awareness about climate change and how every individual, community, and organization can take a stand for the planet's long-term health as well as on the bid for sustainable energy future.

In the country this year and onwards, the pervading scenario will be "tight power supply" and there could even be probabilities of rotational brownouts, hence, pressure abounds for all consumers to embrace energy efficiency and conservation (EE&C) for their lifestyle changes.

Energy Secretary Raphael P. M. Lotilla has been leading this track and whipping up the conversation on how avoiding wastage in electricity usage will be the country's saving grace against a threatening

full-blown energy crisis.

However, Filipinos still struggle on that journey not only in terms of appreciation and understanding; but more so in putting that into practice. Hence, that is a sphere where the government would still need to intensify its leadership call.

Beyond energy efficiency, other technology solutions are also dangled into the mainstream to underpin the country's energy transition agenda - primarily massive scale renewable energy (RE) installations and electric vehicles deployment that will ultimately bring the Philippines into its net zero carbon emissions pathway.

Carbon-neutrality, as anchored on the "net-zero pledges" of many corporations, financial institutions and various industry chains, has been accelerating initiatives on the private sector side to lay down their own decarbonization targets rather than wait for governments to concretize bold steps for us to meet the 1.5 degrees C limit on temperature rise so we can keep planet Earth a "liveable world" through generations.

As envisioned, financial reallocation to "green solutions" will not only require transformation and revolution in business approaches, rather, these could engender the birth and rise of new enterprises, such as on the sphere of digitalization and broader investments on cleaner energy technologies. That could create "green jobs" and opportunities for many people while the world trims overall carbon footprints.

Indeed, our devotion to the planet shall not just be confined to yearly participation in the "Earth Hour." Instead, it should be our "stress test" that will constantly remind us to advance commitments and solutions toward an energy-secure and environment-friendly future.



## Power supply fine, still note Earth Hour

By Joel E. Zurbano

THE government has asked local officials to join the Earth Hour celebration and encourage their constituents to switch off lights from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. tonight (Saturday) to send a strong and urgent message on the need for collective

action to address climate change.

This developed as the Department of Energy assured the public on Friday there would be no "red alert" warnings on the country's power supply for the entire year. Energy Undersecretary Rowena Guevara said only "yellow alerts" are expected to be raised in different parts of the country.

*Next page*

### Power...

From A1

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources urged Filipinos to observe "Earth Hour" on March 25 in support of the global efforts to protect the planet and fight climate change.

The DENR also enjoined its regional and field offices, bureaus, and attached agencies

nationwide to switch off the lights for this year's event, which carries the theme "The Biggest Hour for the Earth."

The Department of Health also encouraged Filipinos to join the rest of the world in observing Earth Hour on Saturday.

Started in Australia in 2007, the annual Earth Hour has become the world's biggest grassroots environmental movement spanning over 7,000 cities and

180 countries and territories.

This year's Earth Hour activities in the country will be held at Quezon City Circle, Quezon City.

The DOH, together with the World Wide Fund for Nature-Philippines (WWF-Philippines), said the annual event takes the initiative of generating awareness to help address the climate crisis and promote measures that help reduce energy consumption through the

one-hour switch-off.

Interior Secretary Benhur Abalos, as the Vice-chair for Disaster Preparedness of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, encouraged all provincial governors, city and municipal mayors, and village leaders to embark on Earth Hour activities that are aligned with the new global action plan for nature for the coming decade. *(See full story online at [manilastandard.net](http://manilastandard.net))*



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SERVICE

1/2

## Public urged: Conserve water

By BELLA CARIASO

As the government braces for the El Niño phenomenon later this year, the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) is urging the public to conserve water.

Sevillo David Jr., NWRB executive director, said conserving water may help prevent a repeat of the 2019 experience in which the water level in Luzon's Angat Dam dropped to as low as 116 meters.

"In 2019, few typhoons entered the country. As a result, we experienced the lowest level of Angat Dam of 116 meters in June, July in 2019. We want to prevent this from happening again," David said yesterday in a radio interview.

He added that agencies like the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) and the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) were already tasked to find other sources of water to minimize the impact of El Niño.

Turn to Page 4



2/2

## Public From Page 1

"It is better that this early, we manage and conserve our water supply (so that) in case the El Niño phenomenon will affect us, we are prepared and there is enough water to supply the needs of our people," David also said.

As of 6 a.m. yesterday, the level of the Angat Dam was at 204.3 meters, slightly lower than Thursday's 204.63 meters.

David noted that while 204 meters is higher than the 180-meter minimum operating level of the dam, the government and the people still need to make the necessary preparations, considering that the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) already warned that El Niño might be experienced in the country starting in June or July.

Angat Dam supplies more than 90 percent of Metro Manila's potable water needs and provides for the irrigation needs of 25,000 hectares of farmlands in Bulacan and Pampanga.

"As of now, the MWSS and NIA are implementing the necessary mitigating measures and contingency plans like deep wells and other sources of water, aside from the Angat Dam, including the Laguna Lake," David said. He added that compared to 2019, the country is more prepared for El Niño this year.

"We have developed the Cardona Treatment Plant, it will help minimize the impact of El Niño. We also have the Putatan Water Treatment. These will help augment our water requirement," he pointed out.

According to David, cloud seeding operations will be the last option of the government to increase the water level of Angat Dam.

"We are coordinating with PAGASA and MWSS in the cloud seeding operation. Farmers can also help by conserving water to ensure that the level of Angat Dam will not reach its critical level," he said.

Meanwhile, a Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) survey showed that almost all Filipino families in the country had access to improved source of drinking water last year.

In its 2022 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS), it appeared that 97.6 percent of families in the country had an improved source of drinking water last year, up slightly from 97.3 percent in 2020.

The PSA said more than half or 54.3 percent of these households sourced their drinking water from refilling stations. Piped water in dwellings was another common source of drinking water at 17.2 percent.

Of the families covered by the survey,

93.2 percent reported there was always sufficient drinking water while 4.9 percent said they experienced not having enough supply at least once as it was not available from source.

The PSA said 84 percent of families did not treat the water to ensure it is safe to drink.

Among the different regions, the National Capital Region and Central Luzon had the highest percentage of families with access to basic service level of drinking water with 99.3 percent each.

The Cagayan Valley and Ilocos regions came in next with 99.1 percent each.

Those with the least access to basic service level of drinking water were the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) at 87.8 percent, Bicol region at 90.1 percent and Zamboanga peninsula at 90.2 percent.

When it comes to sanitation, the PSA said about 84 percent of the families had basic sanitation service level or used an improved sanitation facility that is not shared with another household last year, up from 80.4 percent in 2020.

Those which had a limited service level or used an improved sanitation facility shared with two or more households was at 10.2 percent.

Families, which had an unimproved service level or use of pit latrines, without a slab or platform, were at 2.7 percent, while 2.6 percent had no sanitation facility.

Regions with the highest percentage of families with basic service sanitation facilities were Central Luzon (92.5 percent), Calabarzon (90.4 percent) and Cagayan Valley (89.8 percent). Those with the lowest percentage of families with basic service sanitation facilities were BARMM (51.6 percent), Soccsksargen (73.8 percent) and Central Visayas (76.3 percent).

The PSA said 92.2 percent of families had a handwashing facility last year, up from 90.6 percent in 2020.

It said 70.4 percent of families have a fixed facility with sink or tap in the dwelling last year, while 11.2 percent used a fixed facility with sink or tap in the yard and 10.6 percent used a mobile object like a bucket or jug or kettle.

Calabarzon and Western Visayas had the highest percentage of families with access to basic service handwashing facilities at 97.7 percent each, followed by Central Luzon at 96.1 percent.

On the other hand, regions with the lowest percentage of families with basic handwashing facilities were BARMM (75.7 percent), Eastern Visayas (81.2 percent) and Soccsksargen (81.4 percent).

- With Louella Desiderio



TITLE:

PAGE 44

March 25, 2001  
DATE

# Editorial

## Water is not just a seasonal crisis

IT is encouraging that the impending El Niño-driven seasonal water crisis is being acknowledged at the highest levels of government, with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. making the unexpected but very welcome decision to form an Office of Water Management via an executive order earlier this week. From our perspective, this was a necessary intervention on the part of the President to correct the failure of Congress to act on the pending Department of Water bill, and we agree with the President's view that the Office of Water Management is a stopgap measure.

Unfortunately, some reactions from the Senate to the announcement from Malacañang seemed to indicate that lawmakers consider the problem of inefficient and unnecessarily complicated water management solved with the creation of the new office. If this is truly the Senate's perspective, it is a mistake, because the water crisis we are expecting in the upcoming dry season will not be a temporary problem.

On the eve of the UN Water Summit held March 22 to 24 in New York, the Global Commission on the Economics of Water (GCEW) published an alarming report, which revealed that fresh water demand globally will exceed supply by 40 percent by the year 2030. Obviously, some parts of the world are facing a more dire future than others, but as even the President noted, the Philippines contends with constrained water supplies even in periods of normal weather conditions, which is a great irony for a country surrounded by seas.

*The scientific evidence is that we have a water crisis. We are misusing water, polluting water and changing the whole global hydrological cycle, through what we are doing to the climate. It's a triple crisis.*

The GCEW report identifies several broad causes for the rapid depletion of fresh water supplies. The two largest of these, the report explains, are unsustainable agricultural use of water driven by government subsidies as well as overuse of water resources by the mining industry. Johan Rockstrom, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and co-chairman of the GCEW, and a lead author of the report, said in a media interview that the world's neglect of water resources was leading to disaster. "The scientific evidence is that we have a water crisis. We are misusing water, polluting water and changing the whole global hydrological cycle, through what we are doing to the climate. It's a triple crisis."

All of which means that the impending summer water crisis is more likely to become a way of life rather than an occasional or seasonal problem. Fortunately, the report indicates that the Philippines has a couple of advantages that will provide at least a bit of time to develop solutions.

First, as an archipelago, the country is less affected by other countries' water use; one example is the near-constant friction experienced among our neighbors along the Mekong River. About half of continental countries' fresh water supply can be traced to evaporation from neighboring countries, but that is not a significant factor here. Second, unlike a number of other countries, the Philippines has not yet reached a point where demand exceeds potential supply of water, although much of that water may be difficult to access. Water demand in the Philippines as of 2019 was just under 75 percent of potential supply, which compares favorably, for what it's worth, with countries such as South Korea and India, where demand is nearly 100 percent of supply, and the Gulf States, where water demand exceeds supply by between 10 and 38 times.

Those advantages are only useful if the country acts now, however, before accessible water supplies are overwhelmed by demand from a growing economy and population. While the details of the scope and mission of the new Office of Water Management are yet to be disclosed, the GCEW report offers some pointers on which direction it should take. Among its recommendations are reconfiguring and improving water management — something the Department of Water would do, if Congress ever sees fit to pass the measure — imposing stricter water conservation and pollution control standards, and expanding investment in water supply and management infrastructure through direct government spending as well as public-private partnerships.



## South Korea to help in oil spill response; US underwater robot eyed to drain leaking fuel

By MARTIN SADDONGDONG

Republic of Korea Coast Guard (KCG) personnel are expected to arrive in Manila on March 27 to help in the ongoing oil spill operations in Oriental Mindoro, while another remotely operated vehicle (ROV) or underwater robot from the United

States is being considered by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) to drain the leaking fuel from the sunken vessel.

Rear Admiral Armando Balilo, PCG spokesperson, said technical experts from the KCG will support the PCG's oil spill containment efforts while the Korean gov-

ernment also committed to provide response equipment such as 20 tons of sorbet pads and snares; 1,000 meters of flotation curtain boom; and 2,000 sets of personal protective equipment (PPEs).

"Sa Monday, darating na yung South Korean experts sa headquarters ng Philippine Coast Guard. Ganoon din, mag-evaluate sila at hopefully they can offer 'yung final solution ng ROV sa PCG at sa pamahalaan para makuha na natin 'yung langis at matapos na ang problema (The South Korean experts will arrive on Monday at the PCG headquarters. They will also conduct an evaluation and hopefully they can offer the final solution on ROV to the PCG and the government so we can finally retrieve the oil and end this problem)," Balilo said in a "Balitaan sa Tinapayan" forum in Manila on Friday, March 24.

Aside from this, Balilo said the US Coast Guard discussed with them the availability of an ROV from the US Marines which is capable of funneling the leaking fuel from MT Princess Empress. He said the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) is also finding an ROV with the same capability.

ROV Hakuyo, the underwater robot brought in by Japanese dynamic positioning vessel (DPS) Shin Nishi Maru that was contracted by MT Princess Empress owner RDC Reield

Marine Services, Inc., has no capability to drain the fuel and seal the leaks since it is only meant to survey the vessel, Balilo said.

"Naghahanap pa tayo ng ROV na makakatanggal doon sa langis. Nandoon na tayo sa phase na nakuhanan na natin ng image, mayroon na tayong idea kung anong mga nagli-leak na mga tangke. Ang sa atin ngayon, kung paano siya mapipigilan (We are still looking for an ROV which could extract the oil. We are already at a phase where we took images, we have an idea where the leaking tanks are. What we are now concerned is how we can stop [the leaks])," he continued. "Kailangan natin ngayon isang ROV pa at mayroong mga nag-o-offer sa amin like 'yung NDRRMC mayroon na silang tinitignan na pwedeng magdala dito. Kami sa coast guard, nakilapag-usap kami sa US—kasi tapos na ang assessment nila—na may makuhang ROV from US Marines na kayang sumispsip ng langis (We need another ROV and we are receiving offers, like the NDRRMC is looking at one which they can bring here. For us in the coast guard, the US is talking to us—since they have already completed their assessment—and they can get an ROV from the US Marines which can drain the fuel)," he added. Experts from the US Coast Guard Pacific Strike Team arrived in the country earlier this week to assist the PCG in the oil spill response.

But the PCG official admitted they don't know how long it would take before they could find the ROV that can bag the oil, seal the leaks, and patch the cracks on MT Princess Empress. It was reported that the sunken oil tanker sustained 23 cracks on the ship's surface which caused the cargo oil to leak. The vessel was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil when it sank off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28.

"Hindi ko masagot pero (I cannot answer that but) we are racing against time," Balilo said when asked about the timeline for the acquisition of the ROV.

He explained that until the upgraded ROV is acquired, the PCG could only do so much like cleaning up the leaking fuel: "Ang gagawa labat eh 'yung ROV—'yung bagging, sealing, and patching. Sila lang makakapunta sa ilalim, eh (The ROV is the only one that can do everything— bagging, sealing, and patching. It's the only one that can go underwater)."

### Impact on environment, tourism

Meanwhile, the traces of oil spill monitored in the coastal waters of Verde Island in Batangas City have been cleaned up, according to Balilo. The Verde Island Passage, a strait which separates Mindoro and Luzon islands, is considered the "Center of the Center of Marine Shorefish





FILE:

PAGE

2/2

03-26-23

DATE

## South Korea to help in oil spill response; US underwater robot eyed to drain leaking fuel

Biodiversity" due to its rich marine resources.

"Around 300 meters lang 'yung nakuhang langis. Very minimal siya (Around 300 meters of oil were collected. It's very minimal)," he added.

Balilo also allayed the concerns of Batangas 2nd District Rep. Gerville Luistro that residents in Bauan, Lobo, Mabini, San Luis, San Pascual, and Tingloy might be affected by the oil leakage, endangering their primary source of livelihood such as fishing and tourism like the famed beaches which are expected to be center of attraction especially as the summer season officially starts.

At present, there is no ban on leisure activities and fishing expeditions in Batangas, Balilo said.

"Maliban sa directly affected ng oil spill halimbawa, Polo and Naujan (Oriental Mindoro), siguro the rest of the area ng Mindoro at Batangas ay safe pa po na paliguan. Kahit po 'yung Semirara (Caluyan, Antique) at northern Palawan, wala pong problema at pwedeng dalawin ng turista at i-enjoy ang ganda ng lugar (Except for those directly affected by oil spill such as Polo and Naujan, maybe the rest of Mindoro and Batangas are safe for leisure activities. There's also no problem in Semirara and northern Palawan, and these may be visited by tourists to enjoy the beauty of these destinations)," Balilo noted.

"Hangga't wala pong announcement at wala pong matibay na batayan, i-o-open lang natin 'yung leisure activities lalo sa Mabini dahil spot 'yan (As long as there is no announcement and strong basis [for a

ban], we will open the leisure activities, especially in Mabini because it's a spot)," he said.

### Oil spill-affected fisherfolk to train as citizen scientists

As this developed, the United States will be supporting Filipino fisherfolk whose livelihood has been affected by the oil spill.

The US Embassy in Manila said Friday that the US Agency for International Development (USAID) will extend \$10 million worth of assistance for the initiative.

The fund, according to USAID Philippines Mission Director Ryan Washburn, will be used to train fisherfolk displaced by the fishing ban so they can deploy as citizen scientists to conduct coastal habitat assessments in Oriental Mindoro.

Through its partnership with the ABS-CBN Foundation, Inc., USAID will also assess and monitor the impact of the oil spill on the coastal communities of Verde Island Passage.

In extending assistance, Washburn said, many communities in the province depend on the tourism and fisheries industries for their livelihoods and the US knows that the oil spill is an even bigger crisis.

"As your enduring friend, partner, and ally, the United States remains committed to support your journey to recovery, and to continue our partnership toward the protection and conservation of this region's rich coastal and marine resources," he said. (With a report from Joseph Pedrajas)



PAGE



UPPER  
LOWER



PAGE 1  
STORY



BANNER  
STORY



EDITORIAL



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03-25-23

TITLE

PAGE

DATE

## Korean coast guard joining oil spill cleanup

By ROBERTZON RAMIREZ

A Korean Coast Guard team will arrive in the Philippines on Monday to help in ongoing efforts to contain the massive oil spill from the sunken motor tanker in waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

At the same time, the United States government announced an additional P10-million aid to support oil spill management and environmental assessment amid the sinking of the *MT Princess Empress*.

"On Monday, the

Turn to Page 4

## Korean From Page 1

South Korean experts will arrive at the headquarters of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), Rear Admiral Armand Balilo, PCG spokesman, told reporters at a forum yesterday.

"They will make an evaluation and, hopefully, they could also offer a final solution and an ROV (remotely operated vehicle) to end this problem," Balilo, speaking in Filipino, added.

In a statement, the PCG said the Korean government has also committed to providing oil spill response equipment, including 20 tons of sorbet pads and snares, 1,000 meters of solid flotation curtain boom and 2,000 sets of personal protective equipment.

Balilo said the Philippine government is now heading to the second level of the oil spill response operations, which is to cover the 23 oil-leaking areas of the sunken *Princess Empress* that can only be done through another ROV.

He explained that the ROV from Japan was used to locate the sunken tanker, but is not capable of patching the oil-leaking areas as it was designed only for conducting surveys.

Meanwhile, the captain and crew of the *Princess Empress* appeared yesterday before the National Bureau of Investigation in Manila for questioning about the sinking.

They were interviewed and their statements taken as they are considered "persons of interest" in the ongoing investigation.

## P10 M aid from US

Through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the US government is providing an additional P10 million (\$183,700) worth of assistance to the provincial government of Oriental Mindoro in response to the oil slick.

In a visit to Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro on Thursday, USAID Philippines mission director Ryan Washburn announced that the additional support will be used to train fisherfolk displaced by the fishing ban so they can deploy as citizen scientists to conduct coastal habitat assessments in the province.

Through its partnership with the ABS-CBN Foundation, USAID will also assess and monitor the impact of the oil spill on the coastal communities in Verde Island Passage.

Washburn handed over the first batch of personal protective equipment, hygiene kits and spill cleaning supplies to Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerlito Dolor and observed ongoing cleanup and assessment activities in the municipality of Pola. Earlier this month, through its partnership with the World Food Program, USAID supported the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in transporting 20,000 food packs for families affected by the oil spill.

The US government is actively assisting the response to the oil spill with a team of experts from the US Coast Guard and the US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration arriving in Oriental

Mindoro earlier this week to assist in assessing affected areas and providing subject matter expertise on effective methods to contain and clean up the spill.

## Divers needed

Yesterday, Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla requested the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) to send divers to assist in measuring the rate of oil spillage from the sunken vessel.

"We want divers to come down to be able to calculate the rate of spillage to the ocean to know how much oil is pouring out of the tanker, and we asked the OCD to mobilize some of the divers of the Armed Forces," Remulla told reporters.

He also revealed that the government has hired a consultant to calculate the remaining amount of oil in the vessel in a more efficient manner.

## No CPC, no sail

Meanwhile, the PCG will strictly implement a "no CPC, no sail" policy, which means that sea transportation systems will be required to present their updated certificate of public convenience (CPC) before being allowed to sail.

Balilo said this move on the part of the PCG is aimed at avoiding the same indiscretion that allowed *MT Princess Empress* to set out to sea without the proper documentation that guarantees a vessel is fit to sail.

The Maritime Industry Authority had said that the CPC issued to *Princess Empress* was not authentic. - Michael Punongbayan, Neil Jayson Scervallos, Bella Cariaso, Paolo Romero



STRATEGIC  
COMMUNICATION  
AND  
INITIATIVES  
SERVICE

CG  
PAGE

UPPER  
LOWER

PAGE 1  
STORY

BANNER  
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

03 25 23

TITLE:

PAGE:

DATE:

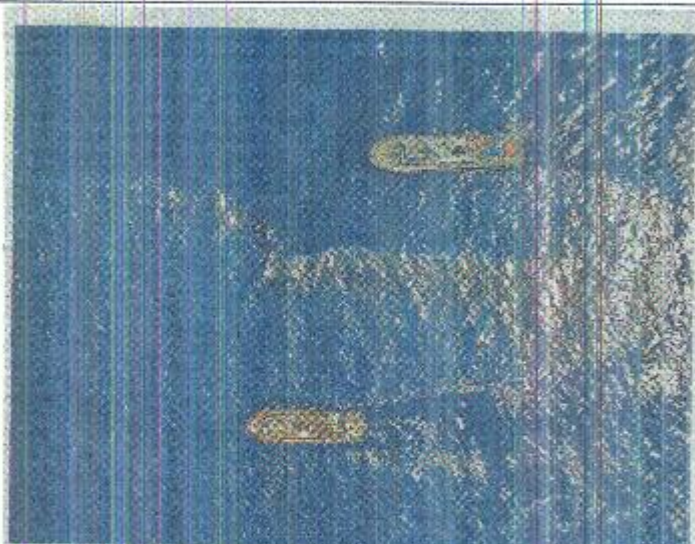


PHOTO COURTESY OF MALAYAN TOWAGE AND SALVAGE CORP/PCG

**SoKor helps in Mindoro spill** South Korea is now assisting the Philippine Coast Guard's oil spill cleanup in Oriental Mindoro by sending experts and equipment. "the first time Korea has provided assistance for the prevention of marine pollution," the Korean embassy said.



TITLE:

PAGE:

DATE:

## DOJ eyes divers to rate oil spill, PCG says too risky

By Rey E. Requejo and  
Macon Ramos-Araneta

JUSTICE Secretary Crispin Remulla has asked the Office of Civil Defense to mobilize divers to the site of the MI

Princess Empress to help measure the rate of spillage of oil from the sunken tanker and prevent it from spreading to other areas in the country.

"We want divers to come down to be able to calculate the rate of spillage to the ocean to know how much oil is

pouring out of the tanker. And we asked the OCD to mobilize some of the divers to the Armed Forces," Remulla said in an ambush interview.

However, in a television interview, the Philippine Coast Guard said diving 400 meters below sea level, where the

sunken tanker is off the coast of Oriental Mindoro, is very dangerous for any diver and may result in their death.

"It's highly not recommended. That's why we have an ROV (remotely operated vehicle to look for the ship). In the very

Next page

DOJ...  
from A1

beginning, if it could be dived by a person, we would have done it already. But this depth is really different," Commodore Geronimo Tuvilla, Incident Commander of Oil Spill Response Mindoro, told ABS-CBN News.

Most technical or expert divers can dive safely down to 100 meters (328 feet) but would still need special equipment to do so, the ABS-CBN report added.

Still, Remulla said the government has also hired a consultant to calculate how much oil, if any, is still left from the 900,000 liters of industrial fuel the tanker carried before sinking.

The Department of Justice chief said this was discussed with Defense Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr. during the meeting Thursday of the Oil Spill Inter-Agency Committee.

A group of fishermen in Oriental

Mindoro, the Samahang Mandaragat ng Baniwad, want to sue the owner of the MT Princess Empress for the damage the tanker caused to their livelihood, their president Bernie Senorin said in a TV interview.

Meanwhile, the South Korean government has dispatched its coast guard to help in the cleanup of the oil spill off Naujan town.

"This is the first time Korea has provided assistance for the prevention of marine pollution, and Korea highly values the importance of restoring areas affected by environmental disasters and accidents," the Korean Embassy in Manila said in a Facebook post on Thursday.

The Korean government would also give 20 tons of sorbet pads and snares, 1,000 meters of solid flotation curtain boom, and 2,000 sets of personal protective equipment (PPE) to the Philippines.

The PCG said the Korean government would also provide technical experts.

MI Princess Empress was carrying about 900,000 liters of industrial fuel oil when it sank due to strong waves on Feb. 28. All 20 people on board were rescued.

As of Thursday, a total of 163,498 people or 34,553 families in Mimaropa and Western Visayas have been 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, it added.

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

Senate President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) reached out to communities affected by the massive oil spill.

In cooperation with the local government of Oriental Mindoro, Legarda's office and the DSWD provided P2,000 worth of aid under the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations (AICS) program to 500 fishermen and distributed

2,000 food packs to the affected family in the municipality of Pola.

Aside from Pola, the municipalities Naujan, Bongabong, Pinamaleyan, Rox Gloria, Bansud, Mansalay, Bulatao, and Calapan are also affected by the oil spill as identified by the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO) of Oriental Mindoro.

Legarda also met with DSW Secretary Rex Gatchalian to discuss other assistance needed.

On March 10, Legarda called on the concerned Senate committee, with the cooperation of all government agencies to immediately conduct an inquiry into the environmental, health, and tourism impact of the oil spill.

The PCG, meanwhile, has sought the assistance of the International Pollution Compensation Funds (IOPC) to boost the country's efforts in cleaning up the oil spill off Naujan town in Oriental Mindoro. (See full story online at [manilastandard.net](http://manilastandard.net))



# Drive to save Verde Island



MINDORO

## OIL SPILL A LESSON AT PRESERVING NATURE, SAYS MARITIME GROUP

The oil spill could reach the Verde Island Passage by the end of the week due to the eastern winds, based on projections from 17 to 26 March.

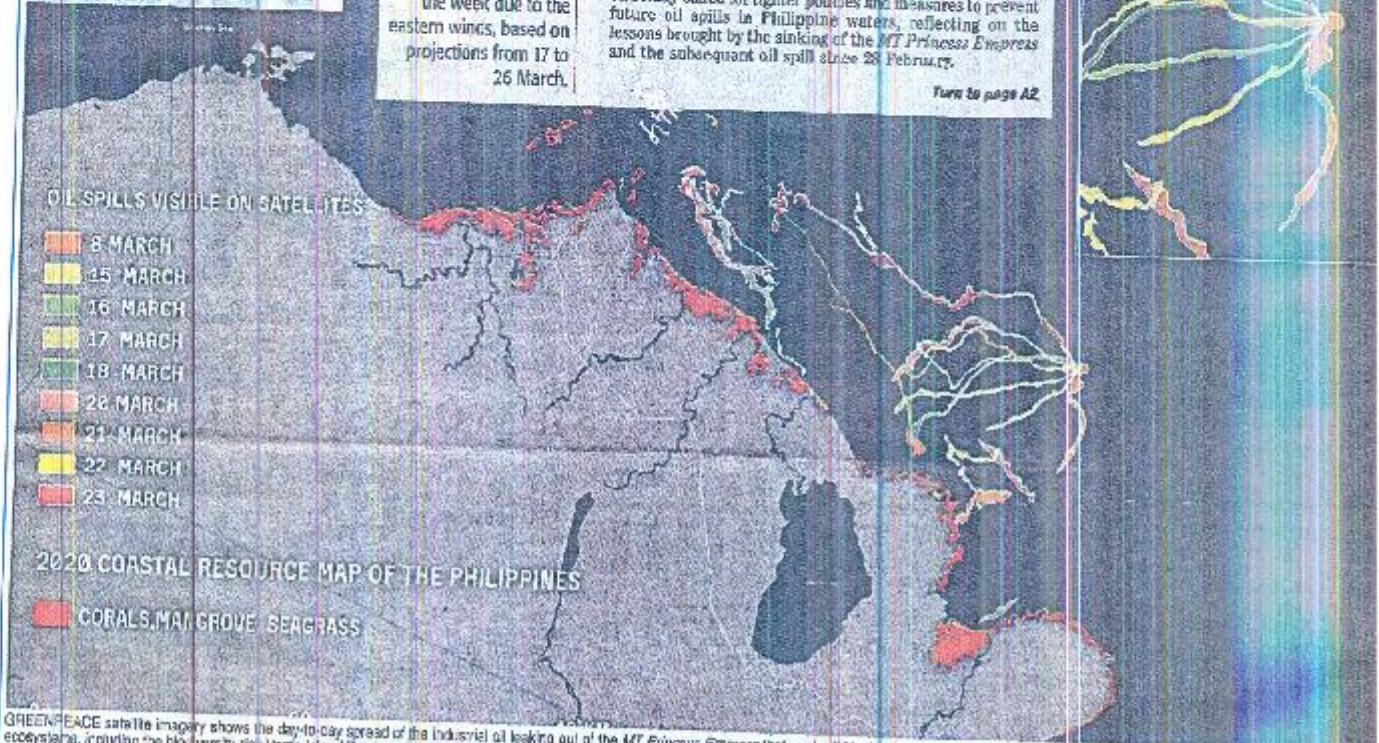
BY DAN NAGARRO, ALVIN MURCIA AND RAFFY AGENE

Catholic seafarers organization Stella Maris Philippines on Friday called for tighter policies and measures to prevent future oil spills in Philippine waters, reflecting on the lessons brought by the sinking of the *MT Princess Empress* and the subsequent oil spill since 28 February.

Turn to page A2



SHIPWRECK LOCATION



GREENPEACE satellite imagery shows the day-to-day spread of the industrial oil leaking out of the *MT Princess Empress* that sank off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on 28 February. Red areas show the location of vulnerable ecosystems, including the biodiversity-rich Verde Island Passage (top, left). Greenpeace and the Philippine government must seek accountability from the companies involved, especially the cargo's owner, and they must pay for damage to the environment and for life disruption in the lives of local residents.

From page 1

This developed as the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute on Wednesday reported a possible oil slick on ocean waters off Oriental Mindoro, citing a Tuesday report by the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association.

UP-MSI said the oil slick spotted on Tuesday at 10:11 in the morning measured around 37.84 square kilometers which, they said, is roughly the size of Las Piñas City.

UP-MSI said the oil spill could reach the Verde Island Passage by

the end of the week due to eastern winds, based on projections from 17 to 26 March.

Experts fear the oil spill could affect the rich biodiversity of the Verde Island Passage. Conservation International said that food resources and livelihood in the strait serve two million people, and it is a known shipping route.

Caritas Philippines on Thursday announced it has collected P1.56 million in donations to aid communities that benefit from the biodiversity of the Verde Island Passage.

"The spill's immediate aftermath

concerns not only human health risks but also damage to deep sea corals, animals, and potentially other ecosystems that are unseen from the surface. Additionally, the losses and disruption in commercial fisheries will result in an economic slump," Stella Maris promoter and Balanga Bishop Ruperto Cruz Santos said in a statement.

### Stricter guidelines

The group urged authorities to implement stricter guidelines for maritime and shipping companies, under the joint responsibility of the government and private firms, as



TITLE:

Drive to save Verde Island.

PAGE

28

well as support for local fishermen, including those whose livelihood have been impacted by the oil spill.

It also called for policies to aid in the protection of the country's marine ecosystem.

"For the time being, programs can be implemented to train the fishermen in acquiring new skills that they can use to earn a living until conditions are safe for them to go back to fishing. Also, resources should be provided by which they will have access to any possible aid they can avail of," Santos said.

"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 to ramp up cleanup efforts and prevent the oil from spreading further," the group said.

However, given the change in wind pattern from the westerlies to the easterlies, or winds coming from the east, UP-MSI said the oil could be blown in the direction of the Verde Island Passage.

In a related development, Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla yesterday asked the Office of Civil Defense to mobilize its divers to measure the rate of oil spillage from the sunken *MT Princess Empress*.

Remulla said, "We want divers to come down to be able to calculate the rate of spillage to know how much oil is pouring out of the tanker. And we are asking the OCD to mobilize some of the divers to the Armed Forces."

The DoJ chief said the government has also hired a consultant to calculate how much, if any, oil is still left in the tanker.

The use of OCD divers was part of the discussion of Remulla with Defense Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr. during the Thursday meeting of the oil spill inter-agency committee.

On 28 February, the *MT Princess Empress* sank off Najuan, Oriental Mindoro while carrying 900,000

liters of industrial oil, affecting almost 100,000 residents of the province.

The Maritime Industry Authority has issued a cease and desist order against the company that owns the tanker while the investigation is ongoing.

Applications for compensation for affected residents, meanwhile, will begin on Monday. The funds will come from the Protection and Indemnity, or P&I, Club, a mutual insurance association that provides risk pooling for its members, which are ship owners, operators and charterers.

Affected residents must bring documentation to prove their losses. A temporary office will be set up at the Oriental Mindoro provincial capitol building in Calapan. Mobile caravans will also be going around to affected areas to collect residents' claims.

Meanwhile, Maritime Industry Authority spokesperson Atty. Sharon Aledo said the Marina oil pollution management fund was released on Thursday on the request of the PCG.

Aledo said P33 million was released, part of the roughly P70 million OPMF revolving fund established under the Oil Pollution Compensation Act of 2007. It comprises contributions from owners and operators of tankers and barges hauling oil and other petroleum products in Philippine waterways and coastwise shipping routes.

She said the fund will be spent on equipment and other supplies, such as personal protective equipment.

Also on Friday, the Embassy of the Republic of Korea said the Korean Coast Guard was on its way to support the PCG in the ongoing oil spill response operations in Oriental Mindoro.

@tribunephil\_dbn @tribunephil\_raf



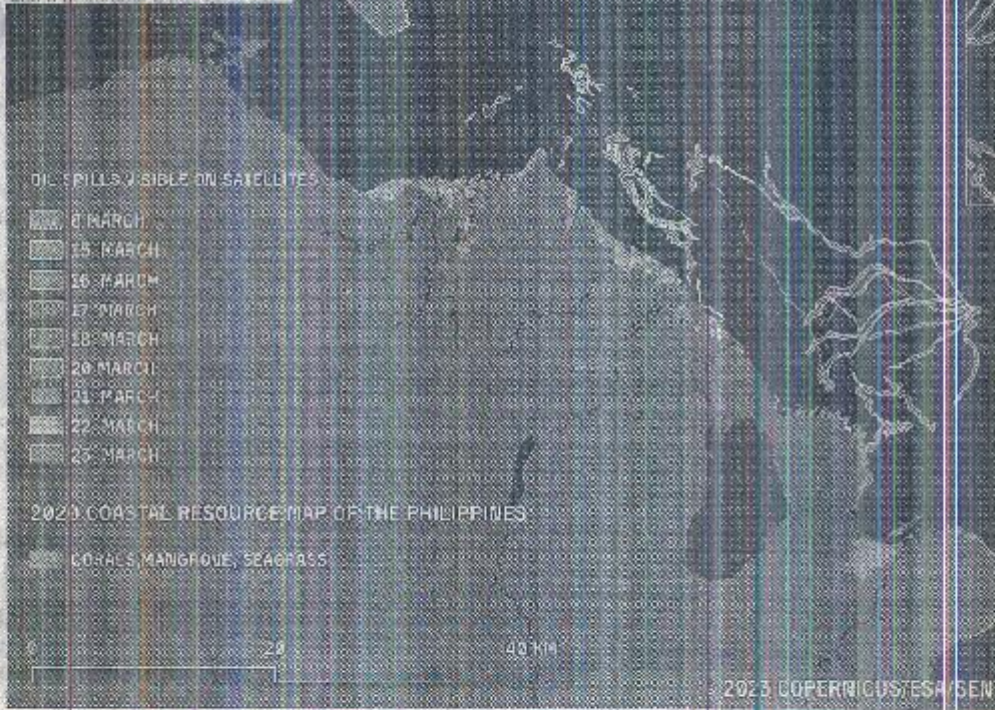
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## MINDORO OIL SPILL UPDATE. A

Greenpeace satellite photo indicating an update of the massive oil spill in Oriental Mindoro shows the day-to-day movement of the oil slick that endangers the province's coastal ecosystem, including the biodiversity-rich Verde Island between Mindoro and Batangas provinces.





DUE TO OIL SPILL

## 23 CALAPAN VILLAGES PLACED UNDER STATE OF CALAMITY

**By Madonna T. Virola  
and Kathleen de Villa**  
@Team\_Inquirer

CITY OF CALAPAN—Twenty-three coastal villages in this city were placed under a state of calamity after the oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress reached the locality last week, authorities said on

Friday. Lawyer Reymund Al Ussam, the city administrator, said the declaration was contained in a city council resolution passed on Wednesday following the request of Mayor Malou Morillo.

"The declaration of a state of calamity is intended to effectively respond to the economic and ecological effects of the di-

saster," Ussam said during the turnover of aid from donors at the provincial capitol.

According to the resolution, the declaration covered the coastal villages of Balite, Baruyan, Calero, Canubing I, Gutad, Ibaba East, Ibaba West, Lazareto, Mahal na Pangalan, Maidlang, Masipit, Nag-Iba I, Nag-Iba II, Navotas, Pachoca,

Parang, Salong, San Antonio, Silonay, Suqui, Tawagan, Tibag and Wawa.

Calapan, which has 62 villages, is situated some 69 kilometers from the waters of Oriental Mindoro's Naujan town, where the tanker was first reported to have sunk on Feb. 28.

On Tuesday, the Philippine Coast Guard said the vessel was

found at a depth of 389.1 meters and 13.89 kilometers northeast of Balingawan Point in Oriental Mindoro's Pola town, which is some 1.2 kilometers away from the first reported in Naujan.

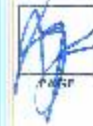
The tanker was heading to Iloilo province from Limay town in Bataan province and was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel when it encoun-

tered engine trouble and capsized.

Ussam said the UP Marine Science Institute accurately predicted the period when the oil spill would reach the shores of Calapan, which was March 16.

Traces of an oil slick were first spotted along the shorelines of Barangays Navotas and Maidlang, he added. 032





# Balanga, Baliuag bay cleanup recognized

BY MAR SUPNAD

The Department of the Interior and Local Government has recognized the efforts of the local government units of Balanga, Bataan and Baliuag, Bulacan in cleaning up Manila Bay and its neighboring bodies of water.

The DILG named Balanga and Baliuag as top national performers of the Manila Bayani Awards and Incentives for the year 2022.

Balanga under Mayor Francis Garcia, in particular, was recognized for having one of the cleanest coastal areas, if not the cleanest.

At least 90 LGUs are participating in efforts to restore the water quality of Manila Bay in accordance with the Writ of Continuing Mandamus issued by the Supreme Court.

DILG Regional Director Anthony Nuyda credited all the participating LGUs in cleaning up Manila Bay and its tributaries within their jurisdictions.

"With their implementation of the Manila Bay program, many LGUs in the region are awarded during the yearly assessment," Nuyda said.

"The implementation is efficient, and hopefully, with the efforts of everyone not only in Central Luzon but also

in the National Capital Region and CALABARZON, we will be able to clean up the waters of Manila Bay," he added.

All the LGUs in Central Luzon have had their 10-year solid waste management plan approved.

"We all know that one of the main causes of the pollution of the bay is our solid wastes that are not properly managed," he said.

At the same time, Nuyda said liquid wastes are also serving as Manila Bay pollutants, thus the need to filter septage before they are made to go into the bay.

"We are now in the process of planning how to implement their (wastewater) projects and plans based on their ordinances," he added.

Local government officials are also continuously doing relocation programs for informal settler families, the official said. DILG vowed to continue assisting LGUs in the monitoring and implementation of their projects for the clean-up program.

The Supreme Court mandamus directs 13 government agencies to clean up, rehabilitate, and preserve Manila Bay to make them fit for swimming, skin-diving, and other forms of contact recreation.

At least 90 LGUs are participating in efforts to restore the water quality of Manila Bay in accordance with the Writ of Continuing Mandamus issued by the Supreme Court.



*Comment*

# Aid must be inclusive

**“**  
*The insurer's presentation did little to ease the trepidation of the thousands of mainly coastline residents whose livelihoods were displaced.*

At long last, an individual appeared in public to address the need to compensate those affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro who ironically was neither the owner of the ill-fated tanker *MT Princess Empress* nor the charterer, San Miguel Corp.

Instead, the lawyer of the insurer, P&I Club, held a press briefing, saying claims will be processed starting 27 March if documents detailing losses from the catastrophe will be presented.

It is hoped that the insurer will not require ridiculously huge volumes of documents since those who are suffering from the tragedy are mostly fishermen and townsfolk who are not familiar with legal papers.

Leaders of fishermen's groups from Calapan, Pola, Naujan, Pinamalayan, Bongabong, Bulalacao, Mandalay, Roxas, Bansud and Gloria in Oriental Mindoro are demanding quick reparation.

“The oil spill stole the source of livelihood of us fishermen,” a leader of the sectoral groups said.

The compensation that the groups are asking for is at least P500 a day for each fisherman during the duration of the disruption of their trade.

As bunker oil continues to seep out of the sunken ship, the economic displacement grows which will make it longer for the communities to recover.

“We are frightened that the situation may become a choice of life or death for us,” according to the spokesperson of the groups.

The fisherfolk groups said the situation must be an eye-opener to the many dangers faced by life-giving seas like the Verde Island Passage and must result in greater measures for protection.

As of the latest report, the floating sludge has reached the area that is called the Amazon of the Oceans.

Thus, the financial aid will likely be selective and will come from risk coverage that is reported to be worth \$1 billion.

It is loathsome to consider that it is the members of the devastated communities who will bear the burden of proof for their predicament.

The insurer's presentation did little to ease the trepidation of the thousands of mainly coastline residents whose livelihoods were displaced.



**“**  
*Commissioner Ernesto Maceda, in a speech, recalled that Philippine jurisprudence is rich with cases involving complaints of fraud in the province.*



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*Leaders of fishermen's groups from Calapan, Pola, Naujan, Pinamalayan, Bongabong, Bulalacao, Mandalay, Roxas, Bansud, and Gloria in Oriental Mindoro are demanding quick reparation.*

Nearly a month after the incident, none of the officials of the principally involved firms, tanker owner RDC Reield Marine Services, and SMC, the owner of the toxic payload, have faced the public.

SMC, the country's biggest conglomerate, has acted as if nothing had happened as it kept clear of the incident, safe in the thought that the law does not include the charterer as being responsible for an oil spill.

Amazingly, last 14 March, the Senate's committee on environment, natural resources, and climate change started a public hearing on the oil spill and, in the course of the two-hour or so proceeding, there was scant mention of SMC or its subsidiary which owned the cargo on the vessel that sailed under questionable

circumstances.

The groups are concerned that none of the principal personalities will come forward to talk about the necessary steps since it has been a month of waiting since the incident.

SMC, however, had assumed in the past the obligations of a good corporate citizen, particularly during the height of the pandemic when it claimed to have spent billions of pesos to help the government's response program.

Now that the plea for help from the oil spill victims is more than real, nothing is heard from the corporate giant.

That is the reason for some to conclude that altruism is a myth in a world dominated by corporate greed.



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DATE:

## Dark days ahead

**“The other equally devastating impact that oil spills can have is on our marine habitats and ecosystems.”**

Aren't we Filipinos blessed that our country is one of 18 mega-biodiverse countries of the world, containing two-thirds of the earth's biodiversity?

Mind you, between 70 and 80 percent of the world's plant and animal species live on our shores but these natural wonders are, unfortunately, under constant threat from environmental catastrophes, some of which are man-made.

Take a look, for example, at the devastating oil spills that have happened in the past and, recently, in Oriental Mindoro, and one gets a vivid picture of the environmental and health impacts on the Filipino people.

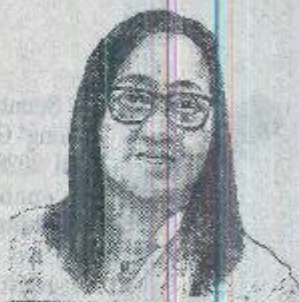
Oil spills can have a significant impact on human health, both in the short term and the long term. The chemicals released during oil spills can be toxic and cause a range of health problems, depending on the level and duration of exposure.

For an archipelagic state such as ours, this is indeed a problem.

Imagine what oil spills can do to the vast population living in coastal areas, both in terms of their livelihood

and health.

One of the most common health problems associated with oil spills is respiratory issues. The volatile organic compounds released from the oil can cause respiratory irritation, coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. People who are exposed to these chemicals for extended



SELMAUSING  
GIGIE ARCILLA

periods may develop more severe respiratory problems, such as bronchitis or asthma.

The other equally devastating impact that oil spills can have is on our marine habitats and ecosystems. Already, we have seen reports of harm being done to the aquatic life in the area.

We can only imagine what sort of havoc the 900,000 liters of industrial oil can wreak on the life thriving in the waters of Oriental Mindoro and neighboring areas as we begin to uncover the full extent of the spill.

If we can glean anything from similar past incidents, such as the 1993 oil spill in Guimaras and the 2006 oil spill in Subic Bay, there are dark days ahead for the ecology and human health in the affected area.

The 1993 Guimaras oil spill, for example, resulted in the release of around 2 million liters of oil into the sea, affecting not only the marine ecosystem but also the livelihoods of the people who depended on fishing for their income. The

oil spill caused respiratory problems, skin irritation, and other health problems among the local population, and studies have shown that the long-term health impacts of the spill are still being felt today.

Similarly, the 2006 oil spill in Subic Bay, which released over 500,000 liters of oil into

the sea, had significant health impacts on the local population. The toxic chemicals released caused skin irritation, respiratory problems, and other health issues among the people who lived and worked near the affected area.

Of course, the predictable conclusion to opinion pieces dealing with this topic is to call on the government and those responsible to take responsibility for preventing oil spills and property cleaning up when they occur, to protect the health of both people and the environment. But lines like these have become a cliché, a banality bound to be repeated when another oil spill occurs.

This might be wishful thinking, and some would say I'm being a little offtopic here, but the government must increase its investments in alternative energy sources, such as wind and solar power, to reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels and decrease the risk of future oil spills.

Yada yada yada.

**“Oil spills can have a significant impact on human health, both in the short term and the long term.”**

Still, I can't fail to miss the opportunity to add my own obvious and vivid “call to action” ritual by saying that, yes, the government must take action

to prevent oil spills from occurring in the first place. This means strengthening regulations around the transport of industrial oil and holding oil companies and individuals accountable for the damage they cause.

We should not tire of holding the government and the “whodunnit” to account, no matter how seemingly trite and regular this may become.



TITLE:

PAGE #3

DATE March 25, 2023

## Tamaraw rangers to confirm existence of Mindoro dwarf buffalo at Mt. Halcon

By JONATHAN L. MAYUCA

**T**HE hunt is on. Protectors of the tamaraw will soon be launching a search for what is believed to be a small population of the iconic wild buffalo at Mt. Halcon.

Towering 2,676 meters above sea level, Mt. Halcon is the highest peak on Mindoro Island. It is the 23rd-highest peak in the country.

Mt. Halcon's steep slopes have earned it the reputation of being one of the most difficult and technically, the most challenging mountain to climb in the Philippines.

Home to the critically endangered Mindoro bleeding heart, an endemic species on the island, Mt. Halcon is an ideal habitat for the tamaraw.

Aril Anthony del Mundo, Assistant Protected Area Superintendent of the Misamis Oriental National Park (MIBNP) and the coordinator of the Tamaraw Conservation Program (TCP) believes they may have a good lead about tamaraws in Mt. Halcon.

On Wednesday, he said a key informant interview team of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Tamaraw Conservation Program asked indigenous people residents of Barangay

Lanuyang at the foot of Mt. Halcon about tamaraws.

"According to Tatay Garcia, a 76-year-old resident and respondent, he had seen tamaraws in Mt. Halcon in his younger years. The porters and guides of mountaineers ascending Mt. Halcon summit had earlier confirmed recent sightings of footmarks (or animal tracks) similar to carabaus, only smaller," he said.

He said the TCP would be conducting verification surveys by June with the hope of finding tamaraw populations in Mt. Halcon.

The distance from Mount Halcon to Mounts Iglit-Baco National Park, known as the last stronghold of the remaining tamaraw population on the island, is about 60 kilometers.

Mts. Iglit-Baco National Park is predominantly situated on the side of Occidental Mindoro.

According to Del Mundo, the tamaraw population on the island is now fragmented. There are reported sightings in different locations and some are sighted near indigenous people (IP) communities or areas outside their known habitats.

Nevertheless, it will be exciting to learn that a tamaraw population now inhabits Mt.

Halcon, he said.

"This is significant if it is true since tamaraws were first discovered in Oriental Mindoro in 1888," said Del Mundo.

In the last few decades, the tamaraw population in Oriental Mindoro was believed extinct, he said.

It was in 2018 when a viable population of tamaraws in Mt. Gintaray was reported. "We verified that there were more than 100 tamaraws there," del Mundo recalled.

Having a viable population in a range for wild animals such as the Mindoro dwarf buffalo is a welcome development, he added.

A fragmented population, on the other hand, is not good news as inbreeding may occur, eventually resulting in genetic defects in offspring.

According to Del Mundo, the occurrence of a tamaraw population at Mt. Halcon only means the tamaraw are now being forced to go to higher elevations, away from the human population, possibly because of development or worse, hunting activities.

Del Mundo had earlier bared that the highly territorial tamaraw may have been fighting for the shrinking territory at MIBNP, as evidenced by six carcasses of young male

tamaraws discovered around the MIBNP in 2021 and 2022.

This, he said, is also the reason why the TCP is now seriously considering the relocation of a viable population of the animals in other areas on the island.

Mrs. Calavite and the Tamaraw Gene Pool, where the famous tamaraw Kalibasib was born and died more than 20 later are being eyed as possible relocation sites, also as part of an ex-situ or offsite conservation captive breeding program.

Last week, the TMC visited a mountainous area in Puerto Galera town to look into the potential relocation of the tamaraws.

However, Del Mundo said the possibility is not happening in the near future. "It's a very very long process. It's part of the feasibility study for ex-situ and translocation (we are conducting)," he said.

According to Del Mundo, the existence of a wild tamaraw population in any area outside the MIBNP has a drawback as they pose a danger to surrounding communities.

Unlike their bigger cousins, the carabao or the beast of burden, the shy and elusive tamaraws are very aggressive when cornered or threatened by humans, especially when they are with their young.



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PAGE

DATE

08-25-23

### Couple selling exotic birds nabbed in Manila

A Filipino-Chinese couple notorious for selling exotic and endangered birds has been arrested on March 10 in an entrapment operation in Manila by operatives of the National Bureau of Investigation Environmental Crime Division. Seized from suspects who were identified as Fe Anita Dulat Qua and Wilson Qua were 29 endangered Sun Conure birds which cost up to US\$500 or P27,000 each. Authorities conducted the operation after an intelligence report confirmed that the spouses were indeed peddling exotic and endangered birds without permit. The arrested suspects were subjected to inquest proceedings before the Manila City Prosecutor for violation of Republic Act No. 9147, or the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act, in relation to RA 10175. —ABBY BOISER



TITLE:

1/3

PAGE

DATE

BAN STAYS ON SMALL-TIME OPERATIONS; ACTIVISTS DISMAYED

## CA ALLOWS LARGE-SCALE OPEN-PIT MINING IN SOUTH

### COTABATO



**AGAINST OPEN-PIT MINES** The South Cotabato provincial government's decision to lift the ban on open-pit mining was met with loud protests on May 19, 2022. Gov. Reynaldo Tamayo Jr.'s veto of the lifting was upheld by a local court whose ruling was overturned by the Court of Appeals in August last year. —BONG S. SARMIENTO



Notwithstanding the pronouncement of the Court of Appeals, we remain firm with our stand that open-pit mining operations in South Cotabato pose a great risk to the integrity of the environment of our province and its neighbors. At stake are the health and livelihoods of many



TITLE

2/3

PAGE

DATE

By **Bong S. Sarmiento**

@InqNational

**KORONADAL CITY**—The Court of Appeals (CA) has dealt a blow to the campaign against open-pit mining in South Cotabato, but activists are undaunted and vowed to sustain their opposition to this mining method which they say is destructive to the environment.

In a decision dated Aug. 22, 2022, parts of which circulated around the province only this week, the CA declared that the ban on open-pit mining in the province was valid, but the prohibition applied only to small-scale miners.

"Further, 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's 23rd Division based in Cagayan de Oro stated.

The controversial project in South Cotabato's Tampakan town, touted as the largest untapped copper and gold minefield in Southeast Asia, is being developed by Sagittarius Mines Inc. The company says that open-pit mining is the most viable method to extract shallow minerals.

**B'laan community petition**

The province's ban has been considered as the remaining hurdle to the operation of the \$5.9-billion (about P295-billion) Tampakan project.

The CA 23rd Division rul-

**Cerilo Casicas**  
Bishop of the Diocese of Marbel,  
South Cotabato

ing was on the petition filed by some members of the B'laan indigenous cultural community, whose lands would be mined by Sagittarius, against the provincial government's ban.

The petitioners questioned the October 2020 decision by Regional Trial Court Branch 24 Judge Vicente Peña, which upheld the prohibition on open-pit mining in the province's environment code.

"Section 22 (b), which bans open-pit mining in the province of South Cotabato is not inval-

id, but rather legal and consistent with DAO (Department Administrative Order) 2017-10 (issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources), the Local Government Code (of the Philippines) and above all the Constitution," the judge had ruled.

**Bishop seeks dialogue**

Bishop Cerilo Casicas of the Diocese of Marbel blew the whistle on the CA's decision on Thursday and urged South Cotabato Gov. Reynaldo Tamayo

Jr. to hold a public dialogue on the ruling.

The bishop wrote Tamayo on March 17 expressing concerns about the implication of the ruling on communities potentially affected by the Tampakan project. He asked the governor to continue the legal battle to defend the province's environment code.

"Notwithstanding the pronouncement of the Court of Appeals, we remain firm with our stand that open-pit mining operations in South Cotabato

pose a great risk to the integrity of the environment of our province and its neighbors. At stake are the health and livelihoods of many," Casicas said in a statement on Thursday.

"We trust that the governor shall exert his best efforts to defend the rights of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology. It is of vital importance that the true meaning and heart of the ordinance is not in any way compromised or defeated," the prelate added.

Casicas stressed that open-





TITLE:

3/3

PAGE

DATE

pit mining, especially large-scale operations, encroached on closed and open canopy forests, some of which are considered integral woodlands.

**'Moral imperative'**

He said large-scale open-pit mining "will erase vast areas of agricultural lands, destroy the remaining watershed, and will cause massive and destructive flooding in Mindanao."

Casicas urged Tamayo to join the 30 parishes, the clergy and the laypeople in "the moral imperative to act together decisively in order to save our common home."

Neither Tamayo nor the provincial government disclosed the CA decision to their constituents before the governor confirmed the court's ruling in a radio interview early this week.

Speaking in the vernacular on local radio, Tamayo said the CA "did not invalidate the open-pit mining ban in South Cotabato but limited its scope to small-scale mining operations."

Based on the same CA decision, he added that large-scale open-pit mining operations are vested in the national government under Republic Act No. 7942, or the Philippine Mining Act of 1995.

According to the governor, the provincial government could no longer question RA 7942 in the Supreme Court because it had already affirmed its validity.

A3

## CA ALLOWS LARGE-SCALE OPEN-PIT MINING IN S. COTABATO

FROM A2

On May 16, 2022, the Sangguniang Panlalawigan of South Cotabato approved a proposal to lift the ban on open-pit mining, causing public outrage and triggering protests in this city.

Two weeks later, Tamayo vetoed the controversial measure, saying that it was hastily decided and included questionable provisions.

He noted that there were no protests in the province when former Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu ordered in December 2021 the lifting of the nationwide ban on open-pit mining imposed by the late Environment Secretary Gina Lopez.

**Contentious method**

Open-pit or surface mining has been contentious. Miners say that it is a globally accepted

mining method, but environmental advocates insist that this technique has caused extensive environmental damage.

In December 2021, during the Duterte administration, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) lifted the ban on the open-pit method of mining for copper, gold, silver and complex ores in the country.

The ban, imposed in April 2017, was one of the high-impact measures taken by Lopez, who was known for her green advocacies before she led the DENR.

The governor said he would try to meet with Environment Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga to discuss her position on open-pit mining.

The Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center (LRC), which works with communities threatened by the risks of open-pit mining projects, said the provincial government could still

appeal the CA decision.

"This is not the end of the line for the open-pit mining ban," said LRC legal services coordinator Rolly Peoro.

"Certainly, the provincial government on behalf of their constituencies has the duty to appeal the CA decision precisely as the decision recognizes their police powers," he said.

The regulatory role of local governments is "very much part" of the national mineral and resource governance laws and "cannot be limited to just small-scale mining projects," Peoro said.

He noted that Tamayo "is in a prime position to push back against this curtailment of the autonomy granted by the Local Government Code to local chief executives defending their constituents' right to a balanced and healthful ecology." —WITH A

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TITLE:

PAGE

March 25, 2013  
DATE

# Green Climate Fund approves \$39.3-M project

THE Green Climate Fund, created to support the efforts of developing countries in responding to the challenge of climate change, has approved the \$39.2-million Adapting Philippine Agriculture to Climate Change Project during its 35th board meeting in Incheon, South Korea.

The Korea-based GCF will finance the project through a \$26.3-million grant to be co-financed by the \$12.9 million from the Philippine government. The Department of Finance (DoF) serves as the Philippines' national designated authority to the GCF.

In a statement, the DoF said the project builds on the Adaptation and Mitigation Initiative in Agriculture led by the Department of Agriculture (DA) through activities that will help the country shift toward a climate-resilient agricultural system and increase climate resilience in rural areas.

It is the first GCF-funded project to be implemented by the DA and the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

The project is seen to benefit some 1.25 million agricultural

workers in areas vulnerable to climate change. The project seeks to enable beneficiaries to incorporate viable climate-resilient agriculture technologies into their practices.

The project will also increase awareness about climate change, its risks and its management toward improving food security, increasing household incomes and enhancing resilience.

The project will be implemented in at least nine provinces identified as the most vulnerable climate change hot spots based on climate change projections. These areas are home to 60 percent of the Philippine rural population, or about 20 million out of 31.3 million rural people. More than half of the rural population most likely to be affected by the impacts of climate change reside within the project areas.

The project is one of the three funding proposals of the FAO approved by the GCF board, and one of the seven proposals for consideration and approval during the 35th board meeting.

Finance Undersecretary Mark Dennis Joven represented the Philippines in the GCF board meeting as the alternate board member for the Asia Pacific Group of the GCF and focal of the country. **TMT**