

26 March 2023 Sunday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**



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## PBBM leads PH switch-off for 2023 Earth Hour

"It only takes 60 minutes to do good for our future."

President Marcos underscored this as he urged Filipinos to turn off their lights and join this year's observance of Earth Hour, an initiative to encourage everyone to help mitigate the devastating effects of climate change.

In an Instagram Reel, the President said Malacañang will observe Earth Hour by switching off non-essential lights during Earth Hour on Saturday, March 25. ▶ 7

"It only takes 60 minutes to do good for our future, 60 minutes to take notice and commit to saving Mother Nature—to be united and take action," he said. "Because together, nothing is impossible. Let's switch off and give Mother Nature 60 minutes to breathe."

Marcos noted that the Philippines is battered with an average of 20 typhoons yearly, "making it one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change."

He added that as the Earth's temperature gets warmer, with the world's carbon footprint reaching a new all-time high of 36.8 gigatons in 2022, the world braces for the ir-

reversible impact of climate change.

Earth Hour is a worldwide movement organized by the World Wildlife Fund.

The event is held annually, encouraging individuals, communities, and businesses to turn off non-essential electric lights, for one hour, from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on the last Saturday of March, as a symbol of commitment to the planet.

This year marks the 16th anniversary of Earth Hour. Since it was first held in 2007, in Sydney, Australia, great strides have been made in highlighting the dire state of the planet, according to the World Wide Fund for Nature, which organizes the event.

In a separate video message, President Marcos said the observance of Earth Hour would help the government enforce its action plans that would benefit the planet.

"So, at this hour, let us stop, slow down and dedicate a moment to help the Earth breathe and heal anew," he said.

Marcos hopes that this shared activity would remind everyone that environmental preservation is an "inter-generational responsibility" that should be a priority in the pursuit of progress and prosperity.

"Let us become part of the solution and embark on advocacies, programs, and initiatives that will help us protect and preserve the Earth, our only home," he added. (Argyll Cyrus Geducos)



# 'Be part of solution to climate change'

Malacañang Palace, as viewed from the other side of the Pasig River, leads the Philippine observance of Earth Hour yesterday. President Marcos called on the entire nation to switch off non-essential lights from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. to allow Mother Nature 60 minutes to breathe and help mitigate the devastating effects of climate change.

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"Let us become part of the solution and embark on advocacies, programs and initiatives that will help us protect and preserve the earth - our only home," he added.

In a video posted on Instagram, Marcos noted that the Philippines is hit with an average of 20 typhoons annually, making it one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. He said switching off lights would give Mother Nature "60 minutes to breathe."

"As the Earth's temperature gets warmer, with the world's carbon footprint reaching a new all-time high of 36.8 gigatons in 2022, the world braces for the irreversible impact of climate change," the Chief Executive said.

"It only takes 60 minutes to do good for our future, 60 minutes to take notice and commit to saving

Mother Nature, to be united and take action. Because together, nothing is impossible," he added.

Marcos' Instagram video showed lights in Malacañang being switched off in support of Earth Hour. The event, which was held from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. yesterday, was organized by the World Wildlife Fund.

## Campaign

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga vowed that her department will continue leading the campaign to minimize the impact of climate change and fulfill the country's climate commitments.

"The DENR will continue to do our part in leading and accelerating climate action and in enhancing the integrity of ecosystems," Loyzaga said.

Marcos, who chairs the Climate

Change Commission, had designated Loyzaga as his representative in the lead policy-making government body on climate change.

"As the designated representative of the President to the Commission, we will focus on accelerating and completing the work that has been long outstanding for us to deliver on our international commitments," Loyzaga said.

Among these commitments are the national greenhouse gas inventory; the national adaptation plan and its financial plan; the national determined contribution implementation plan and the local climate change action plans of local government units.

"The DENR is naturally at the forefront of climate action due to our mandate of conserving, protecting, managing, restoring and regenerating our country's environment and natural resources. The Philippines is also increasingly becoming a model in the region for our whole-of-society



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*change*

approach in disaster risk reduction and climate action," the DENR secretary said.

She added that the country needs to have ecosystems-based, ridge-to-reef approaches that can enhance ecosystems, prevent disasters and mitigate the impacts of hazards.

"We must explore how nature-based solutions can address the food-water-energy security outcomes we aim to achieve," Loyzaga said.

She said several climate plans are in place to accelerate and complete the work of delivering the country's international commitments.

The Philippines submitted its national determined contribution to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in April 2021, pledging a projected reduction and avoidance of greenhouse gas emissions of 75 percent for the period of 2020 to 2030, of which 2.71 percent is unconditional and 72.29 percent is conditional.

The Cabinet Cluster on Climate

Change Adaptation, Mitigation and Disaster Risk Reduction, chaired by the DENR, also adopted a resolution in January 2021 on the phaseout of single-use plastics.

Loyzaga said the resolution further strengthens the Philippine Action Plan for Sustainable Consumption and Production, and supports the UN's Sustainable Development Goal No. 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production.

"Through the newly enacted Republic Act 11898 or the Extended Producer Responsibility Act of 2022 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations, the country is gradually transitioning to a circular economy where plastic waste reduction, recovery and recycling in the private sector will be scaled up," she said.

The World Risk Index 2022, developed by the UN University Institute for Environment and Human Security, ranked the Philippines first among 193 countries in terms of exposure to natural hazards. — With Bella Cariaso



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## REGIONAL DIALOGUE ADDRESSES CLIMATE, SECURITY IN BARM

**D**AVAO CITY—The UN International Organization for Migration (IOM), together with the United Kingdom (UK) government, held a two-day regional dialogue on “Exploring the Nexus of Climate Change, Conflict and Human Mobility and the lived Experiences of the Bangsamoro.”

The event marked a milestone of the project that, for the first time in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), sought to establish evidence on the interlinkages between climate change, conflict and human mobility (IOM said in a news release). It also aimed to strengthen socioeconomic resilience of Bangsamoro communities to climate-related security risks.

The dialogue resulted in key findings from the participatory action research conducted through the project, and

commissioned through the Mindanao Peoples Caucus (MPC), to better understand the effects of climate change to people’s lives in conflict-prone communities and their coping capacity to its impacts.

“Climate change and its impact on security, human mobility, displacement, job insecurity and many other pressing issues should, just as other vital matters, be given the required attention and resources,” said Mister White, the Deputy Head of Mission of the British Embassy in the Philippines, highlighting the importance of the research in raising awareness and driving collective efforts to address climate-related security risks.

For his part, Naldso Jover Jr., research team leader of MPC, said, “While climate change exacerbates conflict, conflict, in turn, prevents people from successfully coping with climate change—that’s why

slow onset climate change is difficult to quantify and, therefore, address,” Jover said.

“It is our role to fill in that gap in understanding how conflict affects people’s social and economic vulnerability to the impact of disaster change,” he added.

The event brought together various stakeholders from key BARMM Ministries, Bangsamoro Parliament, local governments and civil society organizations as the BARMM endorsed climate change action as a priority agenda in the Second Bangsamoro Development Plan 2023-2028 and steps up its efforts to tackle relevant challenges.

The event provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the research recommendations and formulate a plan points to address climate-related security risks, including the impact of climate changes and coping conflict

on agriculture and fisheries—one of BARMM’s largest industries—which threatens the climate-sensitive livelihoods of farmers and fishers.

The discussion led to the climate’s role in worsening food insecurity in the region, which, in turn, exacerbates protracted poverty, forcing families to consider migration as a last resort. This displacement from their communities and cultural roots increases their risk of human trafficking in their search for better jobs outside their places of origin, IOM noted.

Mary Ann Aranda, a member of the BARMM Parliament, said they need to “acknowledge and wake up to the new reality that we are in a climate emergency” without which we will remain in “a vicious cycle and all our interventions will not be that effective. We need to assess, we need to study,

we need to read more and look at other experiences in other areas so that we will be more equipped in dealing with this.”

Parliament member Tawakal Mubandang also affirmed the commitment of the BARMM Parliament to craft legislation through the Committee on Environment. “To my fellow Members of Parliament, I challenge us to develop an environment of care and five bills to solve climate change,” he said.

Carol Kay Puyera of the Climate Change Commission discussed the Philippine’s Republic Act 10174 which established the People’s Survival Fund “to finance adaptation projects aimed at increasing resilience of communities and ecosystems to climate change,” a critical step in addressing the climate crisis.

Ronald Selaya, a scientist, Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Officer of the Municipality of Shariff Aguak,

shared his appreciation of the event.

“We are able to identify additional positive interventions that we can add to our local climate change action plans, which will help mitigate the effects of climate change and conflict in our community. This requires the support of our local chief executive and active participation and involvement of the constituents to ensure that it is implemented at the local level,” he said.

Michael Dumanda, head of the Emergency and Post-Crisis Unit of IOM Philippines, said, “The active participation of the stakeholders not only facilitated the crucial exchange of knowledge and skills but also helped shape the way forward to guide BARMM governments and communities in instituting climate mitigation and adaptation strategies in the context of conflict.”



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## DIPLOMATIC POUCH

ILAN FLUSS



### Israel filling in water challenges of Phl

**W**ith the decline of the coronavirus, the world has returned to focus on the most pressing existential threats – global warming and climate change. One of the main areas critically affected by climate change is the global rainfall cycle, resulting in less rain, more droughts and extreme rain events, bringing with them sometimes more destruction than blessings.

The close connection between the water crisis and the climate crisis was noted in the COP 27 summary statement and was a central theme in this year's UN Water Conference on Water Day. While many places in the world have full access to clean tap water, in many others, this accessibility is limited and almost nonexistent.

In celebration of International Water Day, let me tell you how Israel made the desert bloom.

Israel is a model country for water management, which started from necessity. Half of our country is desert lands. It has experienced extreme water scarcity with the gap between its water demand and supply, in 2015 reaching one billion cubic meters.

For that reason, we developed water expertise at all levels. Israel is well-known as a Start-Up Nation. Water technologies is one of the leading fields of cutting-edge solutions of the Israeli companies. We have the most advanced water systems with an abundance of R&D and innovative technologies. One example is the treatment and recycling of sewage. Israel holds a world record in this field, with 95 percent of its wastewater being treated from which almost 90 percent is used again in agriculture. Today, the country produces 20 percent more water than it needs.

Another field in which Israel holds a world record is the prevention of water loss in urban systems. Today, the water losses in the National Water System are less than 3 percent and the average in the municipal infrastructure is less than 10 percent.

Seawater desalination (which supplies today more than 70 percent of our domestic needs), the use of brackish water in agriculture, drip irrigation, the development of agricultural varieties that consume less water, and even the extraction of water from air, were all developed in Israel. As a global hub of innovation, Israel believes that innovative solutions to the water crisis should be a central part of dealing with climate change and water problems. The technology has to come with proper policies and regulation.

In my posting here as the Israeli Ambassador to the Philippines, I have personally witnessed the water challenges of the country, especially in many far-flung areas. The country, although a tropical country with a lot of rain, is facing water challenges.

Water resources management in the Philippines is complex given the multiplicity and overlapping range of functions of water-related agencies in the country. The Local Water Utilities Authority (LWUA) and the National Water Resources Board (NWRB), which is an attached agency of the Depart-

ment of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), are the primary regulatory agencies for water service providers in the country. Apart from these two regulatory agencies there are 34 entities with functional responsibilities in the water sector of the Philippines.

Because of the abovementioned challenge, there is a current push in the legislative branch of the government to create a Department of Water Resources that will integrate all of these functions. This was also highlighted in the first State of Nation Address of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. He said that this 'will address the "critical" need for freshwater supply in the Philippines'.

The Embassy of Israel in Manila has been an active ally of the Philippine Government in promoting water-related innovations and technologies. For the past two years, Israel has been a partner in the Philippine Water Challenge, which currently serves as a platform for promoting pioneering innovative solutions to expand access to water supply and sanitation. Israel's support through knowledge exchange, technical assistance, and capacity development will further provide new paradigms of water security, water management and a wide range of sustainable solutions.

Through MASHAV, Israel's agency for International Development Cooperation, the Embassy is working on a knowledge exchange program to share our experience with key water agencies and with the legislative branch through the House Committee on Climate Change. It will include success factors and the enabling policies, structures, mechanisms and technologies that helped Israel advance water sector reforms and innovative solutions and technologies. We hosted (and will host more) Israeli water companies and organized for them business to business meetings.



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In an effort to support access to potable water, the Israeli Embassy donated Israeli-made water filtration units to typhoon-stricken areas in Bohol and Dinagat in December 2021, to the indigenous community in Nueva Ecija, and to the Dumagat tribe in Davao. The portable water filtration unit is ideal for use in far-flung areas with limited access to clean and safe drinking water. In addition, the embassy has conducted a water management seminar for local government units in Mindanao. We are eager to work with relevant partners to emulate it on a national level.

In a Water Forum recently held at SMX Convention Center in Pasay City, President Marcos said that the Philippines has to learn from Israel on how to reuse every drop of water. He visited a booth presenting Israeli technology of water purification (and desalination) implemented in the Philippines. Mr. President, Israel is more than willing to extend help to see water-deficit areas in the Philippines finally having access to clean potable water, lifting their glasses, and saying cheers! L'chaim!

*Ilan Fluss is the Israeli Ambassador to the Philippines.*



## Humanity must chart new course on water use – UN chief

UNITED NATIONS, United States (AFP) – UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday delivered an urgent call for the world to modify and safeguard water resources to avert conflict and ensure future global prosperity.

Water is "the most precious common good," and "needs to be at the center of the global political agenda," Guterres said at the end of a three-day UN confer-

ence that experts said held a measure of promise.

"All of humanity's hopes for the future depend, in some way, on charting a new science-based course to bring the water action agenda to life," Guterres said.

"Now is the time to act."

The world is not on track to meet its 2030 water goals, including access to safe drinking water and sanita- ▶ 6

## Humanity must chart new course on water use – UN chief ◀

tion for all.

Guterres earlier in the week described water as humanity's "lifeblood" and said its "vampiric overconsumption" had "broken the

water cycle" and led to more natural disasters.

NGOs, governments and the private sector offered nearly 700 commitments before and during

the three days of the UN gathering that drew some 10,000 participants. Pledges ranged from the construction of toilets to the restoration of 300,000 kilometers (186,400 miles) of degraded rivers and massive areas of wetlands.

Less than a third of the commitments have funding said Charles Iceland of the World Resources

Institute think tank, adding that about a third "are going to have substantial impact."

Despite this, "these voluntary commitments are a good start," he told AFP, referring in particular to a project led by Germany on the management of the Niger River basin which touches nine nations in Africa.

### 'Pleasantly surprised'

"It's probably the part of the world that is the most fragile, and where we're starting to see actual violent conflict over water between different groups," he said.

But at the global level, the issue of water "is a huge problem and one conference is not going to do it," Iceland added, pleading for annual conferences on water.

"You hear a lot of pledges," Stuart Orr of WWF told AFP. "But this feels somehow quite different."

While it "is not all rosy," Orr added, "a lot of the commitments that have been made this week are very good."

He said he was "pleasantly surprised," in part, at the variety of institutions and organizations now talking about water.

"This issue is not going away. The water issue is only going to get worse. And I think that's why everybody is starting to feel maybe now really is the time to get going," Orr said.

The conference pleaded for Guterres to appoint a UN special en-

voy for water, which the secretary-general says is under consideration.

Without a dedicated UN agency or global treaty, "water has no home here at the UN," said Henk Ovink, water envoy of the Netherlands, which was a co-organizer of the conference.

In 2020, two billion people were still without safe drinking water and 3.6 billion lacked access to safely managed sanitation services, including 494 million who had to relieve themselves in the open, according to the latest figures compiled by the UN-Water website.

At least two billion people drink water contaminated with feces, and 2.3 billion lack basic sanitation services—conditions conducive to the spread of cholera, dysentery and polio.

While climate change makes droughts more frequent and intense, UN climate experts (IPCC) also estimate that about half of the world's population suffers from "severe" water shortages during at least part of the year.

A young Dutch woman, Aniek Moonen, addressed the conference as if she were speaking from the year 2050.

She suggested that the summit could be a pivotal moment for water management "to become more sustainable, equitable and just than ever before."

"This is the future speaking. Don't forget to listen," she told the delegates.





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# Humanity must chart new course on water use – UN chief

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"All of humanity's hopes for the future depend, in some way, on charting a new science-based course to bring the water

action agenda to life," Guterres said. "Now is the time to act."

The world is not on track to meet its 2030 water goals, including access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all.

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## Humanity From Page 1

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– AFP



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**WORLD BRIEFS**

**Humanity must change course on water use—UN chief**  
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# Water is a human right

We are draining humanity's lifeblood through vampiric overconsumption and unsustainable use, and evaporating it through global heating.

Water is humanity's lifeblood.

From the food we eat. To the ecosystems and biodiversity that enrich our world. To the prosperity that sustains nations.

To the economic engines of agriculture, manufacturing and energy generation. To our health, hygiene and survival itself.

Water is a human right — and a common development denominator to shape a better future.

But water is in deep trouble.

We are draining humanity's lifeblood through vampiric overconsumption and unsustainable use, and evaporating it through global heating.

We've broken the water cycle, destroyed ecosystems and contaminated groundwater.

Nearly three out of four natural disasters are linked to water.

One in four people lives without safely managed water services or clean drinking water. And over 1.7 billion people lack basic sanitation.

Half a billion practice open defecation.

And millions of women and girls spend hours every day fetching water.

I see four key areas to accelerate results and change the present situation.



SECRETARY  
GENERAL  
UNITED NATIONS  
ANTONIO GUTERRES

First — closing the water management gap. Governments must develop and implement plans that ensure equitable water access for all people while conserving this precious resource.

And I also call on countries to work together across borders to jointly manage water.

One of my proudest achievements as Prime Minister of Portugal was signing the Albufeira Convention on water management with Spain 25 years ago.

The Convention is still in force today.

We see similar initiatives in Bolivia and Peru and elsewhere.

And I urge all Member States to join and implement the UN Water Convention.

Second — massively investing in water and sanitation systems.

The proposed SDG Stimulus and reforms to the global financial architecture aim to increase investment in sustainable development.

International financial institutions should develop creative ways to extend financing and accelerate the re-allocation of Special Drawing Rights.

And Multilateral Development Banks should continue expanding their portfolios on water and sanitation to support countries in desperate need.

Third — focusing on resilience.

We cannot manage this 21st century emergency with infrastructure from another age. This means investing in disaster-resilient pipelines, water-delivery infrastructure, and wastewater treatment plants.

It means new ways to recycle and conserve water. It means climate and biodiversity-smart food systems that reduce methane emissions and water use.

It means investing in a new global information system to forecast water needs in real time. It means covering every person in the world with early warning systems against hazardous climate or weather events.

And it means exploring new public-private partnerships across our work.

And fourth — addressing climate change.

Climate action and a sustainable water future are two sides of the same coin.

We must spare no effort to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius and deliver climate justice to developing countries.

We don't have a moment to lose.

We must recognize and act upon the vital importance of water to our world's sustainability and as a tool to foster peace and international co-operation.

□□□

Excerpts from the Secretary-General's remarks at the United Nations Water Conference, 22 March 2023.



community

# Reality check

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s recent statement about a downplayed water crisis during the recent 6th Edition of the Water Philippines Conference and Exposition was a reality check.

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

Truth be told, billions of people around the world have no access to safely managed drinking water. As a global problem, water constraint afflicts developed and developing countries like the Philippines.

According to *water.org* statistics, of the country's 109 million population, 57 million people lack access to a reliable, safely managed source of water, while 9 million Filipinos are enduring unimproved, unsafe and unsustainable water sources.

Global numbers show more than a fourth, 2.1 billion out of 7.5 billion people worldwide, still lack safely managed drinking water. Rapid population growth and poor governance in putting up the necessary water supply infrastructure and systems to meet the growing demand for water of a rapidly increasing population have been blamed for the global water shortage.

When the Chief Executive said that he "cannot emphasize enough the importance of the water

**“**  
*Managing the country's water resources and responding to the current environmental challenges through a concerted government effort is befitting of the 22 March World Water Day celebration themed 'Leaving no one behind.'*



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situation here in the Philippines and how it affects our daily lives," it should bring us back to the reality of how powerful water is in connecting every aspect of life.

Quoting from a BYJU study: "All the biochemical processes which occur in plants and animals, our surroundings, etc. require water to function. It is required for the existence of life on earth as it is an essential component of all biological processes. We cannot imagine our lives without the presence of water."

Given that around 1 in 10 Filipinos still do not have access to improved water sources, Marcos Jr. made an apt call to take an urgent collective step towards attaining water security and providing safe, adequate, affordable, and accessible drinking water for the people.

Among the many other rights, water (a main constituent of Earth's hydrosphere) is one, too. Anyone and anywhere we are, the water right is undebatable because that inorganic compound with the chemical formula H<sub>2</sub>O – a transparent, tasteless, odorless, and nearly colorless chemical substance – is an extremely important resource that we cannot live without.

With the President's approval of an Executive Order creating the Office of Water Management, it is hoped that the inadequate and intermittent water supply in rural areas, low-income urban cities, and the foremost urban center – Metro Manila – will be a thing of the past.

Managing the country's water resources and responding to the current environmental challenges through a concerted government effort is befitting of the 22 March World Water Day celebration themed "Leaving no one behind."

Now that the OWM is born, may the governance issues and inefficiencies of government-managed water utilities resulting in poor access to adequate and quality water be buried with the sorrows of people who have no choice but to put up with waterless homes.

*“Rapid population growth and poor governance in putting up the necessary water supply infrastructure and systems have been blamed for the global water shortage.”*



STRATEGIC  
COMMUNICATION  
AND  
INITIATIVES  
SERVICE

# Daily Tribune

WITHOUT FEAR & WITHOUT FAVOR



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EDITORIAL



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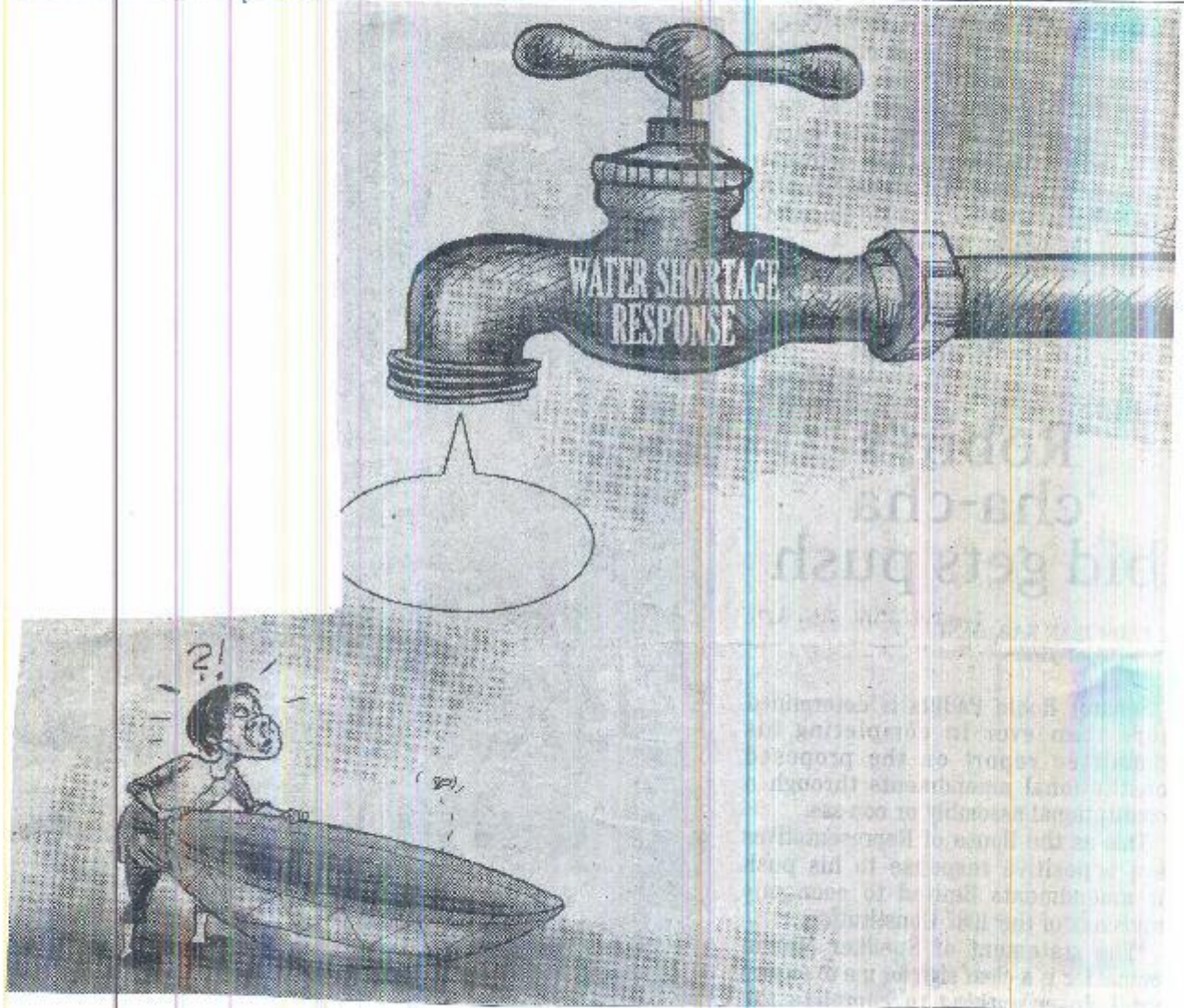
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## Q.C. gets World Water Day award

Quezon City is not immune to the threats of water insufficiency that mostly affects low-income communities

BY JING VILLAMENTE

The Quezon City Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Department has been named one of the country's leading water and environment champions during the World Water Day Philippines Award 2023.

CCESD Head Andrea A. Villaroman received the Water Warrior Award for Advocacy Leadership during a ceremony organized by the Maynilad Water Services Inc., National Water Resources Board, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

"This recognition is a testament that the city's initiatives in water conservation have positively impacted the lives of our residents. We are working closely with our partners and stakeholders to develop more programs to ensure water sufficiency for QCitizens in the future," Mayor Joy Belmonte said.

The mayor herself was also a recipient of the award in 2021.

According to Villaroman, the city already launched in 2019 its Responsible Water Use Campaign which involved all stakeholders in water conservation measures.

The mayor has strengthened the department's cause by issuing a memorandum to all city departments, and barangays to use water responsibly and promote responsible water management.

Various efforts to deliberately attain water sufficiency are also in the pipeline as they are included in the Quezon City Enhanced Local Climate Change Action Plan, the city's strategic framework and roadmap in climate action.

"Quezon City is not immune to the threats of water insufficiency that mostly affects low-income communities," Villaroman said.

"To improve water connections and avoid health and ecological risks, we are prioritizing the establishment of water-conserving sanitation systems in barangays and city-owned facilities," she added.

The city also started assessing schools and city buildings for their viability for the installation of rainwater harvesting systems and water storage tanks.

These were complemented by training and seminars conducted in barangays and communities to ensure their understanding of the importance of water conservation.



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## Whole-of-nation approach vs oil spill stressed in NDRRMC meet

The ongoing response operations and strengthening of various government agencies' joint efforts in addressing the impacts of the oil spill from the submerged *MT Princess Empress* in Oriental Mindoro were emphasized during the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC)'s full council meeting, attended by 45 government agencies, at Camp Aguinaldo on March 23.

"We have further mobilized all the concerned agencies to help end the oil spill at the soonest time possible. The damages to the environment, livelihood, tourism

and health worsen by the day," Office of Civil Defense administrator and NDRRMC executive director Ariel Nepomuceno.

Reporting updates on the operations, the Philippine Coast Guard presented the latest findings of a remotely operated vehicle from a Japanese vessel that arrived in the country on Monday.

Reports said that the tanker suffered extensive structural damage before submerging and oil leaks were observed from all its eight compartments or tanks. The volume of the remaining oil in these compartments is yet to

be determined.

The oil spill has affected at least 34,553 families in Mimaropa and the Western Visayas as well as the livelihood of 13,654 fishermen and farmers.

The affected families were more than P131 million in assistance from the national and local governments, non-government organizations and other partners.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources presented during the meeting its oil spill environmental impact assessment as well as updates on the DENR's cash-for-work for cleanup operations.



National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council executive director and Office of Civil Defense administrator Ariel Nepomuceno (left) leads an NDRRMC meeting at Camp Aguinaldo on March 23.





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COST OF AN OIL SPILL

## PCG SEEKS IOPC FUND'S HELP IN MINDORO CLEANUP

By Dexter Cabalza  
@dexcabalza@INQ

With the insurance coverage of the sunken MT Princess Empress facing a snag due to controversy surrounding its authority to travel, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) has sought the assistance of the International Oil Pollution Compensation (IOPC) Funds to boost the country's efforts in cleaning up the oil spill.

In a statement on Friday, the PCG said it will seek help from the IOPC Funds to help speed up the acquisition of its own remotely-operated vehicles (ROVs).

It cited how the ROV Hakuyo released by the Japanese Dynamic Positioning Vessel Shin Nishi Maru was able to immediately pinpoint the location of the sunken oil tanker under the waters off Naujan in Oriental Mindoro province.

The Japanese ROV was also able to confirm that oil leaks were observed from all its eight compartments, containing 900,000 of industrial fuel oil.

The IOPC Funds are made up of two intergovernmental organizations, the 1992 Fund and the 2003 Supplementary Fund Protocol, which provide compensation for oil pollution damage resulting from spills of persistent oil from tankers.

The Philippines country acceded to the IOPC Funds in

1997, which the Senate ratified two years later.

According to the IOPC, a delegation representing the Philippine government visited the IOPC Funds' offices in London on March 15 to meet with the director and a member of its claims department.

In a statement, the IOPC said it was "monitoring developments closely" and would make a report to the 1992 Fund Convention executive committee in May.

"However, it is too early to determine whether the Convention would apply to this incident at this stage," it noted.

The PCG filed a compensation request with the IOPC Funds for the cleanup of the oil spill in Guimaras province in August 2006, considered the worst in Philippine history, where the agreed compensation amounted to P104.7 million.

A Senate inquiry last week, however, found that the Princess Empress may not even be covered by insurance because of irregularities in the vessel's documentation.

According to the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina), MT Princess Empress had no updated permit when it capsized on Feb. 28, and sank the following day after experiencing engine trouble, because the tanker's owner, RDC Reield Marine Services (RDC), had yet to amend its original certificated of public convenience. INQ



## Humanity must chart new course on water use – UN chief

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Friday delivered an urgent call for the world to modify and safeguard water resources to avert conflict and ensure future global prosperity.

Water is "the most precious common good," and "needs to be at the center of the global political agenda,"

Guterres said at the end of a three-day UN conference that experts said held a measure of promise.

"All of humanity's hopes for the future depend, in some way, on charting a new science-based course to bring the water action agenda to life," Guterres said.

>WaterA3

### WATER FROM A1 Humanity

"Now is the time to act."

The world is not on track to meet its 2030 water goals, including access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all.

Guterres earlier in the week described water as humanity's "lifeblood" and said its "vampiric overconsumption" had "broken the water cycle" and led to more natural disasters.

NGOs, governments and the private sector offered nearly 700 commitments before and during the three days of the UN gathering that drew some 10,000 participants.

Pledges ranged from the construction of toilets to the restoration of 300,000 kilometers (186,400 miles) of degraded rivers and massive areas of wetlands.

Less than a third of the commit-

ments have funding said Charles Iceland of the World Resources Institute think tank, adding that about a third "are going to have substantial impact."

Despite this, "these voluntary commitments are a good start," he told Agence France-Presse, referring in particular to a project led by Germany on the management of the Niger River basin which touches nine nations in Africa.

#### 'Pleasantly surprised'

"It's probably the part of the world that is the most fragile, and where we're starting to see actual violent conflict over water between different groups," he said.

But at the global level, the issue of water "is a huge problem and one conference is not going to do it," Iceland added, pleading for annual conferences on water.

"You hear a lot of pledges," Stuart

Orr of WWF told AFP. "But this feels somehow quite different."

While it "is not all rosy," Orr added, "a lot of the commitments that have been made this week are very good."

He said he was "pleasantly surprised," in part, at the variety of institutions and organizations now talking about water.

"This issue is not going away. The water issue is only going to get worse. And I think that's why everybody is starting to feel maybe now really is the time to get going," Orr said.

The conference pleaded for Guterres to appoint a UN special envoy for water, which the secretary-general says is under consideration.

Without a dedicated UN agency or global treaty, "water has no home here at the UN," said Henk Ovink, water envoy of the Netherlands, which was a coorganizer of the conference.

In 2020, 2 billion people were still without safe drinking water and

3.6 billion lacked access to safely managed sanitation services, including 494 million who had to relieve themselves in the open, according to the latest figures compiled by the UN-Water website.

At least 2 billion people drink water contaminated with feces, and 2.3 billion lack basic sanitation services — conditions conducive to the spread of cholera, dysentery and polio.

While climate change makes droughts more frequent and intense, UN climate experts (IPCC) also estimate that about half of the world's population suffers from "severe" water shortages during at least part of the year.

A young Dutch woman, Aniek Moonen, addressed the conference as if she were speaking from the year 2050.

She suggested that the summit could be a pivotal moment for water management "to become more sustainable, equitable and just than ever before."

AFP



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# 'Oil spill-affected parties can file claims'

BY IRE JOE LAURENTE AND FRANCO JOSE C. BARONA

**CALAPAN CITY:** Residents affected by the oil spill from MT Princess Empress that sank in the waters of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro can file damage claims from the vessel's insurance company, Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerlito Dolor said on Friday.

Dolor in a social media post said that a first claims office or claims caravan will be set up at the

Provincial Capitol Compound in Barangay Camilmil on Monday, March 27, 2023.

Dolor's post added that individuals, corporations or government agencies can file damage claims under various categories that include coastal cleanup and preventive measures, economic loss to those in fisheries and marine culture, economic loss to those in the tourism sector, and related businesses and property damages.

It said that if no clear action is taken on the claims after 30 days, the claimants can contact the insurance

company's nearest claims office.

The amount of compensation might vary and would depend on the evidence presented and on the assessment of the representative of the insurance company.

## Korean Coast Guard to help contain oil spill

A Korean Coast Guard Response Team is set to arrive on March 28 to help in cleaning up the oil spill

in Oriental Mindoro.

"On Monday, the South Korean experts will arrive at the headquarters of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG)," PCG spokesman Rear Admiral Armand Balilo said on Saturday.

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

The PCG is expecting the arrival of 20 tons of sorbent pads

2,000 sets of personal protective equipment and a 1,000-meter spill boom by the first week of April to be used in the oil spill cleanup.

Meanwhile, the United States government pledged an additional P10-million in aid for the Mindoro oil spill cleanup.

Balilo said the second level of the operation is underway, which is plugging the 23 areas of the sunken MT Princess Empress that leaks oil using an ROV.



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# Mindoro calamity dislocates youth

BY RAFFY AYENG  
@tribunenepal raf

Families in Pinamalayan, Oriental Mindoro are having a hard time providing for school fees and the daily expenses of their children, proving that livelihood and food provisions are not the only challenges facing residents as a result of the oil spill.

Several communities as far as Batangas face devastation after the sunken *MT Princess Empress* has been leaking its oil cargo off the neighboring town of Naujan for roughly a month now.

According to the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office of Oriental Mindoro, 23 coastal barangays, or 30,000 families in various municipalities have been heavily affected by the disaster.

On Friday, Senator Risa Hontiveros faced affected residents of Pinamalayan who clamored for financial assistance in addition to relief goods, as most of them said they did not have any money after their only livelihood from fishing was snatched from them by the floating pollutants.

"Until when can the government support us, how long can it feed us? We need jobs since we don't know how long the oil spill will last," Maritess Sagul, a resident of Pinamalayan and wife of a fisherman, told Sen. Risa Hontiveros who visited the hardest-hit towns.

The senator replied that the government will do its best to provide temporary jobs for the fishermen who were idled by the catastrophe.

A fishing ban imposed at the onset of the fuel leak remains in effect in Naujan, Pinamalayan, and Pola, among other municipalities.

## Effect widespread

"Aside from livelihood and food, problems in ecology, health, and education have emerged. Where will the households that depended on fisheries get the money to give their children for schooling? The cash-for-work program must continue," Hontiveros told reporters.

Further, she said, residents were worried about the length of the containment process fearing that it might be like the Guimaras oil spill that lasted four years.

"We are relying on the introduction of new technology to speed up the process," she said.

Bernie Senorin, president of Samahang Mandaragat ng Banilad in Pinamalayan, meanwhile, said suing the operator of the *MT Princess Empress*, RDC Reield Marine Services, is being considered.

## Aid filing starts Monday

Meanwhile, Oriental Mindoro Governor Humerlito Dolor on Saturday announced that the filing of compensation claims for the families affected by the oil spill in his province will commence on Monday, 27 March.

Unfortunately, he said, the processing of the claims will take a few weeks to a month, as he asked for patience and understanding from his constituents.

On Friday, fisherfolk in various municipalities



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of Oriental Mindoro sought to collect P500 per day per family from the insurer of the tanker.

More than 32,000 residents of the municipalities of Calapan, Pola, Nanjan, Pinamalayan, Bongabong, Bulalacao, Mandalay, Roxas, Bansud and Gloria in Oriental Mindoro were affected.

The calls for aid were backed by the Bukluran ng Mangingisda sa Batangas, who expressed solidarity with the fisherfolk while raising the alarm over the trajectory of the slick which was moving west and northwards to Batangas due to the shifts in wind pattern.

#### Survey completed

Meanwhile, the operator of the sunken vessel, RDC Reield Marine Services, said in a statement that the remotely operated vehicle it had contracted had begun its inspection of the vessel and found 23 holes where the industrial oil is seeping out.

"The at-sea response continues with the ROV having completed its survey of the sunken wreck. Experts have identified points where oil is trickling out of the vessel, and specialized equipment is being mobilized to the work boat *Shin Nishi Maru* to help mitigate the pollution," the company said on Saturday.

It added that "the suggested clean-up techniques by the independent oil spill expert International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation Limited, including high-volume flushing and high-pressure washing of affected areas, were being implemented in Oriental Mindoro."



## Time to collect oil in slick — UP MSI

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.

BY DAN NAVARRO  
*@tribunephil\_dbn*

The University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute on Friday night proposed oil collection along the ocean surface east of Oriental Mindoro due to a possible sighting of another oil slick southeast of the province.

Measuring 162.6 square kilometers, the second oil slick is much larger than the 37.84 square kilometer oil slick reported much nearer to the suspected location of the sunken *MT Princess Empress*, citing a report from the United States' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration a day earlier.

They compared the size of the newer discovered oil slick to the size of Quezon City.

UP-MSI said that the formation of thick oil along the ocean floor was still due to calmer seas and the weakening of northeasterly winds, which the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration called the end of the *Amihan* season.

"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," UP-MSI said.

Combining the reported measured oil, UP-MSI estimated 162.60 square kilometers of oil possibly spilled along the ocean stretch east of Oriental Mindoro.



# Spill victims get Kuya Bong's help

On Thursday, 23 March, the Office of Senator Christopher "Bong" Go stepped in to provide aid to residents affected by the oil spill in Pinamalayan, Oriental Mindoro.

Go and his team are scheduled to visit and provide aid to other affected municipalities in the coming days. In his message, Go expressed his deep concern for communities who are put at risk by the oil spill.

"My heart goes out to the residents of Oriental Mindoro and nearby areas who are facing the effects of this oil spill," he said.

"*Cagawin po natin ang lahat ng ating makakaya upang makatulong sa kanila* (We will do everything possible to help them)," he added.

Earlier, Go urged concerned authorities to take necessary and immediate actions to address the oil spill incident caused by the capsizing of *MT Princess Empress*, stressing the immense damages it causes to affected communities.

Go also urged the ship owners to take full responsibility for the incident.

*MT Princess Empress*, which was carrying 900,000 liters of industrial

fuel, sank in the waters off the coast of Naujan town in Oriental Mindoro on 28 February.

Held at Barangay Zone 1 covered court and Barangay Wawa covered court, Go's team distributed face masks and snacks to 500 residents. In addition, select beneficiaries were given a cellphone, shoes and balls for basketball.

Personnel from the Department of Social Welfare and Development separately provided financial assistance to the affected residents.

## Health Impact

Amid the possible health impact of the oil spill, Go emphasized the importance of providing basic medical services to communities in need. It is for this reason that he supported the establishment of Super Health Centers nationwide.

The Super Health Center is a healthcare facility that offers services including database management, out-patient, birthing, isolation, diagnostic (laboratory, X-ray and ultrasound), pharmacy and ambulatory surgical unit.

On Friday, 24 March, Go personally



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Inspected the Super Health Center in Cordova, Cebu, followed by a relief activity to assist struggling residents in the town. The senator's visit highlights his commitment to ensuring public service delivery, especially healthcare, to communities in need.

In line with his goal to strengthen support for healthcare workers, Senator Go expressed his commitment to all Filipino caregivers as he co-sponsored Senate Bill 2261, otherwise known as the Caregivers Welfare Act, on Wednesday, 22 March. The measure already passed on 3rd reading in the House of Representatives.

The proposed measure seeks to implement guidelines for the preparation and execution of employment contracts, the submission of pre-employment requirements, hours of work, minimum wage, payment of wages, leave benefits, other benefits, non-diminution of benefits, settlement of disputes. GR



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SENATE  
SENATOR Bong Go





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**UNSAFE WATERS** Policemen guard the Baseco Beach on Saturday, March 25, 2023, as they enforce the 'No Swimming Zone' because of the high level of 'fecal coliform bacteria' found in its waters. PHOTO BY RENE H. DILAN



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# Oil spill takes toll on biodiversity



A CLEANUP worker pushes a cart filled with oil-soaked debris in Barangay Calina, Pola, Oriental Mindoro, OCMI



AN OIL-SOAKED crab lies dead on a rock on the shore of Barangay Misog, Pola, Oriental Mindoro. MICHELLE GARCIA/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE



A FISHING boat floats in water covered with a thick oil slick in Barangay Misog, Pola, Oriental Mindoro, OCMI

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

**T**HE sinking of MT Princess Empress off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, on February 28 has caused a massive oil spill reminiscent of the 2006 Guimaras oil spill.

Nearly a month after its sinking, the ill-fated vessel which was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil continues to cause havoc, taking its toll on the rich biodiversity of coastal and marine ecosystems in the affected towns.

An estimated 20,000 liters of industrial oil from the sunken tanker are seeping out of the vessel.

So far it has already affected nearly a million hectares of coastal areas in 10 towns of the province of Oriental Mindoro, one in the Antique province and two towns in Palawan province.

The affected Oriental Mindoro towns are Naujan, Pola, Pinalakayan, Gloria, Bansud, Bongabong, Roxas, Mansalay, Bulalacao and Calapan; Agutaya and Taytay in Palawan; and Caluya in Antique.

## State of calamity

POLA is one of the severely affected towns, with the health effect of the oil spill taking its toll on the community. Some 120 people have fallen ill and were taken to the hospital after having been exposed to the oil's toxic smell. They experienced nausea, headache and vomiting.

The whole province of Oriental Mindoro has been placed under a state of calamity, the same with Caluya in Antique.

Locally managed marine protected areas—which are set aside for conservation because of their importance as a marine habitat—

are at risk of devastation.

Also facing serious threats in the affected areas are the mangrove forests, seagrass beds and corals that are important ecosystem-building species that keep the coastal and marine environment healthy.

Last Tuesday's news reports said that oil slick has already reached Verde Island, threatening the Verde Island Passage (VIP), a region described by scientists as "the world's center of marine biodiversity," one of the most productive ecosystems in the world which supports the livelihood of over 2 million people.

## Long-term negative impact

DEPENDING on the severity, the long-term economic and environmental impact of oil spills can never be overemphasized. Most of the time, oil has lethal effects on the environment and it will take years, or even decades, for an affected environment to recover back to health.

But the extent and severity of oil spills can be cushioned or minimized.

Paul Horsman of Greenpeace told the *BUSINESSMIRROR* through e-mail on March 17 that, generally, when oil is spilled into the environment, it has an impact on both the ecosystem and communities that live alongside and within the ecosystem.

"The impact is always negative and, although the ecosystems and

communities do survive to a post-spill state, the scar remains," he said.

Greenpeace has been campaigning against fossil fuel and has witnessed its catastrophic impact, including some of the most devastating destructive oil spills in history.

"The extent and severity of an oil spill depend on many things, all of which work in combination to cause the eventual documented impact," he said.

Horsman, a marine biologist with degrees from Newcastle University and Portsmouth Polytechnic, is an international campaigner at the forefront of advocacy an environmental and peace issues in different countries for over 25 years. He has led Greenpeace teams in response to a number of other oil spills including the 1994/95 spills from pipelines in the Russian Arctic and the BP Deepwater Horizon in 2010.

## 'Highly toxic'

ACCORDING to Horsman, the extent of severity of the oil spill also depends on the type of oil spilled into the environment.

"Whether it is light or heavy oil; whether it is a product oil (after refining) and what type of product it is. Generally, product oils are more toxic than crude oils," he said.

Light oils have more volatile chemicals that evaporate and/or are absorbed into the water, he said.

"These are toxic but generally do not last as long in the environment as the heavier oils," he added.

On the other hand, heavy oils are some of the most difficult oils to deal with, he said.

"They stay much longer in the environment and are not easily broken down. The bunker [oil] is often an issue with shipping accidents as it is the fuel of the ship and it's a heavy oil," Horsman explained.

## Effects on coastal environments

ACCORDING to Horsman, oil spills

have an adverse impact on both plants and animals, including those that occur in rocky shores.

"Rocky shores are generally more exposed to waves that can both spread and break up oil. The oil coats and suffocates the animals and plants that are attached to or grow on the rocks. Oil can remain for years in cracks and crevices as a tarry residue. Rock pools often accumulate oil," he explained.

Like pebble beaches, sandy beaches, which is known in many coastal areas affected by the oil spill in Mindoro are expected to take its toll for the long haul, he said, as the oil coats the beach.

The oil, he said, can cause suffocation as there are many different animals that live in burrows in the sand, again, depending on the type of sand.

"Oil can penetrate such burrows," he said.

Mudflats and salt marshes, he said, are also not spared by oil spills, including the species that feed on these important ecosystems, like migratory birds.

Mudflats and salt marshes are much smaller and the movement of the water much slower.

"The oil spreads further and can stay in such areas for long periods," he noted.

Horsman added that mangroves and coral reefs can suffer extensive damage from oil spills. He explained that mangroves are ecosystems where the wave action is small and the oil can spread much farther. This wave movement will result in suffocating young mangrove shoots and burrowed animals, he said.

## Lethal effects

DR. Resurreccion Sadaba, chairman of the newly created special task force of the University of the Philippines Visayas (UPV), said oil has a lethal effect to marine life and the environment.

"Physical smothering or covering of mangroves, corals and

seagrass can impair their physiological functions," Sadaba told the *BUSINESSMIRROR* in a telephone interview on March 17.

Another mechanism, he said, is the chemical toxicity of oil that can give rise to the lethal and sublethal effects of the oil that can cause impairment of species, including the ability to breathe naturally.

The changes in the ecology primarily because of the loss of key organisms in that community and the possibility of a takeover of opportunistic species on the habitat can also cause biodiversity loss.

As one or two organisms are lost, the food chain is disrupted, which can also lead to the mass extinction of species in the affected ecosystem.

"There are other indirect effects like the loss of the habitat, or the shelter, and consequent elimination of ecologically important species," Sadaba said.

## Oil spill response

ACCORDING to Sadaba, responders to the oil spill should be very careful in removing oil.

He said that once oil has started to coat mangroves, corals and seagrass, their death becomes inevitable, but this can be minimized by properly removing the oil.

In mangrove areas, saplings and seedlings are likely to perish if they are heavily coated. He noted that bigger mangroves could also die depending on the severity of the oil cover.

"Once smaller trees are covered, the leaves will slowly turn yellow after a week. Eventually, if its ability to release the salt is impaired because of the oil covering, then it will eventually die," he explained.

Sadaba explained that removing the oil gently from the affected mangroves, corals and seagrass will help them survive.

However, in most cases, he said natural attenuation or weakening of its impact is the best cure for oil spills.

"Once the oil is already there, one option is natural attenuation. Allow the ecosystem's natural recovery," he said.

"There's a saying that once the oil is there, the best action is 'no action,'" he said.

The daily tidal flushing, he said, is powerful and can clean the oil.

"All you have to do is to collect the oil being removed by the tidal flushing," Sadaba said.

This can be done by making booms to collect the oil going in and out of mangrove forests, seagrass beds and even coral reefs.

## Do's and don'ts

THE UPV has come up with a series of public advisories on how to best remove oil in coastal areas.

Some of the "guidelines" aim to reduce the risk of disaster—essentially oil's lethal effect on health and the environment—while ensuring that the process will not do more harm.

In removing oil, the UPV Task Force highlighted the need to identify duly accredited waste collectors, and of a dump site for collected oil and oil-soaked debris.

For health and safety reasons, the collected oil and oil-soaked debris should be sealed and properly disposed of.

For cleanup workers, the UPV said the local government unit should provide supply to the workforce, and coordinate with the Department of Social Welfare and Development for cash for work program.

Cleanup workers should be physically fit, not suffering from respiratory problems, and should be provided with personal protective equipment.

The UPV Task Force recommends manual removal of oil, and use of commercially available or organic sorbents.

Vacuum cleaning, sediment reworking, vegetation cutting, removal, and application of solidifiers should be strictly prohibited.



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PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROEL HDANG MANIPON FOR THE DAILY TRIBUNE  
VIEW of part of the forest from the tower.

# Revisiting Silonay's mangrove forests

The community-managed Silonay Mangrove Conservation and Eco Park is home to 15 species of mangrove trees and many birds, several of which are endemic. It is one of the important tourist destinations in Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro.

The mangrove forest was sparse when I first visited in 2016, but now, seven years later, the trees seemed to be thriving when we dropped by on a hot afternoon of 21 March.

The Silonay Mangrove Conservation and Eco Park also sported a new reception hall, constructed in 2021 with funds donated by high school students from a prize they won in a dance contest. The bamboo walkway, which was damaged by typhoon Nockten, locally called Nina, in December 2018, had been replaced by a concrete one.

Sprawling on 41 hectares, the park, which was established through an amended City Fisheries Ordinance in 2011 and opened on 13 November 2013, showcases one of the largest mangrove forests in the Oriental Mindoro, one of the two provinces on Mindoro Island, south of Luzon. It is one of several mangrove forest parks that have recently cropped up all over the Philippines, harnessing their touristic potentials for conservation and environmental education, and providing an alternative source of income for locals who gather mangrove wood.

The forest envelopes the site of Singalong of the barangay of Silonay in the northeastern coast of Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro's capital. It sits near the mouth of Bucayao-Silonay River, facing the Verde Island Passage and Tayabas Bay.

## Local tales

A local folk story goes that the growth of mangrove trees was brought about by the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in Central Luzon in 1991, covering many areas in volcanic ash, and an earthquake in 1894, said to be strongest in the province (though this is not scientifically confirmed). There are similar stories in other places related to the Pinatubo quake, such as the story of agoho trees growing abundantly in Anawangin Cove in Zambales after the big eruption.

But locals have been living with the mangrove forest for a long time and have made a living by cutting down trees to make into charcoal. In 2009, however, environmental organization Conservation International Philippines identified the area as vulnerable to anthropogenic climate change. CI developed educational and conservation programs, leading to the establishment of the park.

The park is managed by the community — the barangay council and the people's organization, Sama-samang Nagkakaisang Pansaysnan ng Silonay, which has about 80 members — together with the Ecopark Management Council, Bantay Bakawan and the City Fisheries Management Office of Calapan.

Our volunteer guide for the day, Alwin Simblante, said he used to gather mangrove wood. Though his father is from Daram Island in Samar, he was born in Silonay and spent

his childhood playing in the mangrove forest. An aunt

encouraged him to join a seminar about mangrove conservation in 2017. Now, he works to safeguard the forest. He said residents have also stopped cutting down trees. They also realized how the forest protects the community during storms.

The forest is also crucial in replenishing fish stock as it acts a hatchery and home for fingerlings. The community largely depends on fishing, including Simblante, as well as construction jobs.

## Plant life and birdwatching

We explored the forest with Simblante, who pointed out the different species of mangrove. The walkway, which is about 300 meters long, was narrow, speckled with green moss and, at this time, sprinkled with filaments that had fallen from white pagatpat blooms.

The muddy forest floor, spiky with aerial roots, was also sprinkled with filaments.

The pagatpat (*Sonneratia alba*) is the dominant among the 15 species found in Silonay. Other species include bakhaw talaki (*Rhizophora apiculata*); bakhaw babae or loop-root mangrove (*Rhizophora mucronata*); api-api or Indian mangrove (*Avicennia officinalis*); bungalon or white mangrove (*Avicennia marina*); buta-buta or milky mangrove (*Eroccaria agallocha*), which excretes a poisonous, milky sap; and diluar or holly-leaved acanthus (*Acanthus siliifolius*).

We passed by children swimming in one of the waterways, showing off by jumping from a footbridge. A small crab, with a bright blue pattern on its back, scurried to its hole, and a mudskipper hopped out of the water. We took pictures of a group of jewel bugs with their striking iridescent green and gold coloration under a leaf.

The forest is home to two species of bats — the long-tongued nectar bat and the musky fruit bat — and five amphibian and reptilian species including the tokay gecko, the common puddle frog, and the giant Visayan frog.

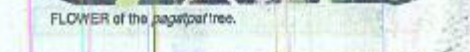
There are also recorded 29 species of birds, including the Asian glossy starling, the clamorous reed warbler, the may or chestnut munia, the oriental magpie robin, the pied triller, the golden-bellied gorygone, the pied fantail, white-collared kingfisher, the yellow-vested bulbul, the kityaxan or black-naped oriole and the tamsi or olive-backed sunbird. Seven of these are endemic to the country — the Philippine duck, the white-eared brown dove, the Philippine coucal, the Philippine nightjar, the pygmy swiftlet, the lemon-throated leaf warbler and the colet.

Birdwatching is included in the list of activities in the park. Income-generating projects supported by CI, PATH Foundation Philippines, the city government of Calapan and the provincial government of Oriental Mindoro. They also sell mangrove seedlings, hold mangrove planting activities during low tide, offer catering services, manage a mini-grocery store and souvenir shop and facilitate kayaking during high tide. They keep lukot or stingless bees, whose honey they harvest and sell.

At the end of the walkway is a three-story tower, where one can rest and have a good view of the forest.



JEWEL bugs under a mangrove leaf.



FLOWER of the pagatpat tree.



GREG CROSSER  
ROEL HDANG MANIPON



CHILDREN frolic in one of the park's waterways.



BOOMS for the oil spill are being readied at the mangrove park.

## Protecting the mangrove

That day, Silonay residents were preparing for a new threat — the oil spill. On 23 February, tanker MT Prince Empress, carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil, capsized and sank in the waters off the town of Naujan. The spill has affected Pals and other towns, and threatens Calapan City.

At the parking lot of the park were booms, made of dayami or rice hay to absorb the oil and empty plastic bottles to keep them buoyant. More booms were made at the barangay hall nearby.

Barangay captain Francisco Forta was waiting to advise when to place them to mitigate the spread of the spill. He said fishermen are discouraged from catching and selling fish, and they are wondering how to get by. But that day, they were getting ready to protect the mangrove forest, which has nourished them and protected them from storms.



# Mountain Province, Benguet battle forest fires

BY ALDWIN QUITASOL

BAGUIO City – Some forested and grassy areas of Mountain Province and Benguet Province turned black after large fires consumed them in the past days and some are still on fire as firefighters together with villagers struggle to put them out.

In Bokod, Benguet, the Bokod Municipal Police Station reported that a senior citizen farmer died in a forest fire incident that transpired in Sitio Poodan, Barangay Ekip, Bokod, Benguet on the afternoon of March 23, 2023.

Initial investigation disclosed that the victim volunteered to help in suppressing the forest fire, however, he was trapped when the fire quickly spread because of the strong wind and was unable to run fast because of the sloping terrain.

The victim was identified as Johnny Alsem Baniwas, 61 years old, and a resident of Sitio Pootan, Barangay Ekip, Bokod, Benguet. His body was found 9:30 a.m. of Friday.

In the Municipality of Tuba, Benguet, personnel of the Bureau of Fire Protection Tuba and employees of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Cordillera rushed to a forest fire at Sitio Utaan, Poblacion, Tuba.

At the moment, firefighters are battling the forest fires eating the mountains in the municipalities of Bokod, Kabayan and Kapangan, all in Benguet. BFP Benguet reported that hundreds of hectares were already razed.

Investigation on the said fires is ongoing.

In Tadian, Mountain Province, community members of Barangay Poblacion of the municipality took part in the "galatis di depdep" or community response to suppress the forest fire ravaging the mountains where the water source of the barangay is.



STRATEGIC  
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# Daily Tribune

WITHOUT FEAR - WITHOUT FAVOR

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PHOTOGRAPH BY BUREAU OF FIRE PROTECTION CORDILLERA  
Flemas Officials of the different local government units of the Cordillera appeal to the public to be responsible enough especially in doing kaingin or slash and burn method of farming to prevent forest fires.



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# Large asteroid zooms between Earth and moon

**P**ARIS: A large asteroid would have safely zoomed between Earth and the moon on Saturday, a once-in-a-decade event that will be used as a training exercise for planetary defense efforts, according to the European Space Agency (ESA).

The asteroid, named 2023 DZ2, is estimated to be 40 to 70 meters (130 to 230 feet) wide, roughly the size of the Parthenon, and big enough to wipe out a large city if it hit our planet.

It is estimated to come within a third of the distance from the Earth to the moon at 19:49 GMT on Saturday, said Richard Moissl, head of the ESA's planetary defense office.

Though that is "very close," there is nothing to worry about, he told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Small asteroids fly past every day, but one of this size coming so close to Earth only happens around once

every 10 years, he added.

The asteroid will pass 175,000 kilometers (109,000 miles) from Earth at a speed of 28,000 kilometers per hour (17,400 miles per hour). The moon is roughly 385,000 kilometers away.

An observatory in La Palma, one of Spain's Canary Islands, first spotted the asteroid on February 27.

Last week, the United Nations-endorsed International Asteroid Warning Network decided it would take advantage of the close look, carrying out a "rapid characterization" of 2023 DZ2,

Moissl said.

That means astronomers around the world will analyze the asteroid with a range of instruments such as spectrometers and radars.

The goal is to find out just how much we can learn about such an asteroid in only a week, Moissl said.

It will also serve as training for how the network "would react to a threat" possibly heading our way in the future, he added.

## 'Scientifically interesting'

Moissl said preliminary data suggests 2023 DZ2 is "a scientifically interesting object," indicating it could be a somewhat unusual type of asteroid. But he added that more data was needed to determine the asteroid's composition.

The asteroid will again swing past

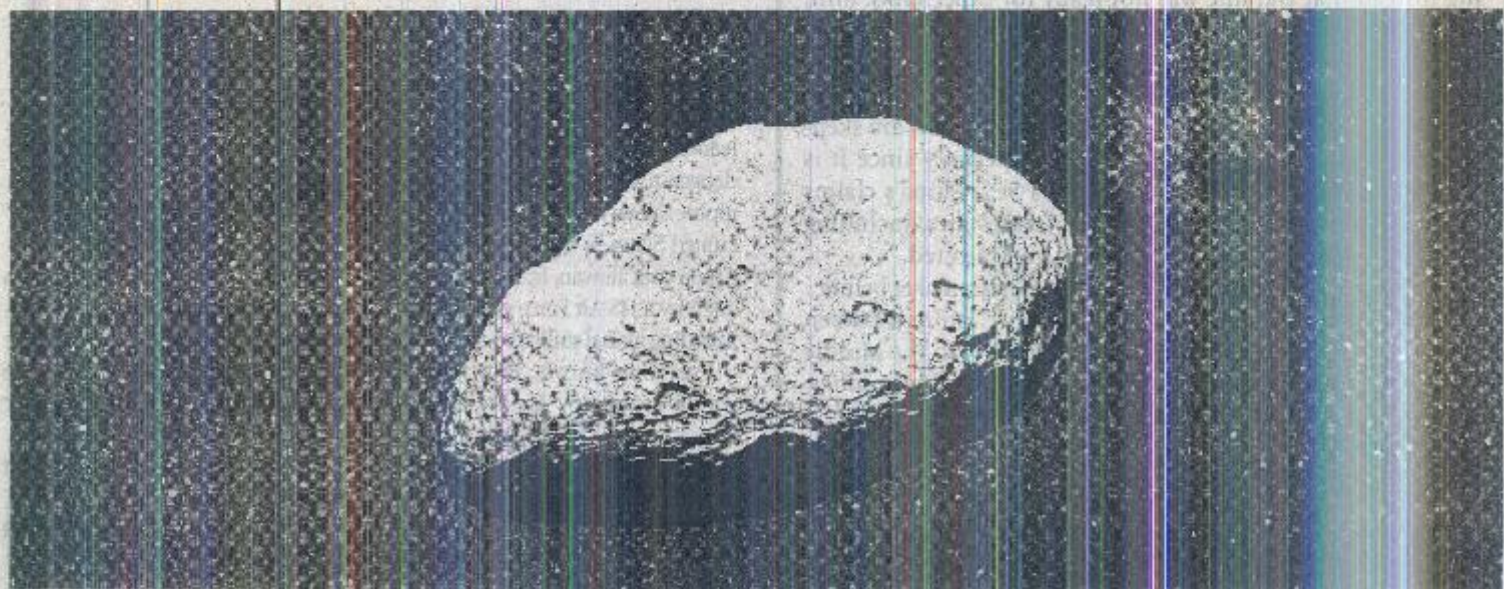
Earth in 2026, but poses no threat of impact for at least the next 100 years — which is how far out its trajectory has been calculated.

Earlier this month, a similarly sized asteroid — 2023 DW — was briefly given a one-in-432 chance of hitting Earth on Valentine's Day 2046.

But further calculations ruled out any chance of an impact, which is what normally happens with newly discovered asteroids. Moissl said 2023 DW was now expected to miss Earth by some 4.3 million kilometers.

Even if such an asteroid was determined to be heading our way, Earth is no longer defenseless.

Last year, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's DART spacecraft deliberately slammed into the pyramid-sized asteroid Dimorphos, significantly knocking it off course in the first such test of our planetary defenses. **AFP**



**SPACE EVENT** A handout artist's impression released on Friday, March 24, 2023, by the European Space Agency shows a gray, irregularly shaped asteroid, rocky objects that often pass safely past Earth. **ESA IMAGE VIA AFP**