

27 March 2023 Monday



DENR

NEWS ALERTS

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R vows lawsuit for Mindoro oil-spill damage; claims caravan to reel off

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By Jonathan L. Mayuga

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By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

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Under the Clean Water Act, the penalty for causing water pollution ranges from P10,000 to P200,000 per day until remediation has been satisfactorily performed. "In oil spills, the Department of Justice (DOJ) steps up the case-building process against the owner of MT Princess Empress. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) through the Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) and the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB), for its part, is stepping up the assessment of the devastation for possible inclusion of a damage claim in the criminal case or cases to be filed against the owner of MT Princess Empress.

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AS the application for compensation in the Oriental Mindoro oil spill begins on March 27, the government led by the Department of Justice (DOJ) steps up the case-building process against the owner of MT Princess Empress. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) through the Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) and the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB), for its part, is stepping up the assessment of the devastation to the environment for possible inclusion of a damage claim in the criminal case or cases to be filed against the owner of MT Princess Empress.

Under the Clean Water Act, the penalty for causing water pollution ranges from P10,000 to P200,000 per day until remediation has been satisfactorily performed.

"In oil spills, the PCG under the marine pollution law has jurisdiction," he said.

He added that the Clean Water Act pertains to discharge in inland water bodies. The oil spill falls under marine pollution, which is under PCG's mandate.

Nevertheless, he said since oil spill causes damage to the environment, the DENR will go after the owners, whether through penalties and fine under the Wildlife Act or NIPAS—for causing the demise of plant and animal wildlife, including corals, mangroves and seagrass.

"Oil spill causes damage to the environment. The DOJ is looking into it. The other day [last week], agencies met to discuss the criminal and administrative charges to be filed," said Leones.

"Like in Tubbataha, remember that the corals were damaged. We can impose the same penalty or fine [in the case of the oil spill]," added Leones, referring to the 2013 grounding by the USS Guardian on Tubbataha Reef, causing enormous damage to corals in the UNESCO World Heritage Site. A total of 2,345 sqm of corals were destroyed within the legislated protected area, and the US Navy was slapped with a fine of P58 million under Republic Act 10067, or the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park Act of 2009.

In the case of the Mindoro oil spill, close to 30 locally-managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are affected.

However, Leones said the leak is continuing "so we cannot make a final assessment yet."

He said the DENR-BMB is in charge of assessing the damage to the environment while the DENR-EMB conducts water quality sampling in oil spill-affected areas.

the DENR Task Force Empress, Jonas R. Leones, told the DENR is in coordination with the DOJ and the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), which has jurisdiction over incidents of oil spill. He said DENR has only 2 roles under the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (NOS COP)—water quality and waste management or disposal. He said the DENR will file a claim for environmental damage, but is still in the process of assessing the damage caused by the Mindoro oil spill. According to Leones, criminal raps against the owner of MT Princess Empress may cover violations of environmental laws like the Wildlife Act and the National Integrated Protected Areas Act (NIPAS) or relevant legislation in case of damaged protected areas.

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The chief of the DENR Task Force MT Princess Empress, Undersecretary Jonas R. Leones, told the BUSINESSMIRROR the DENR is following the lead of the DOJ and the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), which has jurisdiction over incidents of oil spill.

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He said the owner of the ill-fated vessel that sank off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro together with some 900,000 liters of industrial oil, faces penalties and fines as prescribed by the said laws. But since oil spills fall under the category of marine pollution, Leones said the Clean Water Act

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DENR vows lawsuit for Mindoro oil-spill damage; claims caravan to reel off

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Leones said administratively, the DENR can compel the rehabilitation of affected ecosystems under the Clean Water Act.

He said the DENR will make sure that the cost of DENR's effort, including mobilizing people for the coastal cleanup, water quality monitoring and damage assessment will be charged to MT Princess Empress's owner.

Last week, a lawyer of MT Princess Empress' insurer P&I Club, Atty. Valeriano del Rosario announced that local claims offices will be established in affected areas, beginning with the "Claims Caravan" at the Provincial Capitol of Oriental Mindoro.

"The claims caravan will act as the

collecting point for the claimants to submit their completed claim forms," he said. Claimants may include individuals, corporations, and local government units affected by the oil spill.

The categories of claims include the cost of cleanup and preventive measures, economic loss in fisheries and marine culture, economic loss in the tourism sector and related businesses, and damage to properties.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said a total of 163,508 people or 34,555 families in Mimaropa and Western Visayas were affected by the oil spill. At least 192 people experienced health-related problems because of exposure to industrial oil from the sunken vessel.



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Sue polluters

“*Since the big guns refuse to surface, those suffering from the oil spill should compel their action through the legal process.*”

An interesting prospect that the lawyers of the Oriental Mindoro oil spill victims are pursuing is the filing of a class suit to seek at least P300 million in compensation from the companies involved in the disaster.

Ecological advocates said, however, that the amount being sought is too small in terms of a just reparation, primarily for livelihood.

The Exxon Valdez case resulted in \$1.5 billion in awards and other payments to mostly 32,000 Alaskan fishermen whose livelihood was displaced

by the 1989 tanker that ran aground in March of 1989, spilling 11 million gallons of oil into Prince William Sound in Alaska.

A class suit was filed against the oil giant by fishermen, Alaska natives, and landowners.

It took all of 17 years for a final judgment to be obtained and the punitive damages were reduced from the original \$5 billion.

US District Court Judge Russell Holland during the hearing underlined the responsibility of Exxon to be diligent in conducting its business.

“Exxon officials knew that carrying huge volumes of crude oil through Prince William Sound was a dangerous business, yet they knowingly permitted a relapsed alcoholic to direct the operation of the Exxon Valdez through Prince William Sound.”

The same issue is now being raised against San Miguel Corp. maritime unit SL Harbor Bulk Terminal Corp. which chartered the decrepit oil tanker MT Princess Empress to transport 900,000 metric tons of oil apparently for use of an SMC power plant.

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Authorities including senators in a public hearing were quick to absolve SMC of culpability saying that under the Oil Pollution Compensation Act of 2007, the charterer is not liable.

Yet the same personalities admitted that the SMC subsidiary failed to exercise due diligence in examining the condition of the ship it contracted to carry the toxic cargo.

A class suit will provide a good forum on the liability of SMC.

A maritime expert said, "SMC as charterer is duty bound to do a due diligence check on the integrity of the tanker they are hiring, the qualifications of the crew, and the validity of the tanker's operating permits."

“ Authorities including senators in a public hearing were quick to absolve SMC of culpability saying that under the Oil Pollution Compensation Act of 2007, the charterer is not liable.

"SMC cannot and should not keep quiet about this," he added.

The industry veteran said SMC, at the very least, should identify who is supposed to be in charge of these (due diligence) tasks.

The source said despite the assurance of the insurer that the victims will be compensated, the actual release of the insurance payments remains in doubt.

"If the papers of the tanker are not in order, the Protection and Indemnity Insurance coverage of the tanker will have no effect and the liability for any damage or recovery will not be shouldered by their Protection and Insurance Club," the expert said.

Thus, the class suit is crucial since the principal actors appear unwilling to face the public and thus far have left the talking to their insurer who is even not a definite source of restitution.

Since the big guns refuse to surface, those suffering from the oil spill should compel their action through the legal process.

The magistrate in the Exxon Valdez case underlined the responsibility of big businesses to look after the welfare of the community, since they have the resources to do so while taking care of their cash tills.

“ But likewise, the emotional abandonment and alienation that the husband did made the wife suffer.



Oil spill compensation seen eclipsing

P1.1-b 2006 record

**By Rio N. Araja
and Vince Lopez**

COMPENSATION claims as a result of the massive oil spill from the MT Princess Empress could surpass those filed in the aftermath of the environmental disaster in the Guimaras Strait in 2006, when the

MT Solar sank with its cargo of 2 million liters of bunker fuel, a lawmaker said Sunday.

"If we look back at the MT Solar incident, a total of P1.1 billion was paid to settle 26,872 compensation claims, including those filed by owners of beach resorts, tour boat operators, and other tourism service providers hit by the 2006

oil spill," said Quezon City Rep. Marvin Rillo, vice chairman of the House tourism committee.

The Guimaras disaster was widely considered the country's worst oil spill in history.

But considering that the MT Solar episode happened 17 years ago, Rillo said the inflation-adjusted compensation

claims with respect to the pollution damage caused by the MT Princess Empress may well exceed P1.1 billion.

"Apart from tourism-related claimants, we expect property owners hit by the oil spill to file compensation claims for damages to beachfront properties, fishing boats, and fishing gear," Rillo said.

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to suffered economic losses, sterfolk, seaweed farmers, and operators, any likewise claims," Rillo said.

Speaker Ferdinand Romualdez, Tingog party- Yedda Marie Romualdez Welfare and Development Rex Gatchalian distributed of P3,000 to 600 oil spill victims in Oriental Mindoro.

Speaker's office also gave the first congressional district, Arnan Panaligan, a P500,000. The P3,000 cash aid came assistance to individuals in Crisis Situations program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (see on A4 - Editors)

Comments that had to pay in response to the oil spill to file claims, along with contractors and the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), Rillo said.

Mindoro Governor Humerito Dolor, an insurance representative, announced the launch of a "Claims Caravan" in Calapan City that will serve as a claims-collecting point for those harmed by the MT Princess Empress's oil spill.

March 23, the Oriental Mindoro provincial government had 932 fishermen, 61 tourism establishments and 750 community organizations that are expected to be affected by the oil spill.

The province of Oriental Mindoro is now under a state of calamity because of the oil spill, which has also hit coastal areas in Batangas, Antique and Palawan.

The MT Princess Empress sank off the coast of Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28, 1983, spilling 900,000 liters of industrial fuel oil on the way to Iloilo from Bataan.

Defense Senior Undersecretary Carlito Galvez Jr. said the US Coast Guard and some of its air assets will arrive in the Philippines to help in the ongoing clean-up operations.

In a report to President Ferdinand

Oil...

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Those who suffered economic losses, including fisherfolk, seaweed farmers, and fishpond operators, are likewise expected to file claims," Rillo said.

Meanwhile, Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, Tingog party-list Rep. Yedda Marie Romualdez and Social Welfare and Development Secretary Rex Gatchalian distributed cash assistance of P3,000 to 600 oil spill victims in Oriental Mindoro.

The Speaker's office also gave the province's first congressional district, led by Rep. Arnan Panaligan, a P500,000 calamity fund. The P3,000 cash aid came from the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situations program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (see related story on A4 - Editors)

Local governments that had to pay their staff extra in response to the oil spill are also expected to file claims, along with clean-up contractors and the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), Rillo said.

Oriental Mindoro Governor Humerito Dolor and an insurance representative earlier announced the launch of a "Claims Caravan" in Calapan City that will serve as a claims-collecting point for those harmed by the MT Princess Empress's oil spill.

As of March 23, the Oriental Mindoro provincial government had recorded 20,932 fishermen, 61 tourism establishments and 750 community-based organizations that are expected to file claims.

The entire province of Oriental Mindoro is now under a state of calamity because of the oil spill, which has also hit coastal areas in Batangas, Antique and Palawan.

The MT Princess Empress sank off Naujan, Mindoro Oriental on Feb. 28, while carrying 900,000 liters of industrial fuel oil on the way to Iloilo from Bataan, the PCG said.

Meanwhile, Defense Senior Undersecretary Carlito Galvez Jr. said the US Coast Guard and some of its air assets will arrive in the Philippines to help in the ongoing clean-up operations.

In a report to President Ferdinand

Marcos Jr., Galvez said they were expecting the arrival of the entire US Coast Guard contingent for the additional technical support in our disaster response operations," Galvez said in a report to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. "Although, one US C-17 with equipment (50K loader) already arrived this morning and is now at Subic Air Base, another C-5 is expected to arrive tomorrow," Galvez said.

Galvez, who is also chair of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), Office of Civil Defense (OCD) Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno and Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) chief Admiral Artemio Abu, and other Armed Forces and local government officials, conducted an aerial inspection of the affected areas of the oil spill early Sunday morning.

Galvez said the presence of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has greatly helped in the clean-up operations by providing rapid environmental assessments of the affected areas, identification of priority areas at risk of environmental damage, and assessment of the needs for ecosystem restoration.

The DND senior official also reported that the Japanese remotely operated vessel (ROV) which found the sunken MT Princess Empress said the tanker had suffered extensive structural damage after sinking.

He said at this point, it was unclear how much oil remained in the tanker and at what rate it was leaking out.

Galvez said the situation in Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, Palawan) and Western Visayas was "a lot better" than he had imagined and that this was "encouraging."

"Our response efforts, particularly the actions of the various government agencies, are present and very effective with the collaboration of all stakeholders, not to mention the assistance of our allies and other partner countries," Galvez said.

To date, the Marcos administration and non-government organizations have already extended more than P95 million worth of assistance to the residents in the areas affected by the oil spill.

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Defense Senior Undersecretary Carlito Galvez Jr. said the US Coast Guard and some of its air assets will arrive in the Philippines to help in the ongoing clean-up operations.

In a report to President Ferdinand



Over P1.1B in oil claims seen

BY JING VILLAMENTE

Compensation claims due to the sunken *MT Princess Empress*' massive oil spill could surpass those filed in the aftermath of the 2006 sinking of the *MT Solar* sinking in Guimaras Strait. **Turn to page A6**

Over P1.1B in oil claims seen

From page 1

"If we look back at the *MT Solar* incident, a total of P1.1 billion was paid to settle 26,872 compensation claims, including those filed by owners of beach resorts, tour boat operators, and other tourism service providers hit by the 2006 oil spill," said Quezon City Rep. Marvin Rillo, House tourism committee vice chairperson, Sunday.

Considering that the *MT Solar* episode happened 17 years ago, the inflation-adjusted compensation claims concerning the pollution damage caused by the *MT Princess Empress*' oil spill may exceed P1.1 billion.

"Apart from tourism-related claimants, we expect property owners hit by the oil spill to file compensation claims for damages to beachfront properties, fishing boats and fishing gear," he said.

He said those who suffered economic losses, including fisherfolk, seaweed farmers, and fishpond operators, are likewise expected to file claims.

Local governments that had to pay their staff extra in response to the oil spill incident are also expected to file claims, along with clean-up contractors and the Philippine Coast Guard, Rillo said.

Oriental Mindoro Governor Humerlito Dolor and an insurance representative earlier announced the launch of a "Claims Caravan" in Calapan City serving as a collecting point for documentary submissions.

As of 23 March, the Oriental Mindoro provincial government has recorded 20,932 fisherfolk, 61 tourism establishments, and 750 community-based organizations that are filing claims.

The entire province of Oriental Mindoro is now under a state of calamity because of the oil spill, which has also hit coastal areas in Batangas, Antique and Palawan.



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Oil spill victims up to nearly 173K

BY VICTOR REYES

NEARLY 173,000 persons have been affected so far by the oil spill caused by the sinking of MT Princess Empress last February 28 off Oriental Mindoro, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC).

In a situational report, NDRRMC said 36,658 families or 172,928 individuals have been affected so far as of yesterday, up from 34,553 families or 163,498 individuals as of last Saturday.

The agency said those affected come from 163 barangays in 17 towns and municipalities in Oriental Mindoro, Batangas and Palawan.

Most of those affected – 24,292 families or 121,327 individuals – are from Oriental Mindoro, the NDRRMC said.

At least 7,195 families or 27,145 persons have been affected in Antique; 3,404 families or 16,716 individuals in Palawan; and 1,767 families or 7,740 individuals in

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OIL SPILL

Batangas

A total of P136.54 million in aid had been provided in Calabarzon, Mimaropa and Western Visayas, mostly financial and food assistance.

The number of residents who fell sick due to the oil spill remained at 206, all from the worst-hit town of Pola. They experienced severe headache, chest pain, difficulty in breathing, dizziness, cough, and colds, among others. Many of the victims, including children, are still being monitored.

The cost of damage to the fishery sector in Antique alone stood at P3.85 million, the NDRRMC said.

Last Saturday, Defense officer-in-charge and NDRRMC chairman Senior Undersecretary Carlito Galvez went to Pola to check ongoing efforts to address the oil spill.

Galvez, PCG commandant Adm. Artemio Abu and other PCG officials discussed the "ongoing oil spill response operations and efforts to support the affected families, followed by the conduct of aerial and coastal inspections."

In a statement, the PCG said Abu "shared that the officials arrived at a common observation that the area's situation is improving."

It said Galvez "conveyed the government's message of assurance to the affected families about the immediate mitigation, control, clean-up, and recovery of spill oil."

MORE HELP COMING

More personnel and equipment from the United States Coast Guard are arriving in the country to help in the oil spill cleanup drive in Oriental Mindoro and nearby provinces, Galvez said.

Galvez, in a report to President Marcos Jr., said a team from the US

Coast Guard and a C-17 plane arrived yesterday while additional units and air assets, including a C-5, will arrive starting today, Monday, to augment the teams conducting a cleanup and containment drive.

A C5 is usually used to deliver relief aid and humanitarian supplies to areas afflicted with natural disasters or crises while C-17s are used to transport cargo.

"We are looking forward to the arrival of the entire US Coast Guard contingent for the additional technical support in our disaster response operations. Although one US C-17 with equipment (60K loader) already arrived this morning and is now at Subic Air Base. Another C-5 is expected to arrive tomorrow," Galvez said.

"We will immediately employ these assets and integrate in our response operations. In addition, we continue to closely monitor the ROV's (remotely-operated vehicle) operations for significant updates and to further determine the extent of the oil spill," he added.

The US had previously sent members of its National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that provided rapid environmental assessments of the affected areas, identification of priority areas at risk of environmental damage, and assessment of the needs for ecosystem restoration.

Galvez said the NOAA provides support for scientific modeling to estimate the trajectory of the oil spill and satellite imagery to boost assessment efforts.

Galvez also said that based on the findings of the Japanese ROV, MT Princess Empress "suffered extensive structural damage after sinking.

"At this point, no visible consumption fuel leak coming from the damaged vessel. Oil leaks had been observed from all 8 compartments (tanks). Some through ballast tanks.

Volume of remaining oil inside the compartments cannot be estimated at this point. Oil spillage rate from the source is likewise yet to be determined," he said, quoting the findings of the Japanese team.

Galvez said a total of 10,206 liters of oil waste and oily water, and 72,643 kilos of oil contaminated debris have been collected in shoreline clean-up operations.

CASH FOR WORK

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) said more than 17,000 people from oil spill-affected provinces in the Mimaropa and Western Visayas regions have received payment for work rendered for five days, 10 days and 15 days, under the cash-for-work program implemented by the government in oil spill-affected areas.

The department distributed the wages of 2,414 beneficiaries of the cash for work (CFW) from Oriental Mindoro, Palawan and Antique last Saturday. A total of 17,071 beneficiaries are now covered by the CFW.

DSWD data also showed that it has also provided cash assistance to 5,961 under the Assistance for Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS) and distributed a second wave of Family Food Packs, numbering 50,000, in Palawan and Oriental Mindoro.

A total of P75.2 million worth of family food packs and non-food relief items have been provided to those affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro, Palawan and Antique.

The DSWD-Disaster Response Operations Monitoring and Information Center (DSWD-DROMIC) said 34,553 families (or 163,498 individuals) from 151 barangays in Oriental Mindoro and Palawan have been affected by the oil spill – *With Jocelyn Montemayor*



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EDITORIAL



CARTOON

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Oil spill compensation claims can top ₱1.1 B 'improving' — PCG

By MARTIN SADONGDONG
and ELLSON QUISMORIO

Cleanup efforts in areas affected by the massive oil spill in Oriental Mindoro continue as the situation in its coastal waters started "improving," the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said yesterday.

Admiral Artemio Abu, PCG com-

mandant, visited Pola town on Saturday with Department of National Defense Officer-in-Charge (DND-OIC) and acting National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) Chairperson Carlito Galvez Jr. to oversee the cleanup operations by the coast guard, local government units, and other concerned agencies.

Aerial and coastal inspections

were also conducted to assess the situation in the area.

"CG Admiral Abu shared that the officials arrived at a common observation that the area's situation is improving," the PCG said.

Prior to this, PCG personnel conducted a shoreline clean-up and assessment technique (SCAT) in nine barangays in Pola and two towns

CONTINUING CLEAN-UP —
Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) personnel confer with experts in conducting a re-survey as part of the Shoreline Clean-up and Assessment Technique (SCAT) in Pola, Oriental Mindoro, on March 23, 2023.
(Photo from PCG)



CONTINUING CLEAN-UP —
Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) personnel confer with experts in conducting a re-survey as part of the Shoreline Clean-up and Assessment Technique (SCAT) in Pola, Oriental Mindoro, on March 23, 2023.
(Photo from PCG)



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Oriental Mindoro coastal waters 'improving' — PCG

"to measure the level of contamination and condition of the shoreline." The two municipalities are considered as the most affected areas by the oil spill.

According to the PCG, the SCAT revealed that the water samples "passed the water quality standards" set forth by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Administrative Order 2019-08 in compliance with Republic Act 9275 or the Philippine Clean Water Act of 2004.

There was also "no pronounced smell or odor of oil" from the samples taken by the PCG personnel, the agency added.

The samples also yielded negative results for the hydrogen sulfide test which is being done to determine the quality of water in a certain area.

Hydrogen sulfide is a colorless but highly toxic gas known for its odor which resembles that of a rotten egg.

Exposure to hydrogen sulfide "may cause irritation to the eyes and respiratory system" as well as "apnea, coma, convulsions, dizziness, headache, weakness, irritability, and insomnia," the United States' Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said.

Aside from these, the PCG said that other observations noted from the SCAT included the following:

"no visible oil floating in the water; no oil rubbing off on people or boats; no visible oil on the surface substrate; no subsurface oil layers in pits dug into the shore; no mobile oil on the subsurface; no oiled debris; no oiled dead animals are present inshore."

Meanwhile, Galvez assured the affected families that the national government will continue its work to finally seal the leaking cargoes of industrial fuel oil in the sunken motor tanker (MT) Princess Empress so that the oil spill could finally be contained.

Experts from the Korean Coast Guard Emergency Response Team are also expected to arrive in the country on Monday, March 27, to help the PCG in the cleanup efforts.

Furthermore, the PCG said that Eco Trends International, a business development and technology trading company, committed to donate three 40-footer container vans of microfiber absorbent pads to the Incident Management Team in Oriental Mindoro.

The absorbent pads can rapidly absorb oil products while repelling water which will significantly augment the ongoing offshore response and shoreline cleanup operations of the PCG.

Latest data from the PCG showed

that a total of 8,163 liters of oily water mixture and 98 sacks of oil-contaminated materials have already been collected during offshore oil spill response as of March 24.

Meanwhile, there were 3,155 sacks of oil-contaminated materials and 22 drums of waste collected at 13 affected barangays in Naujan, Bulalacao, and Pola towns during shoreline response.

Compensation claims

The compensation claims from the oil spill triggered by the sunken MT Princess Empress could breach the ₱1.1-billion mark.

Quezon City 4th district Rep. Marvin Rillo, vice chairman of the House Committee on Tourism, said this as he cited the 2006 sinking of the MT Solar in Guimaras Strait.

"If we look back at the MT Solar incident, a total of ₱1.1 billion was paid to settle 26,872 compensation claims, including those filed by owners of beach resorts, tour boat operators, and other tourism service providers hit by the 2006 oil spill," he said in a statement yesterday.

Considering that the MT Solar episode happened 17 years ago, Rillo said the inflation-adjusted compensation claims with respect to the pollution damage caused by the MT Princess Empress's oil spill may well exceed ₱1.1 billion.

"Apart from tourism-related claimants, we expect property owners hit by the oil spill to file compensation claims for damages to beachfront properties, fishing boats, and fishing

gear," Rillo said.

"Those who suffered economic losses, including fisherfolk, seaweed farmers, and fishpond operators, are likewise expected to file claims," Rillo said.

MT Princess Empress sank off Naujan, Mindoro Oriental on February 28, while carrying 900,000 liters of industrial fuel oil on the way to Iloilo from Bataan, according to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG). The ensuing oil spill affected Tablas Strait.

Meanwhile, local government units (LGUs) that had to pay their staff extra in response to the oil spill incident are also expected to file claims, along with clean-up contractors and the PCG, according to Rillo.

Oriental Mindoro Governor Hummerlito Dolor and an insurance representative had earlier announced the launch of a "Claims Caravan" in Calapan City that will serve as a claims collecting point for those harmed by the MT Princess Empress's oil spill.

As of March 23, the Oriental Mindoro provincial government had recorded 20,932 fisherfolk, 61 tourism establishments, and 750 community-based organizations that are expected to file claims.

The entire province of Oriental Mindoro is now under a state of calamity because of the oil spill, which has also hit coastal areas in Batangas, Antique, and Palawan.



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Oil spill: US Coast Guard arriving for cleanup

By HELEN FLORES

A contingent of the United States Coast Guard (USCG), along with its air assets, will arrive in the Philippines today to help in the ongoing cleanup of the massive oil spill in Oriental Mindoro, Malacañang said yesterday.

The Presidential Communications Office (PCO) quoted Department of National Defense (DND) Senior Undersecretary Carlito Galvez Jr. in a statement released on the

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Oil From Page 1

expected arrival of the USCG contingent.

"We are looking forward to the arrival of the entire US Coast Guard contingent for the additional technical support in our disaster response operations," the DND officer-in-charge was quoted as saying.

Galvez said one US C-17 with equipment (60K loader) already arrived at Subic Air Base yesterday morning and that a C-5 cargo jet, the US Air Force's largest strategic airlifter, is expected today.

"We will immediately employ these assets and integrate in our response operations. In addition, we continue to closely monitor the ROV's (remotely operated vehicle) operations for significant updates and to further determine the extent of the oil spill," said Galvez, who chairs the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

Yesterday, an aerial inspection of the areas affected by the oil spill from the sunken *MT Princess Empress* was conducted by Galvez with DND Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno, administrator of the Office of Civil Defense; Admiral Artemio Abu, chief of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG); and other officials of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and concerned local government units.

The defense chief cited the significant contribution of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the ongoing oil spill response operations.

"They (NOAA) provide support for scientific modeling to estimate the trajectory of the oil spill and satellite imagery to boost assessment efforts," he said, noting the inclusion of identifying priority areas at risk of environmental damage and assessing needs for ecosystem restoration.

Galvez also reported that the Japanese ROV found out that the oil tanker "suffered extensive structural damage after sinking" in waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro last Feb. 28.

"At this point, no visible consumption fuel leak coming from the damaged vessel. Oil leaks had been observed from all eight compartments (tanks). Some through ballast tanks. Volume of remaining oil inside the compartments cannot be estimated at this point. Oil spillage rate from the source is likewise yet to be determined,"

he said.

So far, a total of 10,206 liters of oil waste and oily water and 72,643 kilos of oil contaminated debris were collected in the shoreline cleanup operations, he said.

In a separate report, the PCG said a total of 3,377.5 sacks and 22 drums of waste along the shoreline of Oriental Mindoro have been collected from March 1 to 25. It has also gathered a total of 106 sacks of oil-contaminated materials and 8,563 liters of oily water mixture.

After the inspection, Galvez said the situation in the affected areas - Mimaropa (Mindoro island, Marinduque, Romblon, Palawan) and Western Visayas - "is a lot better and very encouraging than I imagined."

Meanwhile, the PCO reported that the government and non-government organizations have extended more than P95 million worth of assistance to the residents in areas affected by the oil spill.

Cleanup operations

Prior to the aerial inspection, personnel from the PCG and Malayan Towing and Salvage Corp. resumed cleanup operations in the waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro at 4 a.m., laying out the oil spill boom and skimmers and manually scooping up the oil. At the same time, tugboats *MTug Lidagat* and *MTug Titan-1* sprayed oil dispersants on the surface of the oil slick.

During the Shoreline Cleanup and Assessment Technique conducted in Pola town last March 23, the PCG took part in the re-surveying which entailed the documentation and verification of shoreline oiling conditions, and the spill's impact on miles of affected shoreline, cleanup effectiveness, among others.

Based on their observations during that time, there was no visible oil floating in the water; no oil rubbing off on people or boats; no visible oil on the surface substrate; no subsurface oil layers in pits dug into the shore; no mobile oil on the subsurface; no oiled debris; no pronounced smell/odor of oil; a negative result of the hydrogen sulfide test; no oiled dead animals present inshore; as well passed the water quality standards set forth by Department Administrative Order 2016-08 in compliance with Republic Act 9275, or the Philippine Clean Water Act of 2004.

Aloysius Angelus John Bandoy

of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Environmental Management Bureau, French expert Mikael Laurent of Cedre, and representatives from the local government of Pola participated in the operation. PCG Lieutenant Junior Grade Gerald Cordero also discussed the end-points to measure the condition of environments to the representatives of each barangay in Pola.

In another development, the PCG said that the firm Eco Trends International pledged to donate absorbent pads that could help remove the oil from the water.

The donation of three 40-foot containers of microfiber absorbent pads would be received by Commodore Geronimo Tuvilla, who heads the PCG oil spill incident management team in Oriental Mindoro.

CCC backs USAID initiative

Meanwhile, an official of the Climate Change Commission (CCC) has supported an initiative of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to train displaced fisherfolk in the oil spill area as citizen scientists.

Climate Change Commissioner Albert dela Cruz Sr. said the US project with the provincial government of Oriental Mindoro and ABS-CBN Foundation could support the displaced fishermen by allowing them to take part in coastal habitat assessments in the province.

The USAID last week provided additional P10 million worth of assistance to Oriental Mindoro to support its oil spill management and environmental assessment efforts.

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

Meanwhile, Dela Cruz reiterated his warning against the use of chemical-based dispersants in clearing the areas affected by the oil slick.

Instead of chemical dispersants that produce carbonized tar balls, he proposed the use of skimmers or filtration equipment to remove the oil from the water.

"Tar balls are granulated dry oil and these will go to the sea bed and can pollute the marine environment and ecosystem in the areas affected by the oil spill," Dela Cruz, a biologist and pollution control expert, said.

- Evelyn Macairan



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Coast guard chief botched oil spill response – Roque

THE impact of the oil spill would have been less damaging if only the head of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) was aware of certain remedies that were readily available for such maritime accidents, former Palace spokesman Harry Roque II said.

"Authorities should have enough knowledge about incidents like this oil spill," Roque said in an interview over the weekend. "Why is it that they have no knowledge about tapping certain remedies that could have prevented the oil spill from spreading?"

➤ **RoqueA2**

ROQUE FROM A1

Coast guard chief botched oil spill response

Roque criticized PCG head Admiral Artemio Abu for the alleged failure to lead the operations in immediate containment of the oil that seeped out of the sunken tanker M/V Princess Empress.

He cited the agreement known as the Tanker Owners' Voluntary Agreement concerning Liability for Oil Pollution (Tovalop) which originated from the determination of certain tanker owners to ensure that compensation is available to those affected by oil pollution.

The agreement included provisions on spill response and cleanup. "Not knowing such an available remedy is gross ignorance of the law that is resulting in widespread and long-lasting damage to the environment," Roque said.

He said Abu and the PCG do not need to ask

for assistance from other countries because the needed funds to address such incidents are already available such as the Tovalop.

The Mindoro oil spill is probably the biggest blow in Abu's career, he said.

"That is no competence, lack of knowledge of what should happen when, in the first place, the remedy is already there," said Roque.

He said even the interfolk who have been affected by the oil spill will be compensated under the agreement which should have been activated within 24 hours after a maritime incident is reported.

Roque said he will bring the issue up with Transport Secretary Jaime Banguita. The PCG is an agency attached to the Department of Transportation.

FRANCISCO BARONA



US military assets to arrive to help in oil-spill cleanup

THE United States Coast Guard and some of its air assets will arrive in the Philippines to help in the ongoing clean-up operations on the massive oil spill in Mindoro, Department of National Defense Senior Undersecretary Carlito G. Galvez Jr. said on Sunday.

In a statement issued following his report to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., Galvez said they will be expecting in the following days the arrival in the country of the entire US Coast Guard and another C-5, the US Air Force's largest and strategic airlifter.

"We are looking forward to the arrival of the entire US Coast Guard contingent for the additional technical support in our disaster response operations. Although, one US C-17 with equipment (60K loader) already arrived this morning and is now at Subic Air Base; another C-5 is expected to arrive tomorrow," the Defense chief said.

Galvez, who is also chair of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), along with the Office of the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) Undersecretary Ariel F. Nepomuceno and Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Chief Admiral Artemio M. Abu and other Armed Forces of the Philippines and local government officials, conducted an aerial inspection of the affected areas of the oil spill early Sunday morning.

"We will immediately employ these assets and integrate in our response operations. In addition, we continue to closely monitor the ROVs (remotely-

operated vehicle) operations for significant updates and to further determine the extent of the oil spill," Galvez said.

The DND official added that the presence of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has greatly helped in the clean-up operations by providing rapid environmental assessments of the affected areas, identification of priority areas at risk of environmental damage, and assessment of the needs for ecosystem restoration.

"They [NOAA] provide support for scientific modeling to estimate the trajectory of the oil spill and satellite imagery to boost assessment efforts," Galvez said.

The DND senior official also reported that the Japanese ROV found out that the oil tanker, MT Princess Empress, "suffered extensive structural damage after sinking."

"At this point, no visible consumption fuel leak coming from the damaged vessel. Oil leaks had been observed from all eight compartments (tanks). Some through ballast tanks. Volume of remaining oil inside the compartments cannot be estimated at this point," Galvez said. "Oil spillage rate from the source is likewise yet to be determined, quoting the findings of the Japanese team.

He added that the situation in the areas in Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, Palawan) and Western Visayas regions affected by the oil spill "is a lot better and very encouraging than I imagined." *Jovee Marie N. Dela Cruz*



173,000 affected by Mindoro oil spill

ABOUT 173,000 individuals or 36,700 families have been affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Center (NDRRMC) reported on Sunday.

The NDRRMC said the biggest number of affected residents were from the Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan) Region with 138,043. Western Visayas followed with 27,145, and Calabaizon (Batangas, Cavite, Laguna, Quezon and Rizal) with 7,740.

The oil that had leaked from the sunken tanker Princess Empress also caused injuries to

➤ **AffectedA2**

■ AFFECTED FROM A1

173,000 affected by Mindoro oil spill

206 persons.

Damage to agriculture was estimated at P3,850,500. The oil has also affected the livelihood of 13,654 farmers and fisherfolk.

Four provinces, 14 municipalities and 163 barangay have felt the impact of the oil spill.

Assistance provided to stricken communities has reached P136.5 million.

The MT Princess Empress sank off Naujan town, Oriental Mindoro, on February 28. It was carrying a cargo of 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said it has so far collected 8,163 liters of oily water during offshore cleanup operations.

For its shoreline cleanup, the PCG said it has collected 154 sacks

of oil-contaminated materials as of Saturday.

Since March 1, the PGC has gathered 3,155 sacks and 22 drums of waste in 13 barangay in Naujan, Bulalacao, and Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

Calapan City has placed 23 coastal villages under a state of calamity because of the oil slick, Mayor Malou Morillo said in a post on her social media page on Saturday.

The declaration of a state of calamity was contained in a city council resolution passed on Wednesday, Morillo said.

The declaration will enable the city to effectively respond to the economic and ecological effects of the disaster.

The resolution identified the coastal villages as Balite, Galero, Canubing 1, Gutad, Ibaba East,

Ibaba West, Lazareto, Mahal na Pangalan, Maidlang, Masipit, Nag-Iba 1, Nag-Iba 2, Navotas, Pachoca, Parang, Salong, San Antonio, Silonay, Suqui, Tawagan, Tibag and Wawa.

The city has 62 barangay and is about 69 kilometers from Naujan.

Green City of Calapan Program Director Orlando Maliwanag said in a message on Saturday that patches of oil were seen floating in the waters of the villages of Navotas, Suqui, Harka Piloto in Barangay Lazareto and Maidlang. Harka Piloto is a Marine Protected Area.

City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Officer Dennis Escosoro said on Sunday the slick in Lazareto and Maidlang had been contained.

**FRANCO JOSE C. BAROÑA
AND IRE JOE V.C. LAURENTE**



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Oil spill threatens Mindoro island's rich marine biodiversity

AN UGLY oil spill has blemished the seascape of Mindoro island.

"Second, we do not have the mechanical equipment, submersible, that can dive to syphon it off without endangering (crew) lives."

Rough seas have prevented the deployment of oil spill booms to stop the toxic material from spreading, Balilo said.

Instead, they were spraying chemical dispersants on the water surface to break down the oil.

It is not known how much diesel fuel and industrial fuel oil are in the water.

The situation was "getting worse," said Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerlito Dolor.

He had ordered the province's 18,000 registered fishermen to stay on shore until it was safe to fish. In the meantime, they would receive food packs.

"It will have a big impact on us," Dolor said. "Based on experience, the adverse effects on the community will be long term."

An estimated 591 hectares (1,460 acres) of coral reefs, 1,626 hectares of mangroves and 362 hectares of seaweed could be "potentially affected" by the oil spill, Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Loyzaga said.

The tanker Princess Empress had engine trouble and sank in rough seas off Naujan municipality on Feb. 28. It was carrying 800,000 liters (210,000 gallons) of industrial fuel oil from Bataan province, near Manila, to the central province of Iloilo.

Another vessel rescued the 20 crew members on board.

Diesel fuel, which had been powering the Philippine tanker, and some of the cargo have leaked into the sea, the coast guard said previously, sparking concern for the environment and industries dependent on the ocean.

Coast guard spokesman Armando Balilo said experts and major oil firms were being consulted over how to recover the industrial fuel oil from the tanker, which is more than 400 meters (more than 1,300 feet) below sea level.

"Our entire coastline was hit by the oil spill," said Cruz.

"Earlier, we could smell the foul odor. It's like we're inside an auto shop," AFP

Thousands of fishermen in the Philippines have been ordered to stay ashore days after the accident as authorities struggled in to contain an oil spill from a sunken tanker that is threatening the region's rich marine life and economy.

The slick off Mindoro island, south of the capital Manila, stretched for 120 kilometers (75 miles) and was about nine kilometers offshore, said Ram Temena, disaster operations chief in the affected province of Mindoro Oriental.

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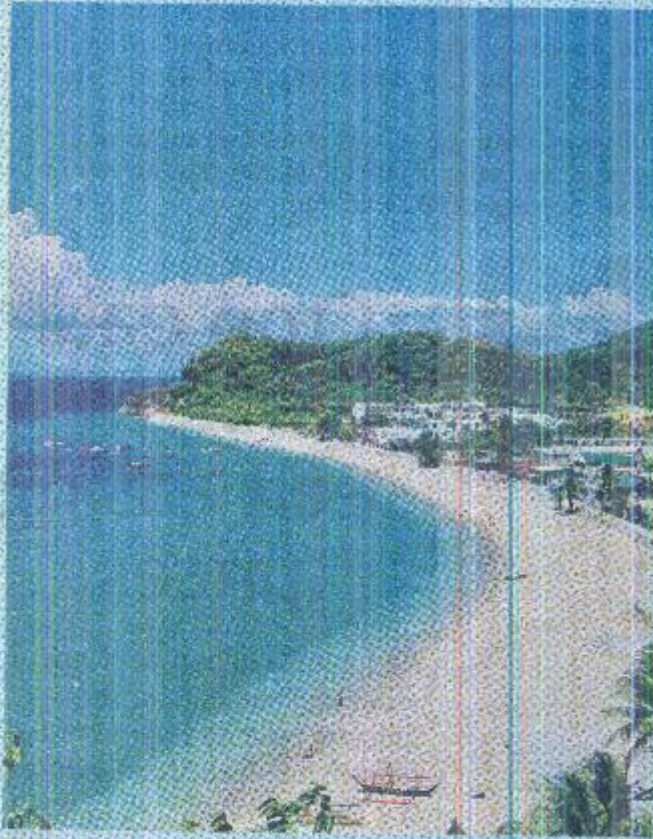
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Hey!

More than the spreading oil slick, Oriental Mindoro communities have to contend with fake news as the peak of the tourism season approaches. The Puerto Galera Municipal government announced that the town remains oil spill-free and tourists have nothing to fear.



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DENR scales up effort

to avoid water crisis

Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources has called on stakeholders to scale up efforts to address the global water crisis.

"Now more than ever, we need to accelerate our efforts to address the water

crisis. We need to act urgently, and we need to act now, in partnership and in cooperation with other stakeholders," Yulo-Loyzaga said over the weekend.

Yulo-Loyzaga attended the United Nations 2023 Water Conference in New York from March 22 to 24.

The conference was aimed at fostering greater discussion on water-related issues, including access to safe drinking water and sanitation, sustainable development, climate resilience and international water cooperation.

During the conference, Yulo-Loyza-

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

She vowed that the country will

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DENR From Page 1

foster knowledge, innovation and just partnerships in water governance through strengthened access to science-informed, equitable and sustainable financing and engagements with the private sector, academe, multilateral development banks and other stakeholders in climate action.

For his part, DENR Undersecretary for field operations Juan Miguel Cuna said it is important to build on past achievements on water conservation.

"The government, the private sector, and civil society organizations have been working together to address the water crisis through innovative and sustainable solutions," Cuna said.

Cuna added that the government has been implementing programs to promote integrated water resource management, improve water quality and ensure water

access for all.

He acknowledged the contribution of the private sector in promoting water conservation and efficiency in their respective operations.

"We at the DENR have started to heavily embark on strengthening our partnerships with multisectoral stakeholders and we are glad to have thus far garnered positive response," he added.

- Bella Cariaso



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Cooperation is key toward sustainable use, development of water resources

Speaking at the Water Conference and Exposition last week, President Marcos reiterated his administration's firm resolve to address the water crisis through grassroots-level and technology-based solutions. Recall that since he took office, his administration has taken on a high-profile advocacy of the need for ensuring the sustainable use, development and conservation of the country's water resources.

High on the policy agenda of the government is the creation of a Department of Water Services (DWS) that has also been endorsed by the Private Sector Advisory Council, along with the creation of a regulatory commission and a vertical industry structure.

In the proposed legislation, the DWS shall be the "primary policy, planning, coordinating, implementing, monitoring and administrative entity of the executive branch of the government" while the independent and quasi-judicial body WRC will set the policy for supply, sewerage, and septage management; issue licenses; set, review and approve rates; review and suspend contracts; initiate investigations on erring officials through its quasi-judicial nature; and ensure that the welfare of consumers is prioritized.

Despite being an archipelagic country surrounded with large bodies of coastal and inland waters, it is estimated that around one out of every 10 Filipinos still do not have access to clean, potable water sources.

Although on a declining pattern during the first half of this year, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) projects that El Niño "will likely develop in July-August-September 2023 season and may persist until 2024." El Niño increases the likelihood of below-normal rainfall conditions, which could

lead to dry spells and droughts in some areas of the Philippines.

President Marcos has emphasized the need for a sense of urgency, citing the propensity to postpone action or adopt stop-gap measures. He expressed confidence that while innovative technology-based solutions are available, the proper conservation and management of available surface water is still imperative. He said: "If you manage your surface water properly, then there will be no need for us to be digging wells and starting to affect the water table that is under us" that also affects agriculture, infrastructure, and construction activities.

World Water Day was observed by the United Nations last week focusing on the need for the sustainable management of water resources. On this year's observance, the UN calls for boosting international cooperation over how water is used and managed as "this is the only way to prevent a global water crisis in the coming decades." Concerted action that is driven by inclusive stakeholder participation is characterized by the involvement of the end-users, improves the quality of water-related services and enhances the delivery of services that match the resources and needs of affected communities.

The message of Gilbert F. Houngbo, chair of UN Water and Director General of the International Labor Organization deserves closer attention: "Nearly every water-related intervention involves some kind of cooperation. Growing crops require shared irrigation systems among farmers. Providing safe and affordable water to cities and rural areas is only possible through a communal management of water-supply and sanitation systems. And cooperation between these urban and rural communities is essential to maintaining both food security and uphold farmer incomes."



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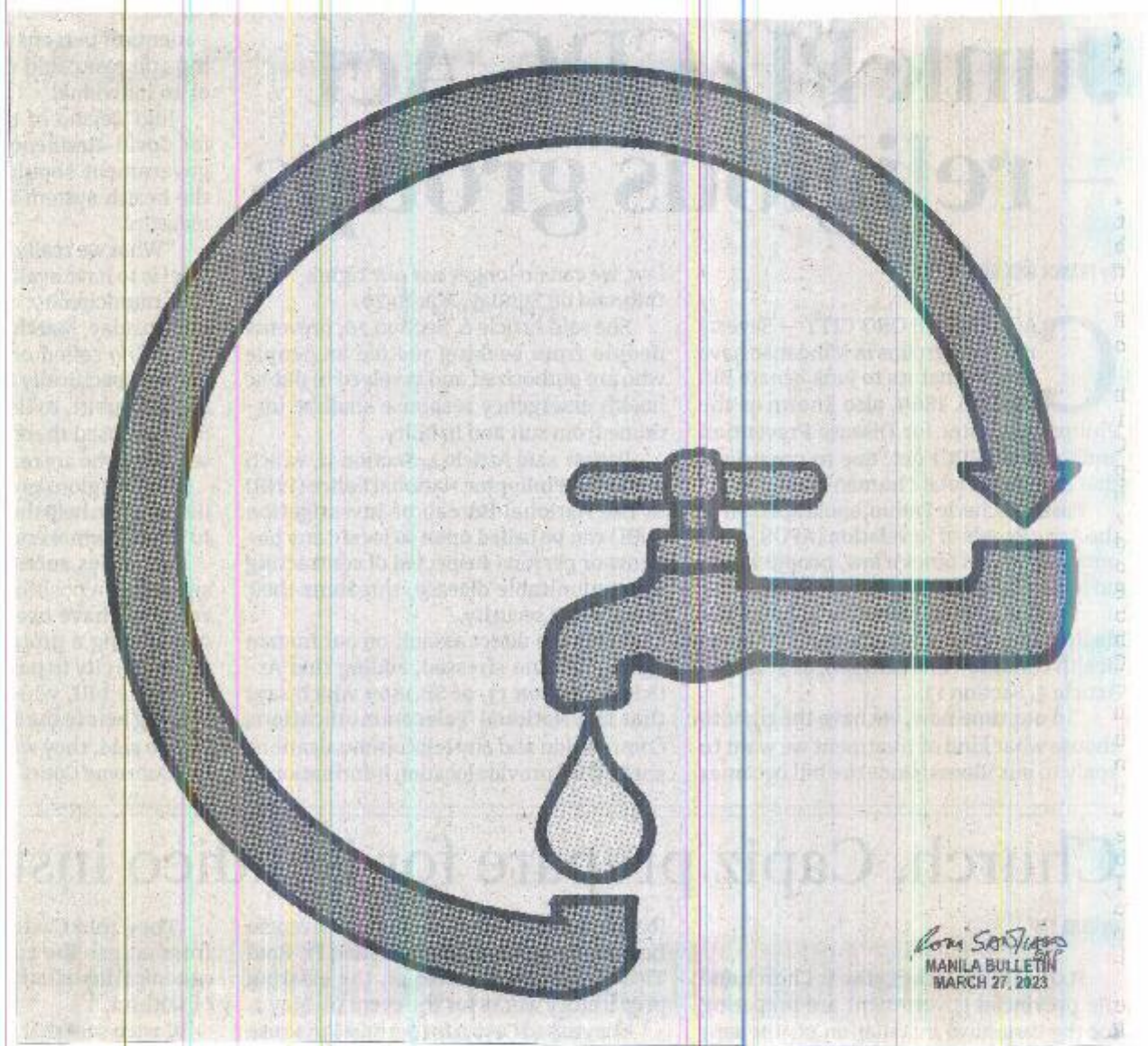
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Roni Santiago
MANILA BULLETIN
MARCH 27, 2023



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Yes to People's Water Code, no to privatization



(An open letter to the Marcos administration, government agencies, lawmakers, and our fellow water consumers and advocates)

ON World Water Day, we, the Water for the People Network (WPN) press the crafting of legislation adhering to the People's Water Code, which prioritizes the needs of ordinary Filipinos over private sector profit. This is to

replace widespread water privatization, which has failed to ensure cheap and affordable water, unhampered access for household and production use, sanitation, and public management to ensure all these.

Since the privatization of water in Metro Manila in 1997, which was the biggest at that time, water rates have soared, yet the basic public utility remains inequitably distributed. Manila Water Company Inc. tariffs per cubic meter rose 1,043 percent from P4.02 to P45.93 and Maynilad Water Systems Inc. 577 percent from P7.21 to P48.83 in January 2023.

This is despite new Concession Agreements removing foreign currency adjustment and value-added tax charges in November 2021 and March 2022, respectively. Under the CAs, water bills are computed to ensure private water firms' profits at the expense of consumers. We note that prior to the pandemic,

Manila Water's net income rose from P3.2 billion in 2009 to P5 billion in 2019, and that of Maynilad from P2.8 billion to P7.7 billion in the same period.

Yet water access and services remain poor for many Filipinos. In local water districts nationwide, of which 124 are in a "joint venture" with Villar-owned Prime Water Company, consumers lament high fees for murky, inefficient, and interrupted water supply.

Recent government-cited data also show that 22 million Filipinos or 21 percent of the country's population still do not have access to safe drinking water; more than half of the population of 332 municipalities are considered waterless; around 26% of families have no access to water treatment facilities; and more than 3 million citizens are compelled to practice open defecation.

Meanwhile, we also note that urban poor communities pay more than they can afford for water—with many connected to submeters and forced to pay P60 to P135 per cubic meter. Farmers and fisherfolk also lament the lack of irrigation and the constriction of fishing waters, respectively, which affect their livelihoods.

We additionally want to underscore how the water undertakings of profit-driven big businesses undermine people's rights. Indigenous Filipinos and other communities' homes, livelihoods and environment are threatened by commercial water supply projects such as the Kalawa, Genned, and Jalaur megadams in Sierra Madre, Apayao and Iloilo, respectively. Local water districts takeover by oligarch firms has also led to public sector retrenchments such as in Bacolod.

Deprivatizing and not merely

consolidating or managing the country's existing water systems would be a positive step towards solving the country's water problems. We are forwarding the Filipino People's Water Code as a foundation of possible such legislation and say that the principles stipulated therein and not a profit-driven framework should guide water resource management in the country.

The water code crafted by IBON and the WPN upon the right to water watchdog's inception in 2004 invokes the principles of water being a basic human right, water being part of national patrimony and should not be subject to exploitation for foreign or private interests; water as a people's resource allocated mainly for the people's survival and livelihood needs and with preferential treatment for the poor and marginalized sectors; water as a public good that should remain in the public



EDITORIAL

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The National Association of Philippine Newspapers

Relevance of Earth Hour

EVERY last Saturday of the month of March, from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., millions of people across the world show their caring and commitment to planet Earth by turning off non-essential electric lights.

The practice was started by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and became an accepted worldwide movement, even as more and more countries and peoples have become aware of climate change issues and how individuals may participate in mitigating the forthcoming climate crisis.

In the Philippines, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. called on the entire Filipino nation to join the observance of Earth Hour to mitigate the devastating effects of climate change. He said Malacañang will observe the event by switching off non-essential lights during Earth Hour.

In a video message, the President noted that the Philippines is battered by an average of 20 typhoons yearly, "making it one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change."

"But in the ultimate analysis, the rich countries and advanced economies are the movers whose actions on climate change will make a difference, not the poor third world nations."

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

Allowing "Mother Nature 60 minutes to breathe" has become a popular slogan among environmentalists, and the concept has elicited wide support from individuals in many countries.

President Marcos said the observance of Earth Hour will also help the government enforce its action plans that will benefit the planet. He urged Filipinos to stop or slow down and dedicate a moment to help the Earth breathe and heal anew. Further, he convinced the citizens to become part of the solution and embark on advocacies, programs and initiatives that will help us protect and preserve the Earth.

The Earth Hour, at best, can only ramp up individual consciousness and support for the concepts of energy conservation, global warming mitigation, reducing carbon footprints and the like. But in the ultimate analysis, the rich countries and advanced economies are the movers whose actions on climate change will make a difference, not the poor third world nations. Such is the position of former President Rodrigo Duterte, which still holds true today.

At the conclusion of the Third Technical Expert Dialogue (TED3) on Climate Finance of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) last year, the Philippines called for equity and justice in the fight against climate change, following the stand of Duterte which Marcos most likely -- and correctly -- adopted.

The Philippines touted that nations around the world should seize the "opportunity to advance inclusive climate finance" driven by a process that ensures "balanced geographical participation, particularly of developing states in the Asia-Pacific region."

This is what our official position should be, of the more advanced economies which contributed more to the degradation of the environment should have a bigger role in the effort to clean and restore it.



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**OUT-OF-THE-BOX
YOGI FILEMON RUIZ**

Saving Planet Earth

“Most of us think that climate change is a recent phenomenon.”

The signs are all over, yet we do not take them seriously. Storms are reported in areas where they used to be rare. Long periods of drought have been recorded, creating unprecedented crises in the food supply. Add to these accounts of glaciers melting with alarming frequency and rising sea levels leading to destructive floods that destroy lives, communities and livelihoods.

In September 2019, it took 16-year-old Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg to make everyone sit back and take notice as she spoke before an assembly of world leaders at the United Nations Climate Action Summit. In an emotionally-charged speech, she castigated them for failing to do their job amidst the growing threat of climate change, briefly defined by scientists as long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns affecting many countries and much of the global population.

Thunberg echoed the fears of her generation — and generations still to come — because of the lack of action of world leaders to respond to the challenges of climate change.

“You have stolen my dreams and

my childhood with your empty words, and yet I’m one of the lucky ones,” she said. “People are suffering, and people are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are at the beginning of mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you?”

Most of us think that climate change is a recent phenomenon. This discovery was made 85 years ago when a steam engineer discovered that the planet “had warmed.” In his spare time, Guy Callendar began collecting data in 1938 from 147 weather stations worldwide and found that global temperatures had risen 0.3 degrees C over the previous 50 years. He hinted that it could be related to carbon dioxide emissions.

However, fellow scientists and the world largely ignored his warning, using rudimentary methods but remarkably accurate based on modern assessments.

Alarming developments in recent years sounded the alarm, with non-government groups and private citizens mainly in the forefront. Groups were organized to launch information drives and activities focused on ways and means to save Planet Earth — the only one we’ve got until other planets are discovered fit for human habitation.

At a UNESCO Conference in San Francisco, peace activist John McConnell proposed a day to honor the Earth and the concept of peace be observed on 21 March 1970.

The first celebration of Earth Day took place on 22 April 1970 in the United States, when about 20 million people attended inaugural events nationwide that focused on

promoting environmental causes. By the 20th anniversary of the first event, more than 200 million people in 141 countries had participated in Earth Day activities. The Philippines officially joined the Earth Day celebration through a Presidential Proclamation issued by then-President Corazon Aquino.

This event was added to Earth Hour, held every last Saturday of March for an hour from 8.30 to 9.30 p.m., with millions of people in more than 180 countries switching off their lights to show support for the planet.

In our little way, we can help prevent the global catastrophe of climate change from happening. We are told to Reduce, Reuse, Repair and Recycle.

Instead of driving our cars, we are

advised to walk, bike, or take public transport for less fuel use. Use LED lights and paper bags instead of plastic. Most of all, we can all be like Greta Thunberg and learn

to speak up. Write your local/national leaders and ask them to take a more active role in global warming. Talk to neighbors, friends, and even family, and enlist them in a green campaign by growing vegetables, planting trees and flowers, and helping in reforestation efforts.

“We can’t save the world by playing by the rules because the rules have to be changed,” Thunberg said. “Everything needs to change — and it has to start today.”

“This discovery was made 85 years ago when a steam engineer discovered that the planet had warmed.”



letters

What did you do for Mother Earth?

Did you turn off your lights during Earth Hour last Saturday? It's really a very small thing to do, and you may think it won't have much impact, but by that simple act you show that you care for Mother Earth and that you are willing to do what you can - even just small acts - to save, preserve and care for our planet.

Earth Hour was first held in 2007 in Sydney, Australia and the Philippines joined the movement in 2008. This year, it is said 178 countries and territories took part in the switch-off movement. The Philippines has consistently been among the countries with the biggest participation.

That is truly laudable, but all those people who participated in Earth Hour should carry that advocacy into their daily lives. There are so many things each of us can do for Mother Earth - simple, easy things that will not take that much extra effort and that can actually even save us money in the process. Like what?

Be a mindful consumer of water.

Water is a very precious resource; don't waste it. Don't leave the faucet running when you brush your teeth or wash dishes. If you wash your car, put water in a pail rather than letting a hose run. And check that you don't have leaky faucets or toilets, and watch your water consumption - if there's a sudden spike, you may have a leak somewhere. Get it fixed asap!

Same thing with electricity. Do you need the TV on to fall asleep? Then set the timer. That could work for the aircon too, if you set the timer to switch off in the early morning hours when it's cooler. Turn the lights off when you leave a room.

Plan your meals to avoid food waste. Be aware of what you have in the freezer, refrigerator and pantry so you don't end up with things that are spoiled or expired.

With the rising cost of everything from fuel to food, what you do to save Mother Earth will also save you money. Now that's a win for everyone!
- HANNAH MARIE TAN, Pasig City



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JV proposes \$500-M integrated waste-energy facility in Clark

By BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT

A joint venture has proposed to invest \$500 million for two integrated waste-to-energy management system in Clark utilizing a German technology to take care of the growing volume of waste in Central Luzon.

The unsolicited project proposal had been submitted to the Bases Conversion Development Authority (BCDA) in 2019 by the joint venture of Metro Clark Metro Waste and German firm Plambeck Emirates. Metro Waste currently operates the 100-hectare landfill facility in Kalangitan in Tarlac, which is inside Sub Zone D of Clark Special Economic Zone.

Norbert Plambeck, general manager of Plambeck Emirates, told Manila Bulletin that the investment needed for one line is between \$200 million to \$250 million to run a 2,000 ton a day volume of waste in the most economical way. It would take three years for the whole development process.

Since the current landfill is already reaching 4,000 tons a day, they are already thinking of expanding their planned facility into a second line once the first line becomes operational.

Their unsolicited project proposal had

been submitted to the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) in 2019 but it was caught up by the pandemic.

"We should not lose time," urged Plambeck. The joint venture is looking at 50-50 equity sharing in the project although BCDA is also expected to get a stake in the project.

Holger Holst, technical director of Metro Clark Waste Management, said the current landfill has a remaining capacity to handle 13 million tons to 15 million tons of waste. Based on their estimate, they would run out of capacity in 10 years.

This is because the entire Central Luzon, including Metro Manila, is expected to regenerate 100 million tons of waste generation in 10 to 15 years as population grows.

If no integrated facility comes on-stream in three years, he said, the 150 towns in Central Luzon that are dumping their waste at the Metro Clark landfill will have a big problem.

"Our landfill has remaining lifetime of less than 10 years and we still around 13 to 15 million tons volume and we get one million a year so in 10 years the landfill is full and we cannot just extend it," said Holst.



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NATIONWIDE ROUNDUP

EcoWaste Coalition presses ban on 'forever chemicals' that threaten health, environment

THE ECOWASTE Coalition pressed for a ban on the use and manufacture of polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAs), which pose a threat to human health and the environment.

"PFAs, which have earned the nickname 'forever chemicals' because they hardly degrade in the natural environment, should be banned as a class to halt the extensive PFAs pollution affecting the entire planet," the group said in a statement over the weekend.

EcoWaste Coalition said it has sent a letter to the Environmental Management Bureau to consider the ban on PFAs; include PFAs in the Philippine Priority Chemicals List; issue a chemical control order for PFAs; and support the global ban on the use and production of PFAs.

PFAs are used in the production of various consumer products such as clothing, food packaging, cooking utensils, furniture, and electric wire insulation due to strong resistance to high heat, water, oil, grease, stains, and natural degradation.

EcoWaste Coalition said that PFAs have been detected in rainwater, over 30,000 umbilical cord blood samples of newborn babies, and in the blood of over 330 wildlife species. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**



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FDA warns vs mercury-laced cosmetics

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has warned the public against the purchase and use of imported cosmetic products that were found to contain mercury.

Karisma Turmeric Booster Cream and Flashskinzz Beauty Treatment Cream were tested by the National Pharmaceutical Regulatory Agency of Malaysia and were found not compliant with the ASEAN Cosmetic Directive (ACD)'s technical standards.

The two creams were reported in the ASEAN Post-Marketing Alert System as containing mercury, "an ingredient that is not allowed to be part of a cosmetic product," based on the ACD, the FDA said in an advisory.

Among the adverse effects of exposure to mercury are kidney damage, skin rashes, skin discoloration and scarring, the FDA said.

"Exposed pregnant women and nursing mothers transfer the mercury to their child, which can later result in neurodevelopment deficits," the FDA added.

- Mayen Jaymalin



GROUND BREAKING FOR GABAY KALKASAN PARK: Metro Pacific Investments Corp., the country's leading Infrastructure investment company, broke ground on the Gabay Kalkasan Park, in partnership with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Biodiversity Management Bureau, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources – National Capital Region, and the local government unit of Quezon City. In photo (from left) are QC LGU's representative Carl Ignacio; DENR-NCR Conservation and Development Division chief Aida Esguerra; DENR-BMB Caves, Wetlands and other Ecosystems Division OIC chief Anson Tagtag; MPIC executive director and chief finance, sustainability and risk officer Chaye Cabal-Revilla; Barangay Marlana chairperson Regina Celeste San Miguel; Barangay Mariana councilor Ma. Conception Amorillo; DENR-NCR regional executive director Jacqueline Caanan; MPIC vice president for investor relations Maricris Aldover-Yamael; and QC LGU Parks Development and administration Department OIC Baltazar Avellino.



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PROTECTION Personnel of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in Soccsksargen region and village officials install last week a fence to protect the two Eastern grass owls found in the upland village of Luna Norte in Makilala, Cotabato, on March 20. —PHOTOS FROM THE DENR FACEBOOK PAGE



RODENT-EATING BIRDS

EASTERN GRASS OWLS FOUND NESTING IN COTABATO TOWN

By **Edwin O. Fernandez**
@InqNational

COTABATO CITY—Environment officials have allowed a farmer in a small village in Cotabato province to take care of two juvenile female Eastern grass owls (*Tyto longimembris*) found in his farm lot in Makilala town.

Afredo Bas, a farmer in the town's Barangay Luna Norte, found the owls on March 20, nesting in a cluster of Arrowhead plant (*Syngonium podophyllum*) in his property and immediately sought the help of village officials and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) personnel on how to handle them.

Bas said he wanted to bring the owls to the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office (Penro) here but he was worried he might get arrested for transporting endangered wildlife.

It was Barangay Luna Norte Chair Alfredo Barnadas who later informed the Penro about the find before he checked on the birds.

Fenced off

Khadija Bayam Benpolok, head of the regional strategic communication and initiatives group of DENR in Soccsksargen, said they found the owls to be healthy and did not want to move them to the DENR wildlife rescue center to avoid stressing the animals.

"The physiological features of the owlets are generally in good condition and in a safe environment," he added.

As long as the site was secured and properly identified as nesting site of the birds, the owls could stay within the

area, Benpolok said.

To protect the owls, the farm owner and village officials fenced off the site and put up a tarpaulin identifying the area as nesting site of the owls.

Declining

The Eastern grass owl are not considered to be endangered or vulnerable species but their number is believed to be declining, according to Birdlife International, a global group of nongovernmental organizations involved in the conservation of birds and their habitats.

The grass owl's most common prey are farm rats; hence, they usually thrive in rodent-infested farms. The owl uses its long legs to penetrate the thick grass where their prey usually hide. Owls are nocturnal animals; hence, they sleep during the day and hunt food at night, the DENR said.

Village officials and local residents also helped Penro personnel in installing the bamboo fence to secure the nesting site.

Barnadas said residents of Barangay Luna Norte expressed their commitment to protecting the Eastern grass owl and other wildlife in the area.

Lawyer Felix Alicer, the region's DENR director, said he was glad that the public in the Soccsksargen region had been helping the DENR in wildlife protection.

On March 22, DENR personnel freed three critically endangered Mindanao hanging parrots, commonly known as "colasisi," in the town's Barangay Spring that were surrendered by a villager. **ko**



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Mt. Apo trail closed during Holy Week

DAVAO CITY - Mountain climbers will have limited access to Mt. Apo during the Holy Week as a trail passing through the town of Sta. Cruz in Davao del Sur will be closed from April 3 to April 9.

The municipal tourism office said the closure intends to decongest the trail as a large number of climbers usually flock to Mt. Apo during Holy Week.

The temporary closure will also help prevent forest fires and similar incidents as it is difficult to check the actual number

of climbers during the holiday.

Every year, mountaineers anticipate the Holy Week trek to Mt. Apo as part of their tradition.

But climbers have also been blamed for the piles of garbage dumped along the way to the peak.

Other paths going to the peak of the mountain will remain open such as the Bansalan, Kapatagan-Digos and Kidapawan City trails as well as the Davao City track.

-- Edith Regalado

MPIF Enlarges Blue Footprint for PH Biodiversity Protection & Conservation

By Magic Bautista

METRO Pacific Investments Founder, Inc. (MPIF) continues to enrich its fifteen-year-old environmental flagship program, Shore It Up! (SIU), by expanding its blue footprint to conserve and protect more wetlands of national importance.

The corporate social responsibility arm of the country's leading infrastructure investments company Metro Pacific Investments Corporation (MPIC) is progressing its environmental stewardship, through its continued support of protecting the 97,000 hectares covering the Tubatuba Reefs Natural Park, as well as the Municipality of Del Carmen, Siargao. MPIF is also working on a partnership with the Department of Natural Resources in enhancing the mangrove-pivoted initiatives in the Las Pilas - Panatag Wetland Park (LPPWP, formerly LPPCHEA).

As the figurehead foundation for marine and coastal biodiversity of the Manuel V. Pangilinan (MVP) Group of Companies, MPIF has made it an imperative to forge partnerships that safeguard the Philippines' natural resources for future generations.

"Our archipelagic country is rife with world-renowned hubs of biodiversity and requires a strong support system from the private sector when it comes to preservation and conservation," says MPIF President Melody del Rosario. "No society entity can undertake that responsibility and we at MPIF want to ensure that we play our part in futureproofing what we have and help in mitigating climate change through the work that we do."

SIU'S BLUE FOOTPRINT

SIU's major initiatives are not singularly focused on alleviating environmental impacts to coastal communities. They also foster the involvement of the local community by providing livelihood opportunities, whether supplementary to or resulting from its programs, impacting the socioeconomic aspect as well.

Since 2013, MPIF maintained a mutually beneficial partnership with the municipality of Del Carmen in Siargao Island, through establishing a Mangrove Protection and Information Center. Del Carmen is home to a contiguous 4,000-hectare mangrove forest - the second biggest of its kind in the Philippines after Palawan.

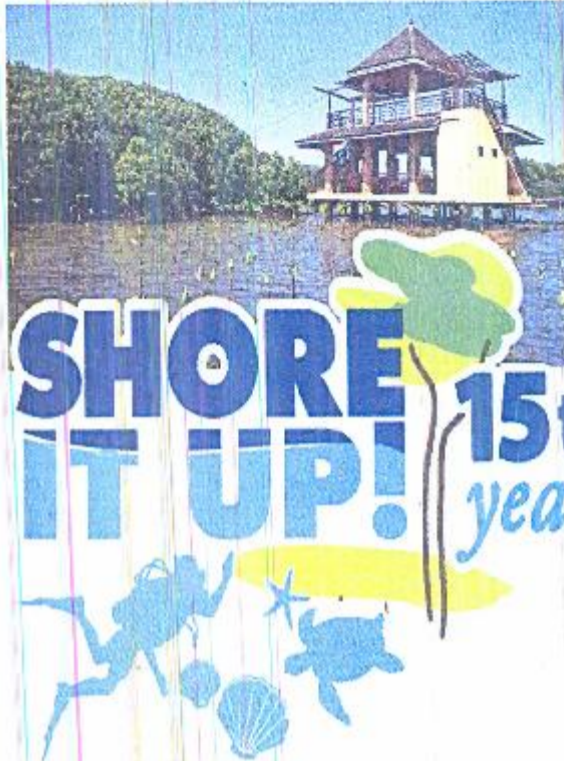


Photo credit: Peter De Los Santos

MPIF's intervention through the Mangrove Center has resulted in 0% mangrove cutting since its inauguration. 10 Mangrove Eco-guides are directly employed across all three sites, including Alaminos, Pangasinan and

Corдова, Cebu. These centers collectively protect over 5,200 hectares of mangroves, becoming additional ecotourism hubs in their cities that spawn a myriad of tourism-related businesses and activities that employ locals.



Del Carmen developed a full-fledged community-based ecotourism program that generated 1,000 direct employments, more than 10 homestays, 20 transport services, 20 restaurants, 1 operational mall, 146 boat tour operators, and a poverty reduction of 29% as of 2019 data.

During the 2023 World Wetlands Day (last February 2), the Philippine government declared the Municipality of Del Carmen's mangrove forest as a wetland of international importance, hopefully setting the stage for its formal inclusion into the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. If accepted, it will be the ninth Philippine wetland to be listed under the international treaty.

As of 2022, MPIF has committed to support the conservation of the Tubatuba Reefs Natural Park and World Heritage Site (TRNP) for four years. TRNP was named a Ramsar site - a wetland site of international importance - by the Ramsar Convention or "The Convention on Wetlands" an intergovernmental environmental treaty established in 1971 by UNESCO. The Convention provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

MPIF's intervention reinforced TRNP's Biodiversity and Habitat Protection, Research, Monitoring, and Restoration program by providing the necessary funding to mobilize ecosystem research, monitoring, and enforcement.

EXPANDING SIU'S IMPACT

In partnership with the Office of Sin Cynira Villan, MPIF is in the early stages of integrating SIU in the current mangrove-centric efforts in LPPWP, a coastal wetland in Manila Bay situated within the metropolis of Manila.

A Ramsar site since 2013, LPPWP was designated as a Critical Habitat for the survival of threatened, restricted-range, and congregatory species in 2007. At least 5,000 individuals of migratory and resident birds have been recorded at the site, including about 47 migratory species. Lined up with SIU's goal to conserve the country's natural resources, MPIF and the LPPWP Protected Area Management Board (LPPWP PAMB) are planning to establish a mangrove nursery in the area.

The mangrove propagules are earmarked for replacement planting inside the protected area and may likewise be distributed to other planting areas within the Manila Bay. The partnership aims to replicate the positive impact generated in the three existing Mangrove Centers.

With SIU's blue footprint reaching more nationally important wetlands, MPIF intends to continue its journey of rescuing, restoring, and reviving the Philippine biodiversity landscape by institutionalizing its initiatives with more partner sites in the future.

Shore It Up!'s commitment to the protection and conservation of wetlands of international importance is aligned with Gabay Kalikasan, one of the MVP Group's Gabay Advocacies for a Sustainable Philippines. It is also in line with MPIC's efforts to contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly SDG 14 Life Below Water, 15 Life on Land, and 17 Partnerships for the Goals.

This partnership bolsters MPIF's role alongside MPIC, as the largest catalyst for a Sustainable Philippines, aimed to improve the lives in the country through providing essential services and mobilizing advocacies that uplift the quality of life of all Filipinos.



DOF wants deeper cooperation with Australia

By CHINO S. LEYCO

Philippines and Australia want to deepen cooperation on airports, mining and agriculture as the amended Public Service Act (PSA) enables full foreign ownership in key sectors, the Department of Finance (DOF) said.

This developed following the meeting of Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno and Australian Ambassador to the Philippines HK Yu and Australia's Special Envoy for Southeast Asia Nicholas Moore to explore deepening Manila-Canberra cooperation.

Yu said the Australian Government is hoping to drum up interest among Aussie companies in the possible privatization of airports in the Philippines.

Under the recently amended PSA, industries such as airports, railways, toll roads, expressways, and telecommunications are now open to full foreign ownership.

The implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of the amendments to the PSA was released last March 20, 2023 and will be effective on April 4.

Moore added that the Philippines can learn from the case of the privatization of Sydney Airport in 2002, which he said was a success.

He argued that privatization has the

potential to deepen the contribution of airports to economic activity through increased freight capacity and more links to the rest of the world.

Diokno shared that the Philippines and Australia can also look into cooperation in mining, particularly in sharing best practices in taxation, engagement with mining communities, and mining technologies.

Yu shared that the Australian government is currently working with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and Philippine companies through a series of mining missions to Australia.

The learning tours serve as an opportunity for Filipino mining stakeholders to learn more about Australian mining best practices.

Finally, Diokno highlighted agriculture as a key priority sector of the Marcos Jr. administration.

Moore said that the Philippines may explore opportunities to tap into Australian skills and technology in agriculture.



Phl, Australia eye mining cooperation

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The government will look into best practices in Australia's mining industry, as the Marcos administration banks on the sector to contribute to economic recovery.

Finance chief Benjamin Diokno recently met with Australian Ambassador HK Yu and Australia's special envoy for Southeast Asia Nicholas Moore to explore possible areas of cooperation between the two countries.

One of these areas is the mining industry, which the Marcos government is reviving, with the passage of a new mining fiscal regime to achieve simplification, fair share, value-adding and good governance.

Diokno said the two countries will look into cooperation in mining, particularly in sharing best practices in taxation, engagement with mining communities, and mining technologies.

The Australian government is already working with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and Philippine companies through a

series of mining missions to Australia.

This aims to provide opportunities for Filipino mining stakeholders to learn more about Australian mining practices.

Ambassador Yu, for her part, noted that the visit to Australia comes at the right time considering that the Philippines is looking at opening up the industry to foreign investments.

"Our practices are really among the world's best and I think this mission will enable Philippine companies to look at how Australian companies are doing their mining," Yu said.

It should be noted that mining is one of the most important sectors of the Australian economy, accounting for about 10 percent of its gross domestic product.

Australia is the fourth largest mining country in the world and is a leading producer of gold, iron, lead, zinc, nickel, lithium, uranium and black coal.

In the Philippines, mining has been contributing less than one percent to the country's GDP as the previous administration has been generally cold to the sector.

It was only toward the end of 2021, when former president Rodrigo Duterte gave a much needed boost in revenue generation for the industry with the lifting of a four-year old ban on open pit mining.

This is what the Marcos government wants to capitalize on and boost through the passage of a new fiscal regime.

Apart from mining, Diokno said Australia also hopes to drum up interest among Australian companies in the possible privatization of airports in the Philippines.

Further, Australia noted that the Philippines may explore opportunities to tap into Australian skills and technology in agriculture, especially on agriculture technology and the use of renewables in power distribution.

The Philippines is one of Australia's longest-standing bilateral partners, with diplomatic relations spanning 77 years.

Philippine-Australian cooperation covers trade, investment, defense, security and development.



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COOLING-OFF

Families and friends slide to the waters of the Waters Dam in Rodriguez, Rizal, on Sunday, March 26, 2023, to cool off in the dry summer days. PHOTOS BY GERARD SEMIN



El Niño could bring prolonged dry spell

BY ARLIE O. CALALO

THE El Niño weather episode could bring a long dry spell and even droughts to the country, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) has predicted. > Dry spellA2

■ DRY SPELL FROM A1

El Niño could bring prolonged dry spell

The El Niño will begin between July and September this year and could last until the first or second quarter of 2024, Pagasa administrator Vicente Malano told *The Manila Times* on Sunday.

There is a 55 percent or higher chance the weather phenomenon will develop in the third quarter of the year, Malano said.

The El Niño is a climate pattern characterized by the unusual warming of the surface water of the Pacific Ocean. It brings torrential rain to South America and drought and dry spells to countries in the western Pacific region, including the Philippines.

The Philippines last experienced an El Niño event from the last quarter of 2018 to the third quarter of 2019.

Malano said Pagasa has issued an El Niño Watch because conditions lean toward the development of the weather pattern within the next six months.

Although El Niño's effects will not be immediately felt, Malano said the issuance was meant to lead to early preparations.

Normally, most of the country will experience above-normal rainfall during the southwest

monsoon season or habagat that usually begins from May to September.

But El Niño could reverse the rainfall pattern, Pagasa said. "The northern part of the country is usually very wet but becomes dry toward the end of the year," it said.

Pagasa forecast normal rainfall over watersheds and dam reservoirs until September. "If that projection takes place, we will have no problems," Pagasa's hydrometeorology division chief Roy Badilla said.

As a result, Pagasa has urged the public to take precautionary measures now that the warm-dry season has started.

It advised the public and all concerned government agencies to take precautionary measures to minimize heat stress, optimize the daily use of water for personal and domestic consumption, and prevent any accompanying health risks associated with El Niño.

Over the next 24 hours, Metro Manila and the rest of the country will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated showers or thunderstorms, Pagasa said.



Magnitude-4.6 quake shakes N. Luzon areas

PAGUIO CITY - A magnitude-4.6 earthquake shook several areas in Northern Luzon yesterday morning.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said the quake occurred at 5:35 a.m. and its epicenter was located some two kilometers east of Pilar town in Abra.

The temblor was felt at Intensity 4 in Bangued, Bolnycy Bucay, Bucloc Peñarubia, Pilar, San Isidro and Villariviciosa in Abra as well as in Bantay in Ilocos Sur.

Intensity 3 was felt in Dolores, San Quintin, Tayum and Tineg in Abra, and Vigan in Ilocos Sur.

State seismologists said instrumental intensities were recorded in Candon, Vigan and Narvacan in Ilocos Sur, and Batac, Laoag and Pasuquin in Ilocos Norte.

Authorities have yet to determine if the quake caused damage to property.

- Artemio Dumlao, Bella Cariaso