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WRMO addresses water security

*Marcos says gov't meeting
looming crisis head-on*

Marcos had ordered the creation of a Water Resource Management Office under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to achieve water security

BY TIZIANA CELINE PIATOS AND MARIA ROMERO
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The Marcos administration will be proactive in addressing the looming global water crisis that is aggravated by climate change, a high-ranking Philippine official told the United Nations recently.

Environment Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga underscored before the United Nations 2023 Water Conference in New York several measures being undertaken by the Philippines to meet head-on the challenges,

specifically the dwindling water supply, brought on by climate change.

"Today, more than ever, there is a critical need for nexus governance, climate, and disaster resilience, one that pursues a strategic balance between supply and the consumption of water for health, food, energy, and environmental security," Loyzaga pointed out.

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She said the Philippines is "moving decisively in this direction."

Loyzaga said President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. had ordered the creation of a Water Resource Management Office under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to achieve water security by integrating the functions of all agencies with water-related mandates.

First in history

The DENR chief emphasized the WRMO is "a first in the country's history."

She said the WRMO is aligned with new legislation creating an apex body for comprehensive water resource management, adding that the Philippines is adopting an all-hazards and risk-informed integrated water resource management approach.

The Environment secretary said all the plans and programs of the government to provide universal access to a safe, sufficient, affordable, and sustainable water supply, sanitation and hygiene will be completed by 2030.

Loyzaga noted that achieving adequate and equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation services are at the core of sustainable development.

"Integrated water management approaches that overcome barriers to water and sanitation access and improve health are therefore imperative," she said.

The DENR chief pointed out that vertical integration to ensure alignment

of local government units' water-related policies and actions with the Philippine Development Plan are also being pursued.

"We are establishing the national geospatial database for natural resources, including water, in order to achieve cross-cutting development goals, de-risked investments, and improve the water resource management down to the community level. It underpins our natural capital accounting programs and establishes the physical bases for the design of water-related social and infrastructure programs which aim to ensure that no ecosystem or community is left behind," Loyzaga explained.

No water crisis – MWSS

Meanwhile, the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System said the capacity of Angat Dam, Metro Manila's main water source, is sufficient to avert any looming water crisis during the dry months.

In an interview with reporters on Tuesday, MWSS Administrator Leonor Cleofas said recent simulations conducted by a technical working group showed the water level at Angat Dam will remain "at the comfortable level" throughout the looming El Niño.

The TWG is chaired by the National Water Resources Board and its members include the MWSS and National Irrigation Administration, along with other water stakeholders.

"We can say that Angat Dam is at a comfortable level. In a simulation to identify what our elevation will be,

come August or the end of the summer season, our prognosis is still good, and our water level is still high," Cleofas said.

The water level at Angat Dam on Tuesday was 203.25 meters, way above its minimum operating level of 180 meters. Its spilling level is 217 meters.

Kaliwa needed for security

While the MWSS has assured that there will be no water crisis during the summer months when demand is historically high, Cleofas said the delayed Kaliwa Dam remains the only viable and long-term solution to the increasing water demand in Metro Manila and nearby provinces.

"If we deliver Kaliwa Dam, we will be reaching for comfortable water security up to 2050 and beyond," she said.

"So we could pursue other water projects and the government could help make smooth their implementation. I hope it's not like the Kaliwa Dam that took us over seven and a half years before we started," Cleofas said.

She said the project contractor, China Energy Engineering Corporation Limited, vowed to work round-the-clock to complete the project in 2026 and the commissioning of the dam could start by early 2027.

Kaliwa Dam is a 70-meter-high concrete gravity dam on the Kaliwa River that will have a reservoir surface area of 291 hectares. It will have a maximum gross reservoir volume of 57 million cubic meters and a discharge capacity of 300 million liters a day.



PH addressing looming water crisis, DENR chief assures UN

THE Philippines is proactively addressing the looming water crisis brought about by climate change, Environment Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga assured the United Nations during the UN 2023 Water Conference held in New York from March 22 to 24.

"Today, more than ever, there is a critical need for nexus governance, climate and disaster resilience, one that pursues a strategic balance between supply and consumption of water for health, food, energy, and environmental security," she said. "The Philippines is moving decisively in this direction."

Yulo-Loyzaga cited the creation of the Water Resource Management Office (WRMO) under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) "to achieve water security by integrating the functions of all agencies with water-related mandates."

The WRMO is aligned with new legislation, creating an apex body for comprehensive water resource management that will adopt an all-hazards and risk-informed integrated water resource management approach.

Yulo-Loyzaga said achieving adequate and equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation services is at the core of sustainable development.

"All the plans and programs of the government to provide universal access to safe, sufficient, affordable, and sustainable water supply, sanitation, and hygiene will be completed by 2030," she said.

An integrated water management approach also ensures that local government units' water-related policies and actions are aligned with the Philippine Development Plan.

"We are establishing the national geospatial database for natural resources, including water, in order to achieve cross-cutting development goals, de-risked investments, and improve the water resource management down to the community level," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

"It underpins our natural capital accounting programs and establishes the physical bases of the design of water-related social and infrastructure programs, which aim to ensure that no ecosystem or community is

left behind," she added.

The Philippines ranks fourth among the countries in the world most affected by water-related disasters.

"Extreme rainfall events and prolonged periods of drought have impacted our food and energy supply. Between 2010 and 2019, damages incurred due to floods, droughts and storms have amounted to \$10 billion," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

"Water stress and insecurity remain and disasters do move people into poverty. We are not alone. Climate-vulnerable developing countries are faced with similar crises," she added.

The Marcos administration, she said, is geared toward three major policy directions: the establishment of the WRMO; the building of the National Natural Geospatial Database, with water as a layer, in support of the natural capital accounting system; and advancing the Philippine Health Facility Development Plan 2020-2040, especially giving priority access to water, sanitation and hygiene in public health-care facilities.

CATHERINE S. VALENTE



BBM: We have an 'overall plan' to address water crisis

BY JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

PRESIDENT Marcos Jr. yesterday assured the public that his administration already has an "overall plan" to address the looming water crisis in the country and manage what water resources are available.

"It's just really a question of managing our water... we kept postponing this problem over the many, many years at every level. So, it's time to put it together, to put in a cohesive plan that all LGUs (local government units) could follow, all agencies of government could follow," the President said in mixed English and Filipino during an interview on the sidelines of the Pag-ibig

Fund Chairman's Report at the Mall of Asia Complex in Pasay City.

Marcos said part of this "cohesive," "overall" plan is the shift from sourcing waters from deep wells to using already available "surface waters."

He it also includes the use of infrastructures such as flood control structures, like dams and dikes, that could supply water for irrigation, as well as the use of hybrid seeds of rice and other high value crops that do very well during dry season and do not require too much water.

"In terms of rice production, we have already identified certain varieties, hybrid varieties especially, that do very well during the dry season.

So we replace the variety to take advantage of the different qualities of the different varieties, especially — not only of rice but also of the high value crops because during dry season, usually some places do not plant," he also said.

The President said the overall plan had also factored in the impact of climate change and look into consideration the best practices and existing water management plans around the world to determine which can be adopted or would work in the country.

Marcos said they are also pushing for the institutionalization of a Department of Water Management through Congress.

He recently formed the Office of Water Management (OWM) which is currently under the Office of the President (OP) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

"All of these things we have already put up together — we have already [put] together [an] overall plan. Now, we have to implement it," the President said.

On the concerns about the impact of the El Niño weather phenomenon, Marcos said the government is also relying on the OWM to address this and ensure the supply of potable drinking water and irrigation during the dry spell.



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WORLD WATER DAY PHL AWARDS 2023: West Zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc., in partnership with the National Water Resources Board and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources recently honored 21 water and environment champions at the World Water Day Philippines Awards 2023 held last March 22 in Pasay City. Recipients of Maynilad's 'Water Warrior Award for Advocacy Leadership' were Caloocan City Vice Mayor Karina Teh, ABS-CBN journalist Alvin Elchico, the Quezon City Climate Change Education Department, and the Million Trees Foundation, for actively raising awareness on water sustainability and environmental responsibility in their respective professions and initiatives. Photo shows the awardees along with officials of the various water agencies that granted the awards headed by DENR Undersecretary for Field Operations - Luzon, Visayas and Environment Juan Miguel Cuna (1st row, 7th from left), Maynilad president and CEO Ramonlito Fernandez and NWRB chief for policy and program division Engr. Susan Abaño (1st row, 9th and 10th from left, respectively).



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Marcos: Gov't addressing water woes

By ALEXIS ROMERO

The administration is addressing the water crisis, President Marcos said yesterday as he reiterated the need to improve the way the country manages the resource.

On Monday, Sen. Nancy Binay cited the

need to prepare for an impending water crisis, saying the country has been affected regularly by the El Niño phenomenon and yet it continues to be caught off guard by water shortages.

Binay urged the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) to share

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Marcos From Page 1

its "holistic and comprehensive water resource plan" and its water allocation and reuse policy with the local governments, so that it can be implemented at the community level.

She asked how many rainwater collection systems have been built by the government in the more than 42,000 barangays in the country since the Rainwater Collector and Springs Development Act was passed in 1989, as well as how many of these are damaged and require rehabilitation.

Asked to react to the call for a comprehensive plan to address a possible water crisis, Marcos said the government has an "overall plan" aimed at improving the way water resources are managed.

"They may not have heard the fact that we have organized already the Office of Water Management precisely to address this problem," Marcos said.

"All of these things we have already put up together - we have already (put) together (an) overall plan. Now, we have to implement it... There are many agencies that are concerned when it comes to water management. So we have to make it more cohesive," he added.

Marcos said the Office of Water Management would be attached to the Office of the President and the environment department.

Malacañang has yet to release a copy of the executive order creating the office, which is tasked to ensure sufficient water supply and address environmental challenges.

Marcos cited the need for a shift in the way water supply is acquired from wells to surface water.

He said the government has identified hybrid rice varieties that can survive during the dry season.

"The water management problem that we have in the Philippines... goes beyond just agriculture. Agriculture is an extremely important part of it but we are talking about irrigation - water for irrigation, water for power production, our management



The water elevation of La Mesa Dam in Quezon City drops to 76.49 meters yesterday. Water concessionaires are advising the public to conserve water during the dry season and brace for possible water interruptions due to the possible threat of El Niño. JESSE BUSTOS

of surface water in flood control and for irrigation as well," Marcos said.

"We already have a problem but then there's now the new factor or not-so-new factor of climate change that we really have to deal with. The good thing is that we have seen many examples of water management around the world which we can emulate."

The President expressed hope that Congress would pass a bill creating a water agency.

"We are hoping down the road, there are bills that have been filed in the legislature, in both houses, establishing the Department of Water Management, and that's precisely what we are trying to face," he said.

'Adequate this summer'

The Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) has expressed confidence that with conservation efforts, water supply would be adequate this summer.

MWSS administrator Leonor Cleofas yesterday brushed off worries of water shortage this summer despite the El Niño phenomenon projected in the second half of the year.

Starting yesterday, west zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc. implemented daily water service interruption in parts

of its concession area as part of a measure aimed at preserving its limited water resources.

The rotational water supply is in preparation for the increased likelihood of an El Niño phenomenon by the latter half of the year.

So far, water elevation at the Angat Dam - which supplies 90 percent of raw water for the west zone - remains at a high level as of mid-March.

This developed after PAGASA issued last week an El Niño watch, which is implemented when conditions are favorable for the development of El Niño within the next six months and the probability is above 55 percent.

Cleofas said the El Niño phenomenon would not be felt during the dry months.

"The El Niño will be felt during later part of this year and early part of next year," she said.

"When there is El Niño, there are no rains, typhoons. So, all we need is to conserve water," she added.

Based on simulations done by the Angat technical working group (TWG), water level at the dam will still be enough by the end of the dry months or by August.

"In that simulation, our prognosis is still good, our water level is still high," Cleofas said. - With Danessa Rivera, Romina Cabrera



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Present *El Niño* plan, NWRB urged

BY LADY JEAN KARAGANI
Correspondent

Senator Nancy Binay on Tuesday urged the National Water Resources Board to come up with a holistic and comprehensive water resource plan before the impact of the *El Niño* weather phenomenon is felt in the country.

This as Binay warned about the long-term effects of the warm and hot season on the water crisis.

"We all have a part in the solution, and it does not rest on the shoulders of a single sector, institution, agency, or company. Everyone needs to be prepared," Binay said in the vernacular.

She pointed out that *El Niño* has been hitting the country for decades, thus, the people must learn from previous experiences.

"On the part of the government, it would be much appreciated if the NWRB can share its holistic and comprehensive water resource plan, its water allocation and reuse policy down to the local government units so that it can be implemented on the community level," she said.

Binay also urged an assessment

be conducted on the implementation of Republic Act 7716, an act providing for the construction of water wells, rainwater collectors, development of springs, and rehabilitation of water wells in all barangays in the Philippines.

She wanted to know how many rainwater collection systems have been constructed in over 42,000 villages nationwide since the law was enacted in 1989, who is currently in charge of the maintenance of the water infrastructure, as well as the number of systems that need to be rehabilitated.

Water crisis is real

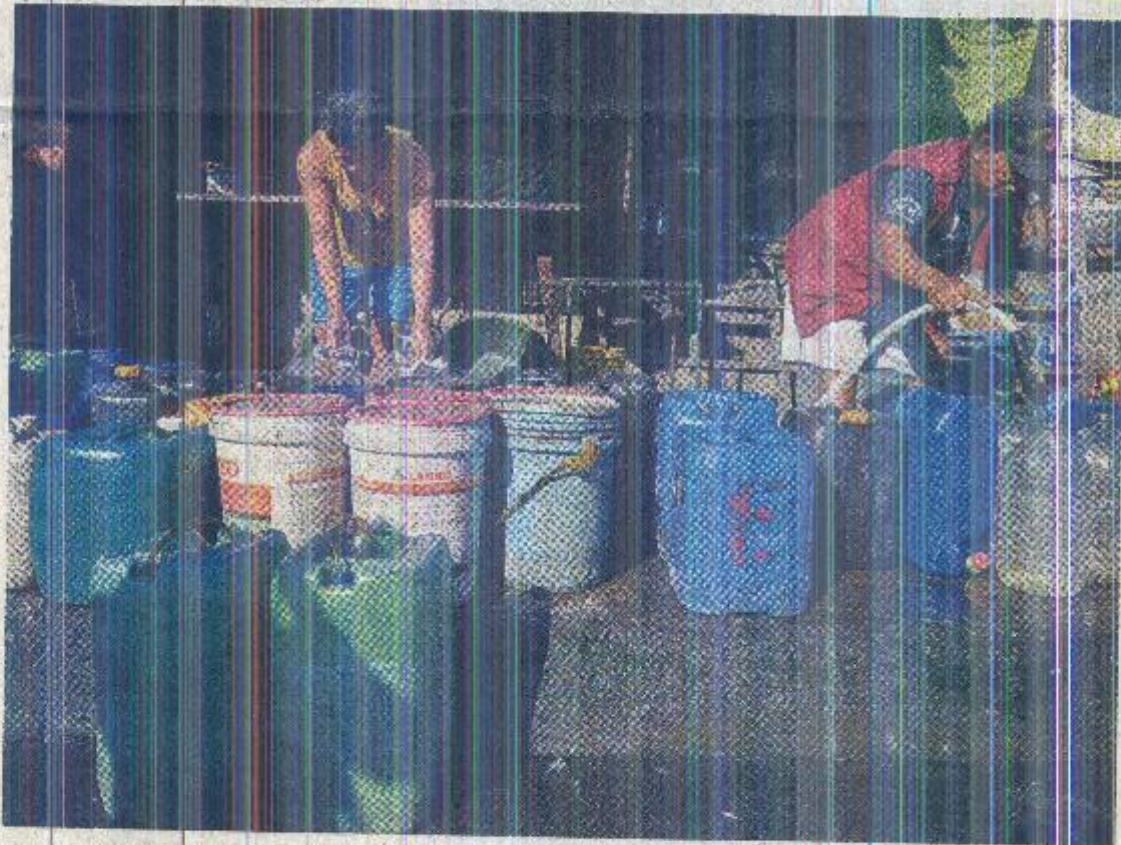
"*El Niño* is here, and the food and water crisis are real. We don't want to go back to having long queues for water rations," she said.

Binay encouraged the public to conserve water in their households.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration earlier said the northeast monsoon or "*amihan*" weather system and the *La Niña* wet weather phenomenon have just ended and the warm and dry season has begun.



MWSS: MM water supply at 'comfortable' level



Residents wait for their turn to fill their containers with water on R10 in Tondo, Manila on Oct. 11, 2022 ahead of a scheduled supply interruption in the area. (Photo by RHOY COBILLA)

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) said water supply in Metro Manila, amid the expected effects of El Niño, is still "comfortable."

MWSS made this assurance based on simulations of water level trajectory of the Angat Dam which supplies 97 percent of Metro Manila's water requirements.

Based on data from the Na-

tional Power Corp., Angat Dam's elevation as of 8 a.m. yesterday, is at 203.25 meters, 23.25 meters more than the 180 meters minimum operating level.

Leonor Cleofas, MWSS administrator, said at the sidelines of the Kaliwa dam project construction site in Teresa, Rizal yesterday the technical working group on the Angat Dam has its own simulation that showed "good prognosis" for the facility's elevation until the end

of summer and end-August this year. The body is chaired by the National Water Resources Board and is composed of the National Irrigation Administration, MWSS and other stakeholders of the Angat Dam.

"We do not depend on Angat Dam alone. We have short- to medium-term sources of additional water. They may ... not be as big

See MWSS ► Page A2

MWSS

as Angat but these can (be of) help (to) our water needs during the summer months," Cleofas added.

The MWSS said construction of the Kaliwa Dam has hit 24 percent. The dam is targeted for completion by end-2026 and operational by January 2027.

Meanwhile, the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA)

is pushing for a conservation program that will manage water supply of 552 water districts in the country.

"With both public and private stakeholders, we will have a whole of nation approach on a conservation program for water resources since this early, this month, we already feel the increased need for

water," said Vicente Homer Revil, LWUA administrator, at the Lagging Handa public briefing yesterday.

Revil said LWUA is also looking at foreign technologies in harnessing water resources like those used in Israel which can be applicable for use in the Philippines including desalination and catchment dams, among others.



NCR dry-season water demand seen rising by up to 15%

DRY-SEASON water demand in Metro Manila and nearby provinces is expected to exceed normal levels by up to 15%, according to Manila Water Co., one of the capital region's two water suppliers.

In the east zone, Nestor Jeric T. Sevilla, Jr., Manila Water's corporate strategic affairs group head, said: "Normally, during summer, demand increases by about 10 to 15%."

In a Viber message to *BusinessWorld*, Mr. Sevilla said the current supply is 1,500 million liters per day (MLD) from the primary water source, Angat Dam, with demand roughly equivalent.

"We get about 1,600 million liters of water per day from Angat as our 40% allocation," he said, adding that the company draws additional water from its Cardona water treatment plant (100-110 MLD); deep wells (50 MLD to 100 MLD) and backwash recovery operations (30 MLD).

He said peak demand in the dry season is projected at up to 1,700 MLD.

Maynilad Water Services, Inc. had a more conservative estimate of 5-6% demand in excess of normal levels.

"The demand increases by 5 to 6% during summer, and we are seeing this effect now," Jennifer C. Rufo, a company spokesperson, told *BusinessWorld* via Viber message on Tuesday.

"What we are saying right now is that we are not relying on Angat dam alone; we have short to medium term sources. We have additional water supply (which) will help us through the summer months," she said.

The MWSS said in January that it is projecting a possible shortfall in 2024 if population growth continues and the Philippines does not develop new water sources.

Ms. Cleofas said that the MWSS is still positive about finishing the Kaliwa Dam by the end of 2026.

"So far, including the detailed engineering design, more or less Kaliwa Dam is 24% complete," she said.

Once completed, the Kaliwa Dam is expected to commence operations by the first quarter of 2027 with projected additional supply of 600 MLD.

Ms. Cleofas said the water regulator hopes to start constructing the dam within the year.

The MWSS estimates that as of March 28, water levels at Angat Dam are at 203.25 meters, above the 192 meters considered to be the dam's normal operating level. The ideal level is pegged at 212 meters, which incorporates a safety margin for the dry season.

Angat Dam accounts for about 90% of the capital's potable water.

For the west zone, Ms. Rufo said the supply of water is currently 2,700 MLD.

"The water that should be available to us is 2,400 MLD from our La Mesa treatment plant (which draws from the Angat-Ipo system), and 300 MLD from our Putatan treatment plant (Laguna de Bay)," Ms. Rufo said.

Maynilad did not disclose its current water demand. The west zone concessionaire serves about 1.5 million connections within its service area.

Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) Administrator Leonor C. Cleofas told reporters on Tuesday that water supply remains at "comfortable" levels.

"Even the NWRB (National Water Resources Board) said that we are still at a comfortable level," Ms. Cleofas said.

Ms. Cleofas said the MWSS is confident supply will be adequate for meeting the expected surge in demand.

She said that it is too early to whether Metro Manila and nearby provinces will experience a water crisis.

Manila Water's service area includes Marikina, Pasig, Makati, Taguig, Pateros, Mandaluyong, San Juan, portions of Quezon City and Manila, and several towns in Rizal province.

Maynilad serves the cities of Manila, except portions of San Andres and Sta. Ana. It also operates in Quezon City, Makati, Caloocan, Pasay, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, Valenzuela, Navotas, and Malabon.

It also supplies the cities of Cavite, Bacoor and Imus, and the towns of Kawit, Noveleta, and Rosario, all in Cavite province.

Metro Pacific Investments Corp., which has a majority stake in Maynilad, is one of three Philippine units of Hong Kong-based First Pacific Co. Ltd., the others being Philex Mining Corp. and PLDT, Inc.

Hastings Holdings, Inc., a unit of PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund subsidiary MediaQuest Holdings, Inc., has an interest in *BusinessWorld* through the Philippine Star Group, which it controls. — Ashley Erika O. Jose



EDITORIAL

Act on water crisis now

Like clockwork, Filipinos are once more talking about a water shortage, prompted by the predictable service interruptions of water utilities that occur almost annually whenever the dry season comes around.

And like clockwork, our government leaders are once more making all the right noises in calling for a coordinated response to this challenge, proffering master plans and new agencies as the solution to a problem that has seemed to defy solution year in and year out.

No less than President Marcos has warned that the country is facing a water crisis which threatens not only the Philippine economy but society as a whole, adding that the required response to this situation has been "continually postponed."

Indeed, it has. And unless the incumbent administration does things differently this time around, it is in danger of ending up like all other administrations before it: Kicking the water crisis can down the road with the minimum required response and letting future leaders tackle future editions of the water shortage while Filipinos suffer dry taps during the hottest months of the year.

Unfortunately, efforts to secure new sources of water supply for the country's growing metropolises almost always run into opposition from environmentalists decriing the harm new dams would cause and local communities lamenting the loss of their ancestral domain.

These concerns are valid, but urgent solutions must be secured for the needs of millions of Filipinos for clean water and for the efficient functioning of the nation.

This doesn't mean that policymakers should run roughshod over environmental and local concerns. It means these water supply solutions like new dams should be built with as little harm to their surroundings as possible and, where that's not possible, offsetting mechanisms like reforestation programs should be put in place to mitigate the damage.

Affected indigenous communities should be relocated, offered alternative forms of livelihood, and compensated for their sacrifice of offering their land so that millions more of their fellow citizens are able to survive and function efficiently in their day-to-day lives.

Meanwhile, water utilities should be more proactive in investing in and building their supply capacities so that they don't get caught flatfooted by rising demand for potable water, as is what's happening to Maynilad Water Services Inc. today and what happened to Manila Water Co. a few years ago.

On the part of the consumer, we should stop whining about the cost of potable water, especially when rate hikes are needed to finance the construction of new facilities like treatment plants and pipe networks. And regulators should carefully balance the interests of water concessionaires and consumers, ensuring that one side's advantage does not translate to the detriment of the other.

Finally, politicians should stop pandering to the public with their populist pronouncements every time someone raises the inevitable opposing voice to these water supply solutions. Once the public has been consulted, once the policies have been agreed on, and once a broad consensus has been achieved, our political leaders should have the backbone to forge ahead with these difficult solutions instead of worrying about losing votes courtesy of a vocal minority in the next elections.

This is especially critical for the national leadership which must lead the way in subsuming parochial concerns—once these have sufficiently been addressed—into the common good of providing millions of Filipinos with the water they need, whether it's for daily household use or to irrigate farms or to run turbines that produce electricity.

According to the National Water Resources Board, as many as 11 million Filipinos lack access to clean water. In a country surrounded by bodies of water, blessed with large watersheds (deforestation notwithstanding) and rain that falls inevitably and abundantly after the dry seasons (often more than what's needed), it is unacceptable that one in every 10 of our nation's citizens does not have sufficient supply of this essential resource for drinking, cooking, bathing, and cleaning.

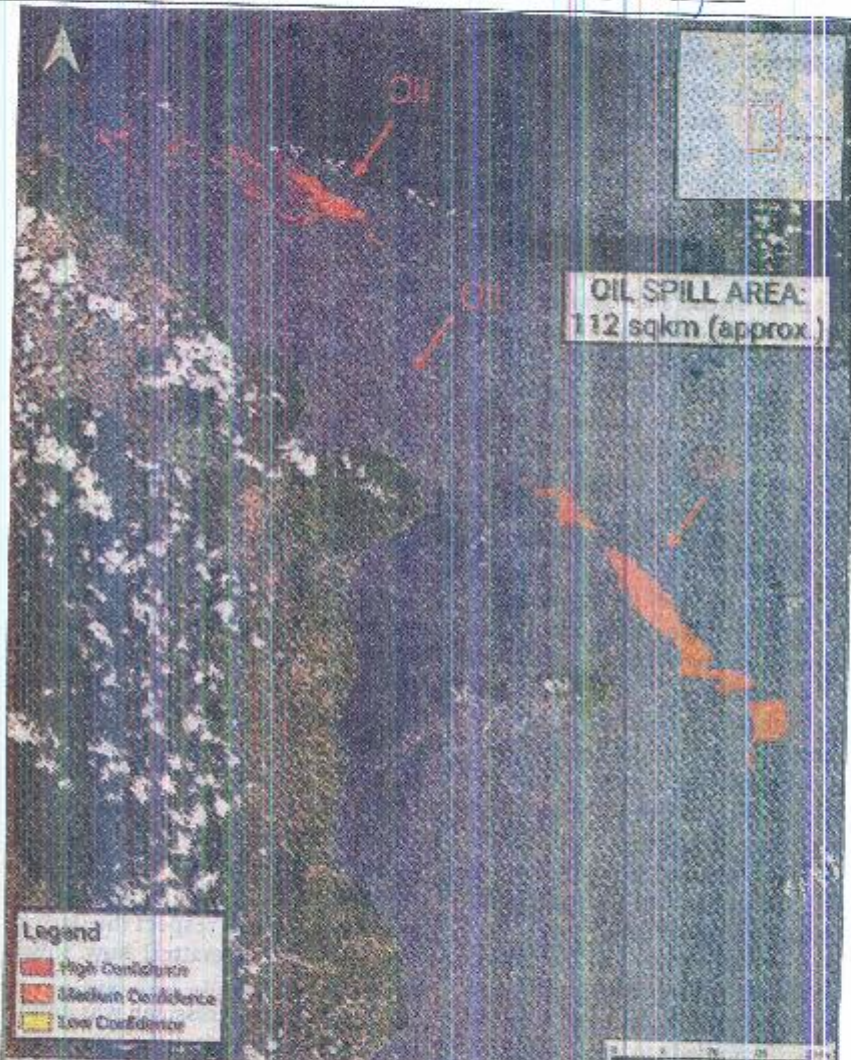
Like clockwork, Filipinos are once more facing a water shortage at the start of the dry season. And like clockwork, policymakers are once more issuing their usual statements about securing new supply. But like clockwork, this issue will die down when the rains come and the problem will lie dormant—and essentially unsolved—until the next dry season.

It is high time that we wrap our heads around the problem and for our leaders to spend the political capital on the tough choices needed to solve the water crisis decisively.



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MARINE POLLUTION DUE TO OIL SPILLAGE

DATE/TIME: 23 March 2023, 10:15 AM (PHIT)
SOURCES: Sentinel-2, Mikumedia Images
Contains modified Copernicus Sentinel data (2023)
PRODUCED: 27 March 2023 by the Philippine Space Agency



BACK IN VERDE ISLAND. Satellite image obtained by the Philippine Space Agency on Tuesday shows new traces of oil slick in Verde Island. PhilSA's Roel dela Cruz said the oil slick, spotted morning of March 27, 2023, is a bit long. **PhilSA photo**

Satellite captures traces of long oil slick in Verde Island Passage

By **Rio N. Araja**
and **Othel V. Campos**

THE Philippine Space Agency (PhilSA) on Tuesday said satellite images showed new traces of oil slick in Verde

Island Passage, an area rich in marine biodiversity.

Roel dela Cruz of PhilSA, said the oil slick was sighted in Verde island between Mindoro and Batangas on March

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Satellite...

From A1

27 at 10 a.m.

The newest satellite image showed "relatively long oil slick" in Verde Island, contrary to the report by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) that the area "no longer had oil spill traces."

Another satellite image obtained from a private firm, Planet Labs, still needed to be processed and analyzed.

PhilSA said the satellite images are important tools that can help authorities in the cleanup and containment of the oil spill off Oriental Mindoro caused by the sinking of the MT Princess Empress with 900,000 liters of industrial fuel oil.

The PCG and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) are given copies of the satellite images and maps showing the progression and the scope of the areas affected by the oil spill.

The University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute is one of the recipients of PhilSA's satellite images to help in developing oil spill trajectory models.

Greenpeace Philippines—on Tuesday alleged that insurers of MT Princess Empress has been discouraging claimants from exercising their legal right to seek justice over compensation money.

Jefferson Chua, Greenpeace campaigner, said there were reports that the insurers have been dissuading potential claimants from filing charges against RDC Reield Marine Services, the company that owns the MT Princess Empress.

"It is utterly unacceptable that an insurer would discourage claimants from exercising their legal right to seek justice while dangling compensation money over their heads. Communities have suffered enough in the past month and the last thing they need is more disenfranchisement from companies who continue to operate with impunity," he said.

While the insurer has the responsibility of making sure claimants fully know their rights and the consequences of their choices, it has no business airing their suggestions about what claimants should or should not be doing," he added.

He called on the government to make polluters take responsibility for the oil spill and pay reparations due to the communities.

A month after the sinking of MT Princess Empress off the coast of Oriental Mindoro, the Protect Verde Island Passage (Protect VIP) launched a coalition called SOS -- Stop the Oil Spill, Save Our Seas! to pool efforts in calling for immediate accountability and action on the oil spill.

"We, a collective of concerned and affected stakeholders, are very alarmed by the inadequate level of response afforded to this disaster. While government agencies have been taking action, it does not seem to be the prompt and coordinated response needed by this oil spill which is already a disaster of national and international proportions," Protect VIP convener Fr. Edwin Gariguez said.

"A tragedy of this scale—one that directly affects an estimated 36,000 families whose lives and livelihoods are interwoven into the health of our seas -- must be met with the greatest possible action and highest standard for accountability of all involved actors," he said.

The Philippine Coast Guard, meanwhile, welcomed the arrival of the Korean Coast Guard Emergency Response Team at the PCG headquarters in Manila exactly a month after the MT Princess Empress sank near Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.



Groups demand 'swift' gov't action as slick lingers in Mindoro

'Invisibility' of concerned agencies, those responsible for ecological disaster decried

By **Madonna T. Virola**
and **Jane Bautista**
@Team_Inquirer

CITY OF CALAPAN—Concerned organizations on Tuesday demanded "transparent, urgent and sufficient action" on the oil spill that continued to affect Oriental Mindoro and some areas in Antique, Palawan and Batangas since MT Princess Empress sank off Naujan town on Feb. 28.

The Stop the Oil Spill (SOS) coalition, a broad network of civil society organizations, noted that it has been a month since the oil spill wrought havoc in Oriental Mindoro and nearby seas but investigations by concerned agencies remained unavailable for public scrutiny.

"Apart from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), none of the involved agencies provided documents, such as cargo manifest, investigation reports or oil-spill response plans that would shed light on the liable actors," the group said at a virtual press briefing.

The coalition said they have been requesting documents about the incident from government agencies, such as the Bureau of Customs, Maritime Industry Authority (Marina), Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and Office of the Civil Defense but to no avail.

Dubbed "Stop the Oil Spill, Save Our Seas!" or SOS, the coalition is composed of representatives from the Protect VIP (Verde Island Passage) Network; Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED); Oceana Philippines; Greenpeace Philippines; and affected communities in Oriental Mindoro and Batangas.



COMMUNITY IN ACTION Policemen, fisherfolk and volunteers place improvised spill booms along the coast of Barangay Silonay in Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro, on March 25 to contain the spread of oil. —LT. GEN. RHODERICK ARMAMENTO/CONTRIBUTOR



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ty experts declared in 2005 as the Earth's "center of marine shore-fish biodiversity."

MT Princess Empress was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil when it sank. As of Sunday, 10,206 liters of oil waste and 72,643 kilos of oil-coated debris had been collected in clean-up operations by PCG personnel and concerned communities, Defense Senior Undersecretary Carlito Galvez Jr. had reported.

'Inadequate'

"We, a collective of concerned and affected stakeholders, are very alarmed by the inadequate level of response afforded to this disaster," the group said in a statement read by Calapan-based Ft. Edwin Gariguez, lead convenor of the Protect VIP Network, during an online forum.

In a separate statement, activist fisherfolk group Pamalakaya said they joined the coalition to push for an immediate response to the oil spill for the benefit of fisherfolk who are the most affected by the effects of the harmful substance in the water.

Around 18,000 fishermen from Oriental Mindoro and parts of Antique and Palawan have been unable to return to their normal fishing activities for a month now, Pamalakaya said.

According to the DENR, the oil spill has spread to the City of Calapan and the towns of Bansud, Bongabong, Butalacao, Gloria, Magsaysay, Mansalay, Naujan, Pinamalayan and Pola on Mindoro Island. Also affected were the coastal towns of Agutaya and Tayray in Palawan; Caluya town in Antique which was placed under a state

of calamity; and Batangas City and Tingloy town in Batangas.

Gerry Arances, the CREED executive director, noted it took three weeks for the shipowner to deploy a remotely operated vessel to locate the sunken tanker, "only to find out it could not stop the leak."

'Agonizingly slow'

"The response has been agonizingly slow, but even more glaring is the invisibility of those truly responsible for this catastrophe—(shipowner) RDC Reield Marine Services, SL Harbor Bulk Terminal Corp. and by extension San Miguel Corp. Shipping and Lighterage," said Greenpeace Philippines campaigner Jefferson Chua.

SL Harbor chartered the tanker from Batjan to Iloilo when it sank. SL Harbor is a subsidiary of SMC Shipping.

"One month after the oil spill tragedy, accountability remains elusive. In Oriental Mindoro, fisherfolk in several towns are expressing frustration over the slow and arduous process of obtaining compensation from the company that owns the MT Princess Empress, the vessel responsible for the spill," Fernando Hicap, Pamalakaya chair, said in a statement.

Citing the Revised Rules on Prevention, Containment, Abatement and Control of Oil Marine Pollution, the SOS coalition said all affected communities and local governments who would file claims or actions for compensation should be covered by a cash bond of at least P70 million from the shipowner or its insurer, charterer and owner of the oil.—WITH A REPORT FROM DELFIN T. MALLARI JR. (S)

The members of the newly formed coalition said they wanted to "ensure just reparation and sustained recovery for affected communities and biodiversity" and by now should hold accountable those responsible for the oil spill that continues to spread in the waters of the affected provinces, threatening vital marine resources, including the Verde Island Passage.

The Verde Island Passage is a strait between Batangas and Mindoro islands that biodiversi-



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400,000 liters of oil still

leaking from *Empress*

By ROBERTZON RAMIREZ

One month after the motor tanker *Princess Empress* sank in the waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, the vessel is still leaking around 400,000 liters of industrial fuel.

Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) spokesman Rear Admiral Armand Balilo reported yesterday that more than 400,000 liters of fuel had leaked from the sunken vessel.

The tanker was reportedly carrying 822,000 liters of fuel.

Balilo said around 46 kilometers of the 55-kilometer area affected by the oil spill had been cleared.

"At least *parang mayroon tayong nakikitang progress sa pag-responde sa oil spill... may natitira pang langis, pero mas malaki na ang nalinis natin*, from 55 to nine kilometers *na lang*," he said.

Balilo said the PCG is waiting for remotely operated vehicles to help patch the 23 leaking areas of the sunken vessel.

He said the assistance of the international community is making the job easier.

A team from the Korea Coast Guard paid a courtesy call at the PCG main office in Manila yesterday as part of its efforts to help in oil spill response operations.

Coast guard personnel from the US and Japan are also helping while private sector groups have tapped experts from France and Singapore.

Satellite image obtained by the Philippine Space Agency (PhilSA) yesterday showed new traces of oil slick in the Verde Island Passage, the global center of marine biodiversity.

PhilSA's Roel dela Cruz, however, stressed the need to monitor the situation on the ground.

Meanwhile, Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Gen. Rodolfo Azurin Jr. said local police units activated their sub-task group oil spill in Mimaropa and Western Visayas to help other government agencies contain the leaking oil.

"These local police units are under strict instructions to ensure order and security in

government-initiated relief programs in hardest-hit communities," Azurin said.

He directed the PNP Maritime Group to make available its floating assets to assist the PCG and local government units in cleanup and containment operations.

Alternative livelihood

Meanwhile, Tourism Secretary Cristina Frasco said the Department of Tourism (DOT) would train workers in the tourism industry who were affected by the oil spill.

In a radio interview, Frasco said the training would focus on alternative types of work.

About 63 tourism sites and 1,000 workers in 10 towns in Oriental Mindoro have been affected by the oil spill.

Frasco directed the regional offices of the DOT to monitor the situation and craft a recovery plan to provide assistance to affected tourism workers and stakeholders. — With Emmanuel Tupas, Mark Ernest Villeza, Rainier Allan Ronda



400,000 liters of industrial fuel still in sunken tanker – PCG

By AARON RECUENCO

Close to 400,000 liters of industrial oil remain intact inside the ill-fated MT Princess Empress which sank off the waters of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro exactly a month ago, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) disclosed on Tuesday, March 28.

PCG spokesperson Rear Admiral Armand Balilo said the estimate was based on the study and assessment conducted by experts who have been helping in the clean-up and containment of the industrial oil that spilled after the

sinking of the vessel.

“From the original 822,000 liters, close to 400 [thousand] liters remain at the vessel as a result of the leak from the tankers,” said Balilo, adding the figure is still under validation.

Earlier, it was reported that the remotely operated vehicle brought in by Japanese experts spotted several holes in some of the eight tankers of the MT Princess Empress—which have been causing the oil spill.

According to Balilo, four of the eight tankers located at the rear por- ▶ **6**

400,000 liters of industrial fuel still in sunken tanker – PCG ◀

tion of the vessel were almost empty based on the experts’ reports.

“There are still fuel inside the four tankers located in front and Tank Number 4 is still full,” said Balilo in a press briefing after the situation briefing of PCG and Korean Coast Guard on Tuesday, March 28. “What we are focusing on right now is how to recover those remaining fuel in the vessel.”

Good response

The PCG as well as the national government have been praised by both the Japanese and American experts for their response in the

clean-up drive and in the containment of the oil spill.

Exactly a month after the oil spill response, Balilo reported that areas affected have decreased.

“From 55 kilometers of affected areas, the areas where the patches of oil are seen were reduced to nine kilometers,” said Balilo. “With this, at least we have been seeing progress in our spill response.”

Continuous clean-up

On Tuesday, the PCG reported that it collected 10,163 liters of oily water mixture and 123 sacks of oil-contaminated materials during its

offshore oil spill response operation on Monday, March 27.

For shoreline response, the PCG collected 130 sacks of oil-contaminated materials on March 27.

So far, the PCG has collected 3,644.5 sacks and 22 drums of waste in 13-affected barangays in Naujan, Bulalacao, and Pola, Oriental Mindoro since March 1.

‘Unconditional indemnity’ sought

Meanwhile, fisherfolk group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) has urged the owner of MT Princess Empress to provide “unconditional indemnity” to affected fishers and coastal residents.

The group noted that around 18,000 fisherfolk from Oriental Mindoro, parts of Antique and Palawan,



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are unable to return to their fishing activities for a month now due to the oil spill.

"One month after the oil spill tragedy, accountability remains elusive. In Oriental Mindoro, fisherfolk in several towns are expressing frustration over the slow and arduous process of obtaining compensation from the company that owns the MT Princess Empress, the vessel responsible for the spill," the Pamalakaya chairperson Fernando Hicap said in statement released, Tuesday, March 28.

As the oil spill from the sunken tanker continues to affect the livelihood of fisherfolk, the group said it became harder for fishers to cope with the "intricate compensation process."

The Pamalakaya reported that the families of fishers are experiencing

"prolonged periods of hunger."

"We once again urge for the prompt and direct distribution of compensation to the impacted fisherfolk and their families residing along coastal areas," he said. "Apart from compensation, the owner of the sunken vessel should be compelled to shoulder the long-term rehabilitation of the affected fisheries, mangroves, reefs, and coasts, to restore their previous vitality."

Earlier, Pamalakaya said the owner of the MT Princess Empress should be held liable as well as concerned government agencies that will be found negligent in allowing the vessel to sail.

Due to the oil spill, local governments were prompted to impose fishing ban for fear of fish contamination. (With a report from Jel Santos)



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KOREAN ASSISTANCE — Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Commandant Admiral Artemio Abu (front row, third from right) discusses with officials of the Korean Coast Guard Emergency Response Team, headed by Director of Marine Pollution Response Division Lee Jongnam, the progress of the efforts to contain the oil spill that occurred in the waters off Oriental Mindoro at the PCG headquarters in Manila on Tuesday, March 28, 2023. (All Vicoy)



Nearly 400K liters of fuel oil have leaked out: PCG

BY VICTOR REYES

MORE than half of the industrial fuel oil cargo of MT Princess Empress that sank off Oriental Mindoro last February 28 has leaked out, according to the Philippine Coast Guard.

PCG officials reported the development yesterday, exactly a month after the ill-fated vessel, owned by RDC Reifield Marine Services, figured in the mishap off Naujan town.

"More than half (of the cargo) is already gone," said PCG spokesman Rear Adm. Armand Balilo, adding the vessel was carrying some 822,000 liters of industrial fuel oil at that time of the accident.

The PCG initially said the vessel was transporting 800,000 liters of fuel oil but later clarified the vessel was transporting 900,000 liters of oil.

"Based on our study, out of the 822,000 liters (cargo), more than 300,000 or close to 400,000 liters of oil are left inside the vessel. We are validating this," Balilo said.

He said the figure was based on the assessment of the Crisis Management Committee, taking into account inputs of oil spill response experts and findings of the remotely operated vehicle (ROV) operation last week.

PCG deputy commandant for operations

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Vice Adm. Rolando Lizon Punzala said five of the eight cargo tanks of the vessel sustained "structural damage."

"Based on the ROV survey, there are no more sightings of oil coming out of these (five cargo tanks)," Punzalan said.

"When we checked the cargo manifest, these five tanks contained more or less 400,000 liters (of oil)," added Punzalan, adding this was probably the oil that spilled during the initial week.

Punzalan said oil is also seeping

out from the other tanks with no structural damage.

"If we subtract that (400,000 liters) from the reported cargo of more or less 820,000 liters, which we are using as reference at present, the remaining oil (inside) is 350,000 liters or so because of leakage in the tanks that did not suffer structural damage," said

Punzalan said they are preparing for a bagging operation, or placing of specialized bags, at the tanks that are slowly spilling oil.

"This is to contain the seepage but it (oil that goes inside the bags) has to be collected," said Punzalan.

Balilo said the specialized bags are expected to arrive this Thursday, adding the bags will be deployed by ROV two days later.

After the bagging operation, authorities will proceed to the next phase of operations - patching leaks, hot tapping and pumping of the remaining oil.

Balilo said they have covered a lot of ground over the past month, explaining that "from 55 kilometers, the area with patches of oil is now down to nine kilometers."

The PCG added it has collected 10,163 liters of oily water mixture and 123 sacks of oil-contaminated mate-

rials during its offshore oil response operations from March 1 to 27.

In its shoreline cleanup, the PCG said 3,644.5 sacks and 22 drums of waste have been collected in 13 affected barangays in Naujan, Bulalacao, and Pola towns during the same period.

Yesterday, PCG commandant Adm. Artemio Abu met with South Korean Coast Guard officials at the PCG headquarters in Manila.

"They discussed the current situation of Oriental Mindoro oil spill and strategized plans of action to augment the ongoing oil spill response operations," the PCG said.



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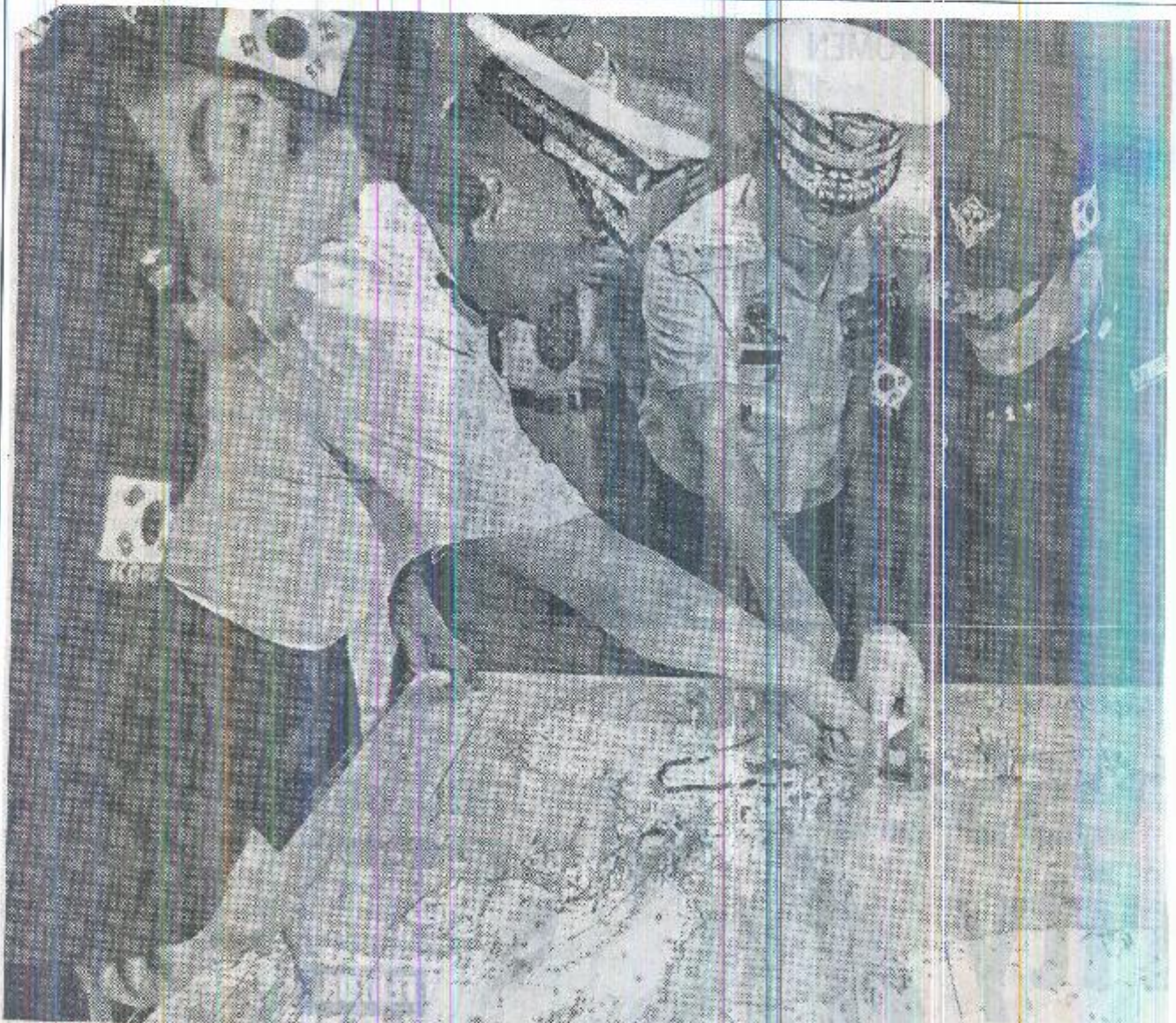
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PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEY SANCHEZ MENDOZA FOR THE DAILY TRIBUNE tribune.phd.joey
To the rescue Philippine Coastguard Command Artemio Abu (2nd from left) welcomes the Korean Coast Guard Emergency Response Team headed by Lee Jongnam, Director of Marine Pollution Response Division, at the PCG Headquarters in Manila on Tuesday, 28 March. The South Korean team will augment teams to contain the oil spill in Mindoro province.



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Hey! Scientists from University of the Philippines Diliman-College of Science indicated a 'window of opportunity' to step up clean up efforts of the oil spill from the *MT Princess Empress* tanker that sank off Naujan, Occidental Mindoro, last 28 February.



tribunephl and ConceptCentral tribunephl and ConceptGrp
tribune.net.ph and conceptnewscentral.com



DOE, DENR collaboration sought on incentivizing waste-to-energy ventures

By MYRNA M. VELASCO

An active and functional collaboration between the Department of Energy (DOE) and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is being sought on incentivizing investments on the waste-to-energy (WTE) space, so the Philippines could have innovation on alternative fuel that can be used for transport - including the aviation industry; as well as for power generation.

In an interview, Ditmar Gorges, managing partner of MET-Power Venture Partners, a subsidiary of Merro Pacific Investments Corp (MPIC), indicated that if the two departments will work together on enthusiastically promoting waste-to-energy ventures, the Philippines will have added valuable solution to its energy supply predicaments; while also addressing the country's dilemma on pollution.

"One thing we've been missing out is: we have a lot of organic wastes from the agriculture sector and also from the municipalities and we're not using that, so the DOE and DENR shall work together to turn that into usage energy resource," he said.

Gorges added "that's a point where we're missing out a little bit - we're missing out on the potential of agricultural organic waste - the pig manure; or rice husks - we're burning them; so instead of burning them, you can use that in a biogas plant and convert it into energy."

He further noted "what I'm trying to get to is: the DENR has problem with all that wastes; and most of them are going to sanitary landfills...and as you know, the landfills have been getting bigger and bigger and it's a major issue - and we're not using these to generate energy."

Gorges emphasized "if the two departments - DOE and DENR - could work together and make use of that collaboration in giving incentives to use agricultural wastes or municipal wastes to generate energy - then we can address not just our waste problems, but also energy supply. It's something that's really missing."

In other countries like Germany, he conveyed that fuel derived from organic wastes - including those from households, are now running part of their transport system like the city buses and city trucks.

"For example in Germany, even for a pig manure or chicken manure, there is special incentive for using that in a biogas plant to generate energy - you can also turn that into power," he pointed out.

Gorges further stated that biogas may also be upgraded to the equivalent of compressed natural gas (CNG), and that could match the quality of gas being drawn from the Malampaya field.

Citing previous studies, including the one undertaken by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Gorges specified that if all the wastes generated from the roughly 100 million population of the Philippines can be judiciously turned into energy, the potential could be more than 10,000 megawatts equivalent of energy that may be added into the country's power supply.

He shared that at METpower, there's already a proof-of-concept that the company can dangle which will clearly show the viability of waste-to-energy ventures, including their two biogas plants in South Cotabato that have been converting farm wastes from pineapple plantation and canneries into usable energy.



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LIFE LINES
DINAH VENTURA

Feeling hot, hot, hot

“Pagasa describes ‘heat index’ as ‘how hot it really feels outside when humidity and other factors are considered along with the temperature.”

Usually, the headlines blare weather-related news only when there are calamities that take hundreds of lives, affect thousands of people or destroy millions of properties. The wrath of the heavens comes in the form of howling winds and lashes of water, with floods inundating the land.

It really does sound like a woman’s wrath, and could well explain why the rainy season is called *La Niña*.

Of course, there are more scientific explanations for these weather patterns, which some people living on our tropical islands get confused about.

When Boracay beachfront resorts, for example, start putting up their wind “shields” to guard guests against wind and rain, that is *La Niña*. The scorch and humidity of summer months mean the “little boy” has arrived.

El Niño, our online sources say, is Spanish for “The Boy.” If we are to think in weather terms, it is the “hot” phase and, thus, we can

remember the term by thinking, “boy, warm-blooded” and the typhoon weather with strong winds as “girl, temperamental.” Okay, pardon the wordplay – it is, as of this writing, too hot.

National Geographic says the climate patterns called *El Niño* and *La Niña* are part of a larger phenomenon called the *EL-Niño-Southern Oscillation* or ENSO.

El Niño, it adds, “describes the unusual warming of surface waters in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean.” *La Niña* is the “cool phase.” Both refer to the “ocean part of ENSO.” *Southern Oscillation*, meanwhile, refers to “atmospheric changes.”

These days, the warmer phase called *El Niño* is causing concern for the intensity it seems to have dropped on us. One day, we were layering tops and sweaters, and the next, we could not understand why sweat would just gather on our brows even as we sat in front of our computer screens, slogging at the keys for the next day’s story.

Writers love to use weather metaphors to describe people or situations, but this time, the heat really is on, literally – the heat index was recorded at 47 degrees Celsius in Butuan City, Agusan del Norte last week, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration.

“More troubling than the precautions being spread around to avoid heat stroke are the alleged cases of people who actually expired from heat stroke.”

This was noted as “the highest recorded nationwide thus far.” Previously, on 17 March, 46 degrees Celsius was recorded in Occidental Mindoro. Other places that registered in the 40s this month are Maasin, Southern Leyte; Davao, Bohol; Roxas City, Capiz; Davao City, Masbate City, Borongan and Dagupan City.

Pagasa describes “heat index” as “how hot it really feels outside when humidity and other factors are considered along with the temperature,” as simplified in a broadsheet report.

More troubling than the precautions being spread around to avoid heat stroke are the alleged cases of people who actually expired from heat stroke. Extended exposure to the heat index of 42 to 52 degrees can cause heat stroke, and those who work outdoors like farmers, for example, or have long activities outdoors, perhaps, like sports, can suffer from this if not checked or avoided.

The impact of climate change has been felt by people and the planet for some years now. Heavens, we have the uncertain weather patterns we have been seeing – like rain in December and January, for example. Those slight changes may seem pretty tame for now, and within communities, the urgency of the climate call to action may not seem relevant in the everyday scheme of things.

The truth is the planet is heating up abnormally and the impact of generations of un mindful use and mindless abuse of natural resources in the name of commerce will be felt sooner than we may realize.

The heat is on – a race against time.



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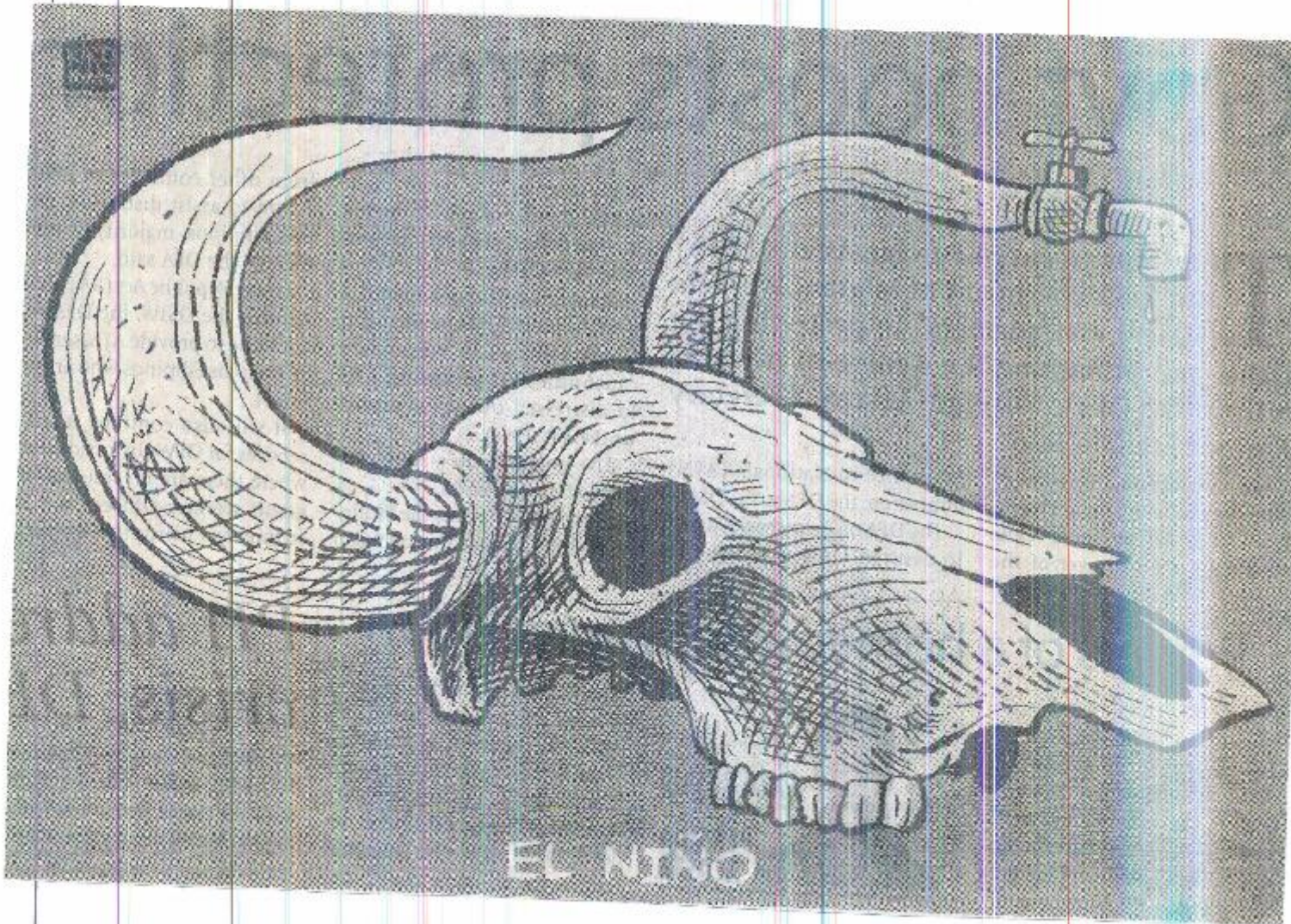
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Pag-IBIG Fund posts highest dividend rates

PAG-IBIG Fund recorded in 2022 the highest dividend rates since the new coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, the agency said in a statement.

In a statement, Pag-IBIG said its regular savings dividend rate for 2022 reached 6.53 percent and its Modified Pag-IBIG 2 (MP2) Savings surged to 7.03 percent per annum.

The dividend rates on the members' savings of the agency were the highlights of the Pag-IBIG Fund Chairman's Report for 2022 at the SMX Convention Center yesterday.

Pag-IBIG Fund posted its best performing year in 2022 as the agency's net income reached a record high P44.50 billion, a 28 percent increase from the P34.69 billion the year prior.

The agency also reported record high figures for the year: home loans, P117.85 billion; total membership savings collected, P79.90 billion and; loan payments, P127.42 billion.

Pag-IBIG Fund also assisted the highest number of members with 105,212 securing new homes from its housing loan programs and over 2.61 million aided through its short-term loans. The agency ended the year with total assets at its highest, amounting to P827.40 billion.

Secretary Jose Rizalino Acuzar of the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD), who also heads the Pag-IBIG Fund Board of Trustees, said the dividend rates are the result of the agency's record-high net income coupled

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with the highest dividend payout ratio approved by the Pag-IBIG Board.

Acuzar said that while the

agency is required to give back to members only at least 70 percent of its annual net income as dividends, the Pag-IBIG Board

approved a 97 percent payout ratio, resulting in a dividend amount to P42.7 billion - the highest in the agency's history.