

30 March 2023 Thursday



**DENR**

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2  
PAGE

UPPER  
 LOWER

PAGE 1  
STORY

BANNER  
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

03-30-23

000

PAGE

DATE

## MWSS: Angat Dam water supply

### good until December

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) yesterday assured the public of enough water supply from Angat Dam until December even as concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc. started implementing daily rotational water interruption.

In an interview with **The STAR**, MWSS Deputy Administrator Jose Dorado Jr. said the water interruption was not due to the shortage in water supply from the Angat Dam.

Based on latest monitoring of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Service Administration as of 6 a.m. Wednesday, the level of Angat Dam was at 202.84 meters, slightly lower than its level of 203.29 meters on Tuesday.

"The water interruption of Maynilad is within their system. When we say within their system, the water from Angat Dam flows to Ipo Dam, until it reaches the La Mesa portal. Once the water reaches the La Mesa portal, Maynilad and Manila Water divide the allocation," Dorado said.

He added that the water allocation for Manila Water goes to the Balara Treatment Plant and La Mesa Reservoir, while the share of Maynilad goes to the La Mesa Treatment Plants 1 and 2.

"What happens is that the water that

reaches the reservoir of Maynilad is less than the requirement. The MWSS provides all the requirements to the two concessionaires. The supply from MWSS is sufficient but the problem is the system of distribution of Maynilad," Dorado explained.

He said that MWSS presided over a top-level meeting with Maynilad and Manila Water to address the ongoing rotational water interruption.

"We held a top-level meeting this morning and Manila Water said it is willing to assist Maynilad address its water requirement to prevent the water interruption," Dorado added.

According to Dorado, the water concessionaires also urged MWSS to write to the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) to increase the water allocation for Maynilad and Manila Water.

"The concessionaires asked the MWSS to write to NWRB to increase the allocation of MWSS two cms (centimeter per second), so if the two cms will be granted, Maynilad will be able to refill its dams, the Ipo, La Mesa and after the refilling, the distribution will again normalize," he said.

Dorado said for March, NWRB allocated a total of 50 cms of water to the MWSS.

"It will allow Maynilad to reach the desirable level of its dams. We will then observe if the system of Maynilad improves," he noted. -- **With Danessa Rivera**





## Maynilad: Brace for longer daily water interruptions next week

**By Othel V. Campos, Rio N. Araja, Joel E. Zurbano and Willie Casas**

MAYNILAD on Wednesday said it has begun daily service interruptions to preserve the remaining supply of water in the Angat-Ipo system, as there will be less rainfall to replenish the dams because of the El Niño.

Even before the service interruptions,

Maynilad has been augmenting supplies through a "cross-portal" arrangement with Manila Water, because less water has been reaching the Novaliches Portal in Quezon City.

However, the declining water elevation at La Mesa Dam has forced Manila Water to gradually suspend the cross-portal sharing.

*Next page*

## Maynilad:...

*From A1*

This will mean less supply for Maynilad to distribute, resulting in longer daily service interruption schedules starting April 1.

"We met with the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System and Manila Water this morning, March 29, 2023, to discuss the situation. And while the cross-portal sharing will no longer be extended, the MWSS is sending a letter request to the National Water Resources Board for an increased allocation of 52 cms (cubic meters per second) from April to May 2023 so that both Ipo and La Mesa dams can fully recover and more raw water is conveyed to the Novaliches portal," Maynilad said in a statement.

With a higher raw water allocation, Manila Water would be more comfortable with sustaining the cross-portal sharing arrangement with Maynilad.

"It would also increase the volume of raw water that reaches Maynilad's treatment plants, enabling us to suspend the daily service interruptions that are currently in place," the company said.

Maynilad is also taking other measures to help mitigate the supply shortage, including "massive leak repair activities at the conveyance system — from Bigti to La Mesa Dam — to arrest losses in the aqueducts and improve raw water flow to the Novaliches portal."

Also on Wednesday, the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority on Wednesday announced it will reimpose the daily 30-minute "heat stroke break" policy beginning April 1 to protect the health of its traffic enforcers and other personnel working outdoors during the summer season.

MMDA chairman Romando Artes has signed a memorandum circular re-implementing the "heat stroke break" policy to prevent field personnel getting sick from exhaustion, stroke, and cramps due to severe heat waves.

Under the policy, on-duty traffic enforcers and street sweepers are allowed to leave their posts in shifts to seek shelter from the sun and take a 30-minute break to allow their bodies to cool down.





# MWSS wants bigger supply for water concessionaires

BY FRANCIS EARL CUETO

**T**HE Manila Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) on Wednesday said that it will ask for additional allocations from the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) for the two water concessionaires in Metro Manila.

Officials from the MWSS, along with Maynilad and Manila Water, held a meeting to discuss the water supply and projection until the onset or effects of the El Niño phenomenon.

They agreed that there is an urgent need to preserve water, especially at the Angat Dam, which supplies 90 percent of the water in Metro Manila and nearby provinces.

The MWSS said that to either avoid or lessen the hours of water interruptions, they will ask the NWRB for additional allocations.

The water concessionaires were also urged to help each other.

"We'll try to get the assistance of the two concessionaires, to help each other to lessen the impact of the water interruption of Maynilad," Jose

Dorado Jr., deputy administrator for Engineering and Technical Operations Group, MWSS, said.

"There is a possibility that Manila Water can give cross-border systems to help with the water interruption," he added.

The MWSS said it will ask for an additional 2 cubic meters of water. Presently, the allocation is 50 cubic meters per second.

"If allowed, this will address the problem of Maynilad because we will have additional allocation for our supply," Dorado said.

The NWRB has yet to issue any statement on the matter.

Meanwhile, Maynilad continues to implement the water service interruption in preparation for El Niño.

"We're worried about El Niño, that's why we are conserving water to stretch our remaining water stored in the dams," said Jennifer Rufo, head of Corporate Communications of Maynilad.

As of March 29, the water level in Angat Dam stood at 202.84 meters. This is above the 180 meters normal operating level.

Ipo Dam, meanwhile, had 98.73 meters while La Mesa had 76.48 meters.

The MWSS earlier said that there should be no water interruptions since the water level is normal.

According to Maynilad, households in major parts of Metro Manila and Cavite will have low water pressure, or at times no water at all.

Maynilad said the water interruption, affects portions of Manila, Quezon City, Valenzuela, Malabon, Caloocan, Navotas, Las Piñas, Parañaque, Makati and Pasay.

It will also affect residents in Bacoor City; Cavite City; Imus City; Kawit, Cavite; and Rosario, Cavite.

The water interruptions will last for 14 hours each day until April 7.





TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

## Higher water allocation sought

THE Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) is set to ask the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) for an increased allocation from the Angat Dam to limit water supply disruptions in Metro Manila, according to west zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc.

The increased allocation will allow Manila Water to continue its cross-portal sharing arrangement with Maynilad that has been augmenting its supply.

Maynilad, MWSS and Manila Water on Wednesday met where they discussed the need to increase the allocation to 52 cubic meters per second (CMS) from the current 50 CMS from April to May 2023 so that both Ipo and La Mesa dams can fully recover and more raw water can be conveyed to the Novaliches Portal.

Maynilad started implementing daily service interruptions in its franchise area starting last Tuesday "to preserve the remaining supply in the Angat-Ipo system given the impending El Niño when less rainfall will arrive to replenish the dams."

Prior to the implementation of the service interruptions, Maynilad

See HIGHER ► Page A2

• FROM PAGE A1 •

## HIGHER

augmenting supplies through cross-portal arrangement with Manila Water because less supply has been available at the Novaliches portal. However, Maynilad said since the allocation at La Mesa Dam has gone down in recent weeks,

Manila Water has been forced to gradually suspend the cross-portal supply sharing. This is expected to lead to longer daily service interruptions for Manila beginning April 1.

"With a higher raw water allocation, Manila Water would be

more comfortable with sustaining the cross-portal sharing arrangement with Maynilad. It will also increase the volume of raw water that reaches Maynilad's treatment plants, enabling us to suspend the daily service interruptions that is

currently in place," Maynilad said.

Apart from the increased water allocation, Maynilad said it continues to facilitate supply augmentation measures including sustained reduction of non-revenue water which involves the repair of pipe leaks and

replacement of old pipes to recover more supply.

Leak repair activities at the conveyance system from Bigti to La Mesa Dam are also being done to arrest losses in aqueducts and improve raw water flow to the Novaliches Portal.

MWSS said on Tuesday water supply in Metro Manila is still "comfortable" based on simulations of water level trajectory of the Angat Dam which supplies 97 percent of Metro Manila's water requirements.

- Jed Macapagal





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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS  
SINCE 1900  
**MANILA BULLETIN**  
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



PAGE



UPPER  
LOWER



PAGE 1  
STORY



BANNER  
STORY



EDITORIAL



CARTOON

03-30-23

TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

## Summer months but wintry news

**C**limatelinks, a global knowledge portal on climate change and international development, could not have put it more precisely, that the Philippines is highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change, including sea level rise, increased frequency of extreme weather events like rising temperatures and extreme rainfall. We have long coastlines which host key cities and majority of the population, we depend on climate-sensitive natural resources which are increasingly running out like agriculture and forestry. Our major problem is managing climate change, its adverse consequences on our economic activities being existential.

As a people, we seem to have failed our environment.

In our youth, we recall watching movies and paying at least 25 centavos in flood tax that never succeeded in arresting floods that gets high and more destructive with the years. We have retained the distinction of paving roads before doing the drainage, dredging rivers with equipment that seldom worked. We could not enforce our forest laws, so we opted for total ban on logging activities which nonetheless continue to this day. As the Philippine Institute for Development Studies reported two years ago, "forest loss persists in the Philippines even with a log ban and protection laws in place." Land use conversion, exclusion of reforestation activities as part of climate change mitigation measures and legal gaps in protecting our forests are among the culprits.

Our very own Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) admits that climate change is happening now. But it is evident that such a change is beyond what lawyers and insurers refer to as acts of God. "The most recent scientific assessments have confirmed that this warming of the climate system is most likely to be due to human activities..." Public policy and enforcement should be driven by climate concern, or else, our economic prospects could be very dim.

We expect more than a public policy that calls for mere water conservation to keep water in power dams from dropping to alarming levels. We need to root out the fundamental problem of environmental degradation, instead of insisting on the old solutions like deep wells. We don't even have a semblance of water impounding facilities. Additional water treatment facilities like those in Cardona and Putatan would

certainly help augment our water supply as long as alternative sources are also found. Senator Nancy Binay, commenting on the Rainwater Collector and Springs Development Act, was spot on: "We have been beset with the effects of El Niño for decades and every time the dry season comes, we are often caught by surprise by a water shortage."

Needless to say, this year's growth target of 6-7 percent and 6.5-8 percent in 2024 as well as the latest inflation forecasts of the BSP of 6 percent and 2.9 percent for the next two years must also hinge on the expected turnout of the weather this year and the next. Admitting that "the balance of risks to the inflation outlook for 2023 and 2024 also continue to tilt heavily towards the upside," the Board in its press statement last Thursday highlighted the impact of food supply shortages,

*This early, PAGASA has warned the public to take all precautions as temperatures continue to climb. Temperatures in Celsius are expected to rise to as much as 45 degrees in Metro Manila, 32 degrees in Iloilo, and 35 degrees in Zamboanga.*

higher transport fares, rising power rates and wage adjustments in 2023. A more explicit recognition of bad weather conditions could help prepare the public's inflation expectations.

In fact, most recent weather bulletins from PAGASA show that La Niña or wet conditions have come to an end, shifting to more ENSO (El Niño and the Southern Oscillation)-neutral conditions — those periods when neither El Niño or La Niña is happening. If the weather monitoring indicates that this neutral condition is expected to occur until around the middle of the year, we don't know what to expect between now and then, and for the rest of the year when El Niño actually sets in.

This early, PAGASA has warned the public to take all precautions as temperatures continue to climb. Temperatures in Celsius are expected to rise to as much as 45 degrees in Metro Ma-

nila, 32 degrees in Iloilo, and 35 degrees in Zamboanga. During the weekend, the mercury exceeded 30 degrees, a temperature level considered by PAGASA as "dangerous." It could cause heat cramps and exhaustion, and in some cases, even death.

Yes, the Department of Agriculture (DA) has announced its preparation for El Niño and its potential impact on agriculture especially rice. With a required 52-day rice inventory, DA announced it might have to resort to importation should domestic output falls short of requirement for food security. Recurring almost every two years to 10 years, this year's El Niño could cause the importation of at least 3.8 million metric tons, the level in 2022. This is bad news for rice supply, this is bad news for inflation.

The other wild card against growth and inflation is the risk of power interruption. With the summer months fast approaching, energy demand is expected to rise. With this unusually torrid summer, we could only expect ever receding water levels in many dams and waterways, knocking off some megawatts from the power grid. Ironically, demand for water in the coming summer months is expected to bloat by 15 percent. How does one sustain real GDP growth of over 7 percent when power is deficient?

The National Grid Corporation of the Philippines (NGCP) had already sounded the alarm because of another reason. The Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) rejected its request to extend its monthly ancillary services agreements. Without these agreements, NGCP cannot nominate power plants to provide such services that are crucial in managing power fluctuations. Unless the ERC reconsiders its decision, or the Department of Energy authorizes month-to-month extension of existing agreements, the general public should prepare for periodic power interruptions due to what NGCP calls "automatic load dropping." Rotational blackouts could make a big dent in domestic production and inflation.

We are plodding into the summer months but the news we gather every day is wintry. Suppose for once we buckle down to real work and fight those battles that really matter, and get those existential threats out of the way?



**OF SUBSTANCE  
AND SPIRIT**

DIWA C. GUINIGUNDO





TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

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# Water needed

**“Decisions about how we obtain and dispose of water have important implications for our health, the environment, and the long-term viability of society.”**

Water as a major city issue suffers from one core problem: most of us don't worry about water.

Until, of course, when the faucet runs dry and there's no water to wash off the day's grime or cool off the summer heat, to wash and cook rice with, and, more importantly, there is no clean refreshing water to drink.

Then all hell breaks loose. Catastrophic enough that if left unaddressed can go as far as toppling a government.

With the water gone, we'll realize our seemingly secure day-to-day world is nothing but an illusion.

Even more significant, we'll realize that the story of water is not technological but political.

Our relationship with water and the lack of it has always captured a deep sense of our vulnerability to the environment, which in turn had built our political structures.

Realization, of course, often comes too late.

But then most of the time we can go about our daily lives without knowing anything about the hidden world of water.

As water expert David Sedlak says: "Modern urban water systems are unobtrusive by design. The pipes that bring water to our homes, drain our streets, and transport our wastes are hidden underground."

So, since our daily encounters with water are limited to the turning of a faucet and the flushing of a toilet, we've handed any concerns over water to the professionals.



**OUT AND ABOUT**  
NICK V. QUIJANO JR.

We assume that the people who provide the service and the government officials responsible for overseeing their activities will make sure we are safe.

But that's a mistake. We have to be personally involved.

There is, in fact, no lack of alarms for getting involved. Just last week the United Nations did precisely that and held a conference on the water crisis, the first in 50 years.

Similarly, the Marcos government last week also pretty much acknowledged the same water crisis when it formed the Office of Water Management, a new office.

Unfortunately, most of us aren't swayed by the urgency of the water crisis.

Yet, decisions about the future of urban water systems are best made by an informed public.

Decisions about how we

obtain and dispose of water have important implications for our health, the environment, and the long-term viability of society.

Putting a little effort into becoming better informed about how water goes in and out of our cities is a necessary first step in navigating the water challenges our society will face in the coming decades.

As a start, it'd be best to inform ourselves of some of the general strategies for the better handling of water.

Some claim that water shortages can be solved by investing in the next generation of treatment plants capable of purifying sewage to a point where it can be piped back as drinking water.

An example of this is Maynilad's P220-billion Parañaque New Water plant, which is a treatment plant taking treated effluent from the Parañaque Water Reclamation Facility and converts it to drinking water. It's the first implementation of potable water reuse in the country.

**“Even more significant, we'll realize that the story of water is not technological but political.”**

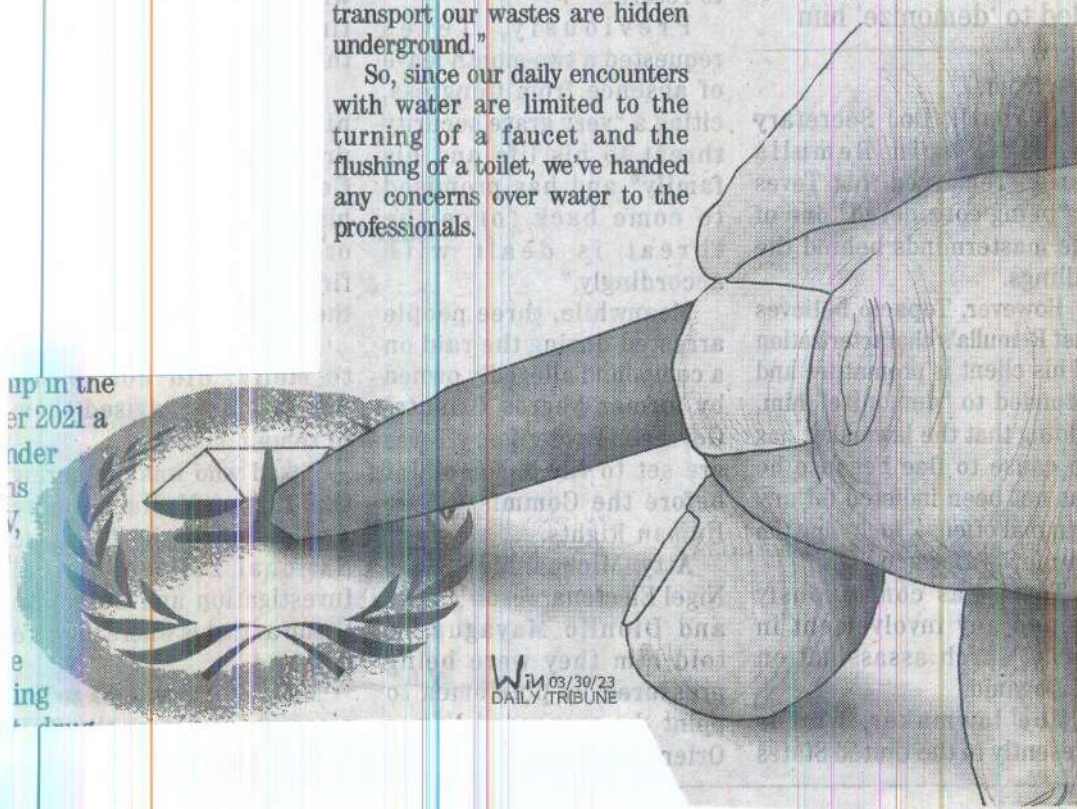
There are those inclined toward minimizing our impact on the environment by advocating for water conservation, expanded use of local water sources, and integration of natural processes like rainfall into systems designed to collect and treat water.

And still, others tell us the crisis is one of our own makings and that the answers to all of our water problems can be found in common sense reform of the inefficient institutions that are responsible for allocating and regulating urban water.

All these disparate solutions signal but one important point — our present urban water systems have had their day.

We need to start building the next generation of water systems, which will cost money, before climate change (which evaporates water has a lot to do with), population growth, and pollution engulf us to points of no return.

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DAILY TRIBUNE





## Oil spill: 5,185 hectares of marine habitat affected

The oil spill from the sunken *MT Princess Empress* has affected up to 5,185 hectares of corals, seagrass and mangroves in Oriental Mindoro and Western Visayas.

In a situational report released yesterday, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said among those affected were 2,252 hectares of corals in Oriental Mindoro.

The DENR said the waters off Bansud, Bongabong, Bulalacao, Gloria, Magsaysay, Mansalay, Naujan, Pinamalayan, Pola, Puerto Galera, Roxas, San Jose and Calapan in Oriental Mindoro; Taytay and Agutaya in Palawan; Caluya in Antique, and Batangas City and Tingloy in Batangas province were affected by the oil slick.

The DENR's Environmental Management Bureau office in Mimaropa said 76 percent of water samples in 89 stations exceeded quality guidelines.

In Western Visayas, 68 percent of water samples in 16 stations did not pass safety tests.

Joery Geroleo of the Naujan Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office said 35 kilometers of spill booms were installed in 11 coastal barangays.

On Tuesday, the Philippine Coast Guard said the sunken vessel was still leaking around 400,000 liters of industrial fuel.

Meanwhile, Occidental Mindoro Rep. Leody Tarriela urged residents and local officials in areas affected by the oil spill to file a class suit against the owner of *Princess Empress*.

Tarriela said concerned government agencies found remiss in their duties should also be held accountable. — **Bella Carias, Sheila Crisostomo**





TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

PAGE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

EXPERT ASSISTANCE

# US NAVY EQUIPMENT SEEN TO BOOST OIL SPILL RESPONSE

By Frances Mangosing  
@FMangosingINQ

The US Navy will deploy its remotely operated vehicle (ROV), Hydros, starting April 3 to help in operations to contain the oil spill from a fuel tanker that sank off Oriental Mindoro a month ago, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said on Wednesday.

The Hydros is "a working-class ROV with full manipulator arms," that would augment oil containment and recovery solutions.

To support the ROV operations, the US Navy will also bring "a container of support equipment, including a crane and launching system to be able to deploy the ROV from the vessel," the PCG said.

Slick and sludge from the MT Princess Empress that capsized and later sank off Naujan town on Feb. 28 had reached coastal areas in several towns in Oriental Mindoro, Antique and Palawan and the Verde Island Passage, a strait known for its rich marine biodiversity.

The tanker was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil and was on its way to Iloilo when it encountered engine trouble and sank off Mindoro.



**SITUATIONER** Philippine Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Artemio Abu (second from right) on Tuesday briefs members of the Korean Coast Guard Emergency Response Team on the oil spill situation off Oriental Mindoro. —NIÑO JESUS ORBETA

The Pacific Valkyrie, an anchor handling vessel carrying the ROV, arrived in Subic, Zambales, on Tuesday, the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) said in a separate statement.

"Once all mandatory checks and preparations are completed, the Pacific Valkyrie... will head to Oriental Mindoro to check the current situation of the shipwreck and its fuel cargo. We will then use data gathered to determine the next appropriate course of action to control the oil leakage coming from its source," the OCD quot-

ed acting Defense Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr. as saying.

Experts from the US Coast Guard, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and US Navy are also expected to arrive in the country for assistance.

### Focus on VIP

On Tuesday, Adm. Artemio Abu, PCG commandant, met with the technical experts from the Korean Coast Guard (KCG) and Singapore-based Oil Spill Response Limited (OSRL), the largest international oil spill response cooperative.

"I told them to focus on the Verde Island Passage because of the recent projections that the spill will reach the area," he told the Inquirer.

The experts brought in by the KCG and OSRL are expected to lend their expertise on oil spill response and give their assessments, just like those provided by US Coast Guard and Japan Disaster Relief expert team, he said.

Meanwhile, water samples taken from three areas in the tourist town of Puerto Galera in Oriental Mindoro all tested negative for industrial oil. The samples were taken on March 17 from Varadero Bay, Palangan and Escarceo Point, and were tested and analyzed until March 24, a local government statement said.

Noe Lineses, president of the Puerto Galera Tourism Council, said most resorts and hotels in the town were booked for the Holy Week.

"There is not a drop of oil in Puerto Galera waters. Our beaches, coves and bays remain clean, pristine and rich in marine life. Now is the best time to come to Puerto Galera," Lineses said in an interview on Wednesday. —WITH A REPORT

FROM MADONNA T. VIROLA INQ





03-30-23

TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

## Coalition presses govt action, accountability as Oriental Mindoro oil slick spreads further

**A** MONTH after the sinking of the ill-fated MT Princess Empress off the coast of Oriental Mindoro, cause-oriented groups have bonded together and launched the "SOS: Stop the Oil Spill, Save Our Seas!" (SOS) to pool efforts in calling for immediate accountability and action on the oil spill.

The members of the coalition raised concern over the level of responses so far being led by the government.

"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. 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," the group said in a statement.

The coalition lambasted the govern-

ment's lack of transparency and urgency in oil spill containment efforts and investigations, increasing scope of affected seas and communities, insufficient action to ensure accountability and lingering silence on decisive and punitive actions to be taken against liable actors, lack of opportunities for the meaningful participation of stakeholders, and absence of any meaningful discourse on policy reforms needed to protect coastal and marine communities and biodiversity and to prevent future spills.

"The big problem now is the day-to-day food requirements [of the affected communities] and the lingering question of where can they get the money to buy food. Even the tourism industry is affected and it happened at a time when tourists are supposed to start coming. This will no longer happen. What we want is concrete and quick action from the government, the owner of the vessel, and the charterer. There should be accountability for government officials who have been remiss of their duties," Dindo Melaya, convenor of *Koalisyon ng mga Mangingisdang Apektadong Oil Spill* said in a statement. *Jonathan L. Mayuga*





# Fishermen struggle as oil spill grows

**P**OLA: A crab covered in oil creeps across the sand as Philippine fishermen wearing white protective suits, rubber gloves, and respirator masks scrape toxic sludge from the rocks along the shore.

Four weeks after a Philippine tanker loaded with 800,000 liters (210,000 gallons) of thick oil sank off the central island of Mindoro, the vessel is still leaking.

More than half the oil has been discharged and dispersed over hundreds of kilometers of waters famed for having some of the most diverse marine life in the world.

Experts estimate the two main slicks northwest and southeast of the tanker could span 162 square kilometers (62 square miles).

It took two days for the spill to reach Buhay na Tubig, a remote village in Pola, one of the island's worst-affected municipalities.

Some villagers got sick after oil smeared the shoreline, turning rocks black and leaving dark globs on the beach.

Authorities have banned fishing and swimming indefinitely, leaving thousands of fishermen wondering how long they can survive.

"They say this might take six months, but what if we are unable to fish for an entire year?" asked Arvie Anonuevo, 32, who has three children.

For more than two weeks, Anonuevo and other fishermen have spent four hours a day cleaning up oil in exchange for a daily wage of P355 from the government — a little over half of what they used to make from fishing.

The fishermen use trowels and sheets of thin, absorbent material to clean the rocks.

By the following day, more oil has washed up on the shore.

"It's annoying that the oil keeps coming back the next day no mat-

ter how much you clean them (rocks)," Anonuevo said.

The government estimates at least 5,000 hectares (12,400 acres) of coral reefs, seaweed and mangroves have been affected.

Mangroves can suffocate if oil covers their roots, while corals — breeding grounds for many fish species — can die or struggle to grow and reproduce if exposed.

It will take at least six months to clean up the spill, but the recovery could be years long, said Irene Rodriguez, an associate professor at the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute.

One of the worst spills in the Philippines was in 2006, when a tanker carrying two million liters of oil sank off the central island of Guimaras.

Rodriguez said 500,000 liters of oil leaked into the sea in that incident.

This time, she hoped "it can be contained as soon as possible." "If [the oil] is not removed properly and not treated properly ... this will have a significant impact," Rodriguez told AFP.

## Living 'hand-to-mouth'

The Princess Empress was found last week by a Japanese remotely operated underwater vehicle, at a depth of nearly 400 meters (1,300 feet).

It had suffered "extensive structural damage" after sinking on February 28, the Philippine Coast Guard said.

Seven out of eight cargo tanks have leaked. Of those, four are already empty.





STRATEGIC  
COMMUNICATION  
AND  
INITIATIVES  
SERVICE

INDEPENDENT

# The Manila Times

PAGE

UPPER  
LOWER

PAGE 1  
STORY

BANNER  
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

03-30-23

DATE

fishermen

PAGE

2/2

About 60 percent of the oil has spilled into the sea, Philippine Coast Guard spokesman Armando Balilo told AFP.

Rough seas initially delayed the deployment of floating barriers to contain the spill.

Oil has been found as far away as the western island of Palawan, more than 350 kilometers (220 miles) from where the tanker went down.

Some oil has also drifted north to the Verde Island Passage, between Mindoro and the Philippines' main island of Luzon.

The passage is near the top of the Coral Triangle, an area of water spanning down to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and East Timor that is called the "Amazon of the Seas" because of its rich marine life.

The Philippine Coast Guard said the vessel's insurers were looking for experts to patch the leaks and remove the oil.

Several countries, including the United States, Japan and South Korea, are helping the Philippines respond to the disaster.

The owner of the tanker said

anyone affected by the spill could seek compensation.

Financial help can't come fast enough for many of the fishermen, who would normally turn their hands to picking bananas or coconuts to supplement their incomes.

But banana trees were damaged by a strong storm last year and the next coconut harvest is months away.

Pola Mayor Jennifer Cruz is worried about how families will make ends meet once government assistance dries up.

"These are people who live

hand-to-mouth," Cruz said, warning it could be a year before fishing is allowed to resume.

Anonuevo is already struggling, having used half the money earned from the first week of cleaning rocks to pay off debts from buying food for his family and petrol for his motorbike.

Fellow fisherman Marlon Fabrero, 46, said he was considering pulling one of his four children out of school to cut expenses.

"Where would I get the P50 daily allowance for each of them?" he asked.

AFP



■ Fishermen, community leaders and members of climate justice groups urge the government to enforce the 2017 Verde Island Passage agreement to strengthen the protection and management of the passage that is rich in marine life on Wednesday, March 29, 2023. The groups also sought compensation for the damage wrought by the sinking MT Princess Empress. PHOTO BY BENEDICT ABAYGAR, JR.





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AND  
INITIATIVES  
SERVICE

# THE PHILIPPINE STAR



PAGE

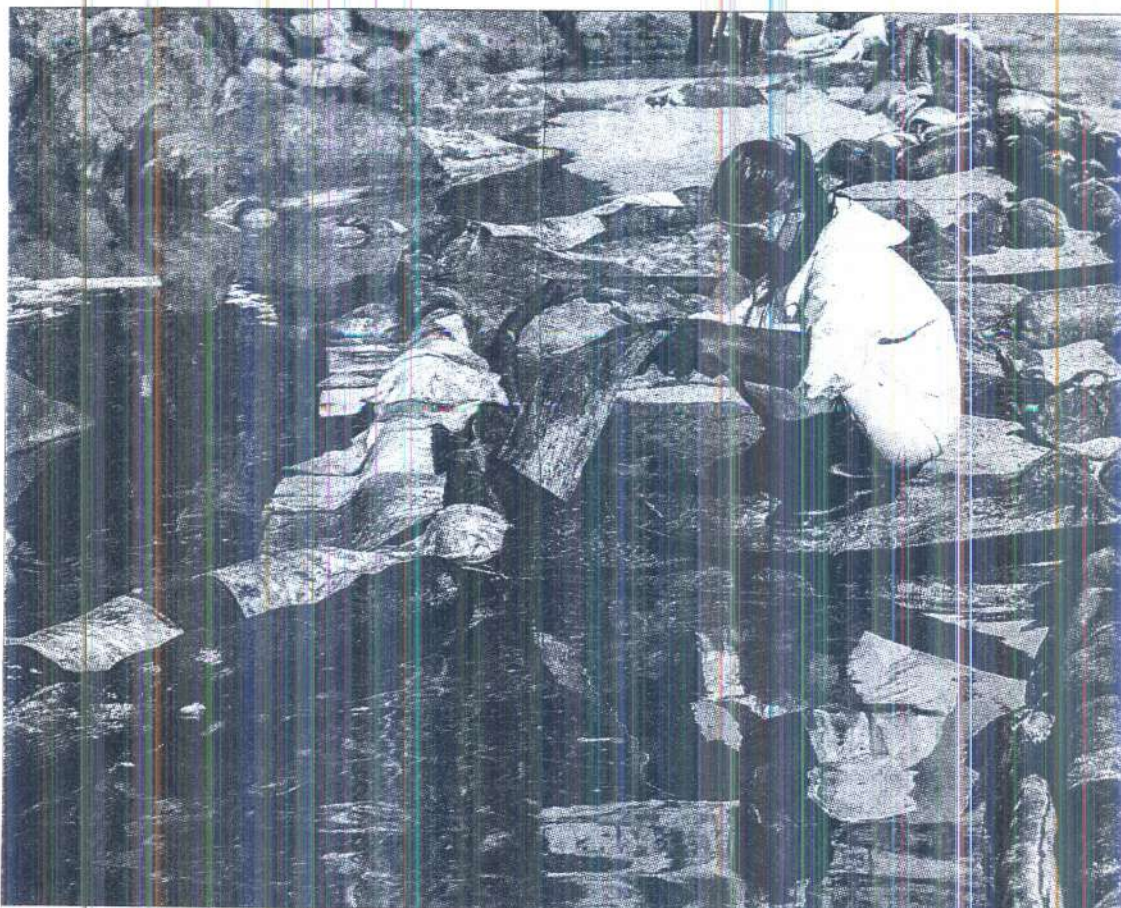


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A volunteer checks the water filter placed in the coastal community of Pola, Oriental Mindoro to help remove oil slick from the sunken tanker *Princess Empress* yesterday. The Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. distributed food and relief packs to families affected by the oil spill.





## MPIC, DENR, QC LGU break ground on model park Gabay Kalikasan Park



OFFICIALS present during the Gabay Kalikasan Park Groundbreaking Ceremony are, from left, QC LGU's Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Department 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 Mariana Chairperson Regina Celeste San Miguel; Barangay Mariana Councilor Ma. Conception Amorillo; DENR-NCR Regional Executive Director Jacqueline Caancan; MPIC Vice President for Investor Relations Maricris Aldover-Ysmael; and QC LGU Parks Development and Administration Department OIC Ar. Baltazar Avelino

**M**ETRO Pacific Investments Corporation (MPIC), the country's leading infrastructure investment company, broke ground on the Gabay Kalikasan Park, in partnership with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources - Biodiversity Management Bureau (DENR-BMB), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources - National Capital Region (DENR-NCR), and the local government unit of Quezon City.

In a groundbreaking event held on March 9, 2023, representatives from MPIC, DENR-BMB, DENR-NCR, and the QC LGU, officially ushered the development of Gabay Kalikasan Park into an urban green park model as part of the landmark three-year public-private partnership for urban biodiversity in the Philippines.

"MPIC sees itself as the public sector's partner in nation building, and advocating for environmental sustainability is part of that," said MPIC Chairman, President, and CEO Manuel V. Pangilinan. "Expanding our biodiversity-friendly footprint is crucial to our mission

of uplifting the lives of Filipinos."

The primary goal of the project is to contribute to the development of a biodiversity-friendly city to increase access of urban dwellers to green spaces and maintain functional urban green spaces to regain ecosystem services, develop resiliency, increase aesthetics and quality of urban environment, and bring people close to nature to improve human well-being.

"Given the circumstances, I think this is the perfect site for this project," said Quezon City LGU Parks Development and Administration Department OIC Ar. Baltazar Avelino. "On behalf of our Mayor, I would like to thank the DENR for initiating the project and MPIC for funding the project. I hope we do more projects with you and would like to thank all of you for your initiatives."

The project aims to pilot the Adopt-a-City approach in the implementation of the Urban Biodiversity program, encouraging business sector support in creating green urban communities at the city and barangay/village level.

"Gabay Kalikasan Park, aptly named after our advocacy on environment stewardship, is a testament to our group's commitment to become a catalyst for inclusive, safer, resilient, livable, and sustainable cities and communities," said MPIC Chief Finance, Risk, and Sustainability Officer Chaye A. Cabal-Revilla. "We gladly take on the responsibility with the government and communities to create greater environmental responsibility in our country, for the good of our people and our planet."

Aside from the establishment of the green linear park, the parties will also jointly implement important project activities such as development of Communication, Education, and Public Awareness (CEPA) plans and capacity-building trainings and workshops for the partner communities, among others.

DENR-NCR Regional Executive Director Jacqueline Caancan emphasized the goal of this program and the impact it will have. "Gabay Kalikasan Park is an important undertaking as it helps address the lack of urban green spaces in Metro Manila and provides a model for the private sector on green investments. As the pandemic has taught us, urban green spaces play an important role in keeping us physically and mentally healthy and in improving the environment. Hence, the initiative of the MPIC to build a public park in partnership with the DENR and the Quezon City government is truly commendable."

"This partnership with MPIC also highlights the role of the business sector in building green and resilient cities," says DENR-BMB Director and Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning and Foreign-Assisted and Special Projects Marcial C. Amaro, Jr. "Let us continue our collaborative work towards the goal of developing biodiversity-friendly cities in the country and in strengthening biodiversity conservation in the metropolises."

This partnership for Gabay Kalikasan Park bolsters MPIC's resolve to be the largest catalyst for a Sustainable Philippines. It is also aligned with the efforts of the conglomerate to contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), primarily SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities.





TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

PAGE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## Tampakan project contractor welcomes CA decision

BY GILBERT GORGONIO JR.

**GENERAL SANTOS CITY** – The contractor of the Tampakan Copper-Gold Project in the province of South Cotabato welcomed the recent decision of the Court of Appeals pertaining to the local open pit ban through the Provincial Environment Code.

Roy Antonio, External Affairs and Communications Manager of Sagittarius Mines Inc. – the main government contractor of the Tampakan Project – stressed that they

support the decision of the CA as it reinforces their position that it is a national government project and priority.

“It also gives flesh to the consent of the Blaan Indigenous cultural communities for the Tampakan Project to operate within their ancestral domains as an exercise of their rights to self-governance and self-determination,” Antonio said.

However, the SMI clearly distanced itself and said that they are not a party to the case.





TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

PAGE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

## NAC sets higher capex for mining

NICKEL Asia Corp. (NAC) said that its allotted capital expenditure for its mining business this year is up by 80 percent to P4.5 billion from last year's P2.5 billion.

The figure was bared by the company during its earnings call on Tuesday.

NAC has five operating mines which sold a combined 15.94 million wet metric tons (WMT) of nickel ore in 2022, an 11 percent decline from 2021's 17.94 million WMT.

Last February, the company said it will conduct due diligence and exploration activities as well as execute definitive agreements with Hallmark Mining Corp. and Austral-Asia Link Mining Corp. through a letter of intent (LOI)

to become the sole and exclusive contractor for two mine properties located in Davao Oriental.

Under the LOI, NAC or its wholly owned subsidiary will be the contractor for Hallmark's mineral production sharing agreement (MPSA) that covers 4,999.71 hectares (ha) in Mati and San Isidro, Davao Oriental and Austral-Asia's MPSA covering another 5,000 ha in Mati and Gov. Generoso, Davao Oriental.

It also allows the conduct of a feasibility study to determine the economic and technical viability for the establishment of a high-pressure acid leach plant or an equivalent mineral processing plant within the MPSA areas. **-Jed Macapagal**





STRATEGIC  
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PAGE



UPPER  
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PAGE 1  
STORY



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EDITORIAL



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03-30-23

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PAGE

DATE

# Pagasa issues extreme heat danger alert

By ROMINA CABRERA

The heat index in Laoag City in Ilocos Sur may reach 48 degrees Celsius on the first day of April, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration.

PAGASA said this corresponds to an "extreme danger level" on its heat index chart.

It said the heat index may reach up to 44 degrees Celsius tomorrow.

The highest heat index recorded so far was

47 degrees Celsius in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro on March 25 and in Butuan City in Agusan del Norte on March 24.

PAGASA said extreme caution should be taken during these temperature surges.

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

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

PAGASA had raised the alert level

to El Niño watch as the probability of its occurrence had reached 55 percent or higher.

It said the El Niño phenomenon would likely develop from July to September following a transition from the current neutral conditions in the El Niño southern oscillation.

The phenomenon, which increases the likelihood of below normal rainfall conditions, may last until the first quarter of 2024.

It may result in dry spells and droughts in some areas of the country, with forecasters expecting early impact on the Visayas and Mindanao.