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Oil spill reaches Calapan

By BELLA CARIASO

The oil spill from the sunken *MT Princess Empress* has reached the shoreline of Calapan in Oriental Mindoro, according to Gov. Humerlito Dolor.

"I confirm that at 9:58 p.m. last night, officially the oil slick reached Calapan. At least 500 meters long of a thin line of oil reached the shoreline," Dolor told a radio interview yesterday.

He cited the projection of the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) that the direction of the oil spill would be north of the province if the northeast monsoon or *amihan* continues to weaken.

Dolor said the incident could have been prevented if concerned government agencies had done their job.

"It is saddening as we are currently harvesting palay. The weather is also ideal for harvesting fish, which we supply locally and outside, but because of the tragedy, people don't have livelihood," Dolor said.

"We built improvised spill booms but the oil slick still reached the shoreline," he said.

Dolor said the owner of *Princess* had offered to send relief packs for residents.

UP-MSI associate professor Irene Rodriguez had earlier warned local officials in Batangas, Puerto Galera and Calapan to prepare amid the

threat of oil spill.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) is coordinating with other government agencies to facilitate the arrival of a Japanese vessel to help in oil spill response operations.

In a Viber message, the PCG said its crisis management committee met to strategize and fast-track Customs, immigration, quarantine and security procedures of the *DPV Shin Nichi Maru*, which carries a remotely operated vehicle to be used to search for *Princess*.

The PCG said it has so far collected 1,313 sacks and 22 drums of oil-contaminated materials along the shore in 13 barangays in Naujan, Bulalacao and Pola.

As this developed, the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) said it is considering grounding the fleet of RDC Reield Marine Services, the owner of *Princess Empress*.

Sen. Francis Escudero said authorities should investigate possible corruption involving the PCG and MARINA, noting that *Princess Empress* sailed without the needed permits. — With Robertzon Ramirez, Paolo Romero, Emmanuel Tupas



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Oil slick spreads to 2 more Calapan villages

Swimming in areas hit by spill banned but fishers allowed to go out to sea; BFAR sending teams to inspect seafood in local markets

By **Madonna T. Virola**
@mvirolaINQ

CITY OF CALAPAN—The oil slick from the sunken MT Princess Empress that reached the shores of this capital city of Oriental Mindoro province has spread to two more villages, authorities said on Friday.

In an advisory, the city government said patches of oil clumps were also found along the coastline of the villages of Maidlang and Silonay.

Calapan is located some 23 kilometers from the waters off the province's Naujan town, where the tanker, which carried 800,000 liters of industrial oil, sank on Feb. 28.

The oil slick was first reported in the city's Barangay Navotas on Thursday, particularly in Sitio Villa San Antonio and Sitio Proper after residents found traces of industrial oil stuck on the sand.

Members of local disaster response units and volunteers have started placing a 500-meter long improvised spill boom, made out of empty bottles, red plastic bags and rice straws, near the shores of affected areas to cushion the impact of the spill.

Booms were installed at the estuary of Wawa River and at the mouth of Calapan River in Barangay Ibaba West, said Marius Panahon, aquaculturist at Calapan fisheries management office.

The city government initially prohibited fishing in the affected areas but lifted the ban late Friday, telling residents that they were still allowed to catch fish.

Instead, it asked villagers to closely inspect seafood they buy in local markets for possible contamination.

The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources said it would send "sensory inspection" teams to local markets to check the appearance, flavor, odor and texture of fish and other seafood.

Only swimming in the waters of the three affected villag-



BRACING FOR DISASTER Volunteers, aided by members of disaster response units, on Friday secure a section of the coastline of Barangay Navotas in Calapan City from an oil slick from a sunken fuel tanker by using a spill boom that residents made. —**MADONNA T. VIROLA**

es has been banned by the local government.

People living near coastal areas were asked to avoid taking and using water from sources within 100 meters of the shoreline where traces of oil were found.

In an interview on Friday, Dennis Escosora, head of the Calapan disaster risk reduction and management office, said their priority was to install floating barriers along the shoreline of Sitio Proper since it would be one of the main gateways to the town's other coastal areas.

"But we are also targeting to install oil spill booms in all areas that are projected to be affected," Escosora said.

Appeal to Marcos

The environmental group Protect Verde Island Passage (VIP) called on President Marcos on Friday to intervene and order concerned government agencies to help contain the oil spill.

Located north of Calapan, VIP is a thriving marine corridor that traverses the provinces of Batangas, Marinduque, Romblon, Occidental Mindoro and Oriental Mindoro.

"The only way to achieve the President's hope of cleaning up the oil spill in four months is to compel government agencies to direct all resources toward

containment," said Fr. Edwin Gariguez in a statement sent to the Inquirer on Friday.

Gariguez, also the director of the Diocesan Social Action Center in Calapan, said they wanted more concrete plans from the national government "as worries over the sustainability of the current assistance have surfaced."

In Oriental Mindoro's Pola town, which is among those worst hit by the spill, Mayor Jennifer Cruz said the local government had already sought the help of the National Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to probe the liability of RDC Reield Marine Services Inc., the sunken vessel's owner, in the spill.

"It's up to the NBI and the DOJ to decide on this matter. We will listen to them... All we want is to get justice for what happened to us here," Cruz said in a television interview on Friday.

Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla, on Thursday, said his department had started doing a case buildup against the owners and operators of MT Princess Empress.

"We are sorting out all the evidence so that we can file the proper complaint. We are collating all the data... there are possible cases to be filed (against the owners and operators of the sunken vessel)," he said.

According to Cruz, the ship's operator has neither sent aid to the affected communities nor sent people to help in the cleanup since the slick reached the town's shoreline early this month.

Cruz said at least 191 Pola residents had fallen ill due to the fumes and foul odor from the spilled oil.

She said many of them suffered from headache, upset stomach, sore throat and fever and experienced difficulty in breathing.

"The [Department of Health] has been providing us with medicines... But we're also looking for alternative livelihoods for affected families as the effects of the oil spill are expected to be long-term," Cruz said.

Gov't efforts

The government task force managing the oil spill off Mindoro Oriental is awaiting the arrival from Japan on March 20 of a response team with Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) to help in the cleanup efforts, said Senior Undersecretary Carlito Galvez Jr., Department of National Defense officer in charge, on Thursday.

In his report to Mr. Marcos, Galvez said the task force and the Oriental Mindoro provincial government were coordinating with the customs, immigration and quarantine bureaus to hasten the entry of the team and its ROV, which was provided by Harbor Star, a private company contracted by the insurance firm of the owner of the shipping company.

The Malayan Salvage and Towing Corp., a private company also contracted by the insurance firm, is supporting offshore oil containment, he added.

Galvez said 894 sacks of oil-contaminated debris and 77.5 drums of waste for treatment were collected during the continuous shoreline cleanup activities. —**WITH REPORTS FROM TINA G. SANTOS AND JEROME ANING INQ**



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OIL SLICK THREATENS VERDE ISLAND PASSAGE, BATANGAS

By **DANNY ESTACIO**

CALAMBA CITY, Laguna - The Regional Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (RDRRMC)- Calabarzon (Region 4-A or the Cavite, Laguna, Rizal, Batangas, and Quezon area) is taking proactive measures as the oil slick from the sunken MT Princess Empress in the sea of Oriental Mindoro threatens to reach Verde Island Passage and other parts of Batangas province.

RDRRMC chairperson and Office of the Civil Defense (OCD)- Calabarzon regional director Maria Theresa R. Escolano said emergency preparedness and response efforts of the council have been activated to "Alpha."

This requires member-

agencies and Local Disaster Risk Reduction Management Councils to implement preparedness measures, undertake resource inventory, and closely monitor the situation, Escolano added.

The RDRRMC-Calabarzon's Pre-Disaster Risk Assessment report showed that the oil slick might reach Verde Island and some parts of Batangas depending on the wind direction in the coming days.

Escolano assured that they are ready to deal with the impact of the oil spill in Batangas. Residents were advised to stay calm and stay tuned for announcements by the RDRRMC and local government.

She said that the RDRRMC Emergency Operations Center is also on "blue alert" status to focus on the threat of oil slicks in the sea in the region.

The University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute had earlier warned that the oil slick could reach Verde Island Passage and other parts of Batangas due to the change in wind direction caused by the weakening of the "amihan" or northeast monsoon.

The Verde Island Passage separates the islands of Luzon and Mindoro and connects the South China Sea with the Tayabas Bay and the Sibuyan Sea beyond.

The strait has a large number of fish, corals, seagrass, and mangroves.

It is also a refuge for endangered and threatened species, including the critically endangered species hawksbill turtles, whale sharks, manta rays, sea cow or "dugongs," hump head wrasses, giant groupers, and giant clams.



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Oil spill-hit town to sue tanker owner

THE mayor of Pola, Oriental Mindoro, said the town plans to sue the owner of the tanker MT Princess Empress after it was revealed in a Senate hearing that it has no permit to operate.

In a recorded video interview with *The Manila Times*, Mayor Jennifer Cruz said she wanted to hold those

behind the spill accountable.

"We will find a way to do something that can hold them responsible for the spill," she said in Filipino.

"It's hard to rely on them because they did not have a permit," she added. "Where do we go? We cannot collect from their insurance company. Who is responsible? It's the owners. It's under investigation and we will wait for the results of this."

Cruz was referring to RDC Reield Marine Services, owner of the Princess Empress that sank on February 28, causing a massive oil spill that has damaged the coastlines of Oriental Mindoro.

At Tuesday's hearing, it emerged that the tanker, which was carrying 800,000 liters of oil, did not have an updated permit to operate. What it had was a certificate of public convenience from the Maritime Industry Authority.

The RDC Reield Marine Services has since apologized for the incident.

Cruz said human hair and coconut husks are being used to build a boom for cleaning up the leaked oil.

She admitted that using hair is not allowed by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

However, coconut husks and hay are more effective because the oil sticks to the fibers faster than it does to hair.

"The DENR said it (use of hair) is not allowed, they gave their reasons why," she said in Filipino. "We used to accept these in fishnets, because human hair could slip through if improperly wrapped in the nets."

The mayor said she does not understand why the DENR prohibits the use of hair to soak up the oil.

"Oil sticks to hair faster," Cruz said. "Even if our hair is wet, oil could still stick to it. Pretty sure that is the reason. As for coconut husks, oil sticks to the fibers very fast."

The Japanese Risk Reduction Management team has provided the town with an 8-meter oil snare, which could absorb up to 400 kilograms of oil.

"We are sampling these at the moment in one area," she said.

Cruz said about 130 people in Pola have fallen ill because of the oil spill, 80 people are under observation, while others have since recovered.

The oil from the Princess Empress has reached the shores of Calapan City, its mayor has reported.

In a post on her social media page on Thursday, Mayor Malou Morillo said that light traces of the oil spill were monitored in Barangay Navotas at around 9 p.m.

Barangay councilor Ranilo Magbanua told *The Manila Times* they smelled something pungent and when they went to the shoreline, they saw black sediment believed to be oil.

The University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UPMSI) predicted that the leaked oil from the tanker would reach Calapan.

The UPMSI had also warned that coastal areas on the northwest side of Oriental Mindoro, and Batangas province, including the Verde Island Passage, would be affected.

In an advisory posted on the Calapan City Information Office social media page, Morillo asked everyone to refrain from fishing in the city's seas, selling of products from the seas and swimming on beaches in the city.

She also advised senior citizens and people with respiratory problems not to venture within 100 meters of the affected shorelines.

On Friday, Caritas Philippines called on San Miguel Corp. (SMC) to take responsibility for its involvement in the Mindoro oil spill and its contribution to the growth of the fossil fuel industry in the country.

The humanitarian arm of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines is demanding that the SMC stop the development of fossil gas and liquefied natural gas power plants.

It said the continued use of fossil fuels not only harms the environment but also the health and well-being of people, especially those in communities that are most vulnerable to climate change.

"San Miguel Corporation should take responsibility for its involvement in the recent tragedy as charterer of the MT Princess Empress, as well as its contribution to the growth of the fossil fuel industry in the country," said Caritas in a statement.

It also called for the passage of the Rights of Nature bill, which it said, "will help ensure that the environment is protected and prioritized in all decision-making processes."

Caritas said it is in "complete solidarity" with the victims of the oil spill that has caused "havoc" in Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan) subregion and Western Visayas.

Caritas President Bishop Colin Bagaforo said authorities have yet to recover the Princess Empress and contain the oil spill that has affected 143,713 people so far.

Bagaforo said the incident had also "severely disrupted" the livelihood of over 13,000 fishers.

"Our hearts go out to the people of Mindoro and neighboring areas who are bearing the brunt of this environmental disaster," he said.

Environment groups like the Protect Verde Island Passage earlier criticized the SMC for its silence over the oil spill incident.

**ARIC JOHN SY CUA,
IRE JOE V.C. LAURENTE
AND CHRISTIAN CROW
MAGHANOY**



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Marina ipatatawag ng DOJ sa oil spill tragedy

IPATATAWAG ng Department of Justice (DOJ) ang Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) kaugnay sa patuloy na imbestigasyon sa paglubog ng MT Princess Empress na nagbunga oil spill sa karagatan ng Oriental Mindoro.

Sa panayam ng Super Radyo DZBB kay Justice Secretary Juan Crispin Remulla, hihilingin sa MARINA na dalhin sa kagawaran ang lahat ng dokumento at papeles na may kaugnayan sa lumubog na tanker at sa kompanyang may-ari ng MT Princess Empress.

Magugunita na lumabas na hindi kasama sa listahan ng Certificate of Public Convenience ng RDC Reited Marine Services ang naturang tanker.

Bubuo na rin ang DOJ ng investigating panel bilang bahagi ng "whole government approach".

Nakikipag ugnayan na rin si Remulla sa marine biology

expert na si Ed Carpenter para masuri nang maigi ang mga pinsala sa dagat dulot ng paglubog ng tanker.

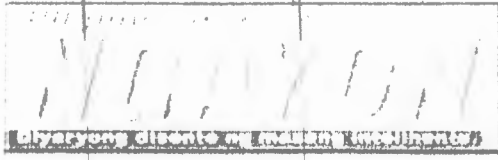
Iginiit rin ni Remulla na kapani-paniwala ang testimonya ng isang testigo na nagsabing luma na at gawa lamang sa scrap at hindi nararapat maging tanker ang MT Princess

Empress at raliwas ito sa paha-yag ng may-ari na bago ito.

Ayon kay Remulla, bine-nipika mismo ng Natuonal Bureau of Investigation ang paha-yag ng testigo.

"The declaration of the witness is consistent with reality," dagdag ni Remulla.

TERESA TAVARES



Opisyales ng MARINA, ipatatawag ng DOJ

Nakatakdang ipatawag din ng Department of Justice (DOJ) ang mga opisyales ng Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) sa isasagawang sariling imbestigasyon sa naganap na paglubog ng MT Princess Empress na nagdulot ng oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro.

Sinabi ni Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla na bahagi rin ito ng paghahanda sa ikakasang 'exploratory talks' sa pagitan ng Philippine Coast Guard; Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources; Department of Trade and Industry at iba pang ahensiya ng gobyerno na may taya sa insidente.

Kapag natapos na ang imbestigasyon ay posibleng maghain sila ng administrative case sa Office of the Ombudsman at criminal charge naman sa korte sakaling makitaan ng pagkakasala ang mga opisyal ng mga nasabing ahensiya.

Sa panig naman ng may-ari ng barko ay posibleng masampahan ito ng mga kasong sipil at kriminal at environmental damages, criminal negligence, falsification of documents at iba pa.

Isa rin sa sisilipin ay ang usapin sa insurance ng barko at ng laman nito na sinasabing nagkakahalaga ng US\$ 1 bilyon.

Ngayong Martes, magtutungo ng personal si Remulla at iba pang opisyal ng DOJ sa Oriental Mindoro para sa balidasyon ng mga inisyal na mga impormasyon na nakarating sa kaniya. Nangako ang kalihim na bibigyan nila ng hustisya ang mga residente ng mga bayan na naapektuhan ng oil spill. (Danilo Garcia)



Overloading ng MT Princess Empress, posibleng dahilan ng paglubog

Tinitingnan ngayon ng mga awtoridad ang posibilidad na lumubog ang MT Princess Empress dahil sa overloading dahil sa karga nitong halos 100,000 litro ng industrial fuel na lagpas sa unang deklarasyon na 800,000 litro lamang.

Ayon kay Batangas Port Manager Joselito Sinocruz, sa kanilang radar monitoring bago ang paglubog ng barko, nadiskubre nila na tumatakbo lamang ng 3.6 knots ang MT Princess Empress, mas mabagal pa sa pinakalumang barko sa port na tumatakbo ng 6 knots.

Nagkaroon din ng obserbasyon na sadyang mabagal ang takbo ng barko bago pa ito lumubog na indikasyon na sadyang mabigat ang dala nito.

Makaraang na lumubog ang MT Princess Empress ay tumawag sa kanila ang kapitan nito na si Lawrence Bongalos at iniulat na tuluyang lumubog na ang kanilang barko na taliwas sa naglabasang ulat na 'half-submerged' lamang ito.

Naibigay ng kapitan ang coordinates ng pinaglubugan ng barko na ipinasa agad nila sa Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) ngunit sa ibang

lugar umano nagtungo ang PCG. Dahil dito, umabot pa ng ilang araw bago natukoy ang tunay na lokasyon ng barko at nagsimula nang tumagas ang langis.

Sinabi ni Sinocruz na ipinadala nila sa Coast Guard ang recording ng interview sa kapitan ng barko kung saan idine-talye ang coordinates ng pinaglubugan ng barko.

Samantala, sa isang dokumento naman ay natuklasan na may hawak na Coastwise License ang MT Princess Empress na siyang permiso para payagan na magkaroon ng 'coastwise trading' ang barko. Nilagdaan ang dokumento ni Engr. Jaime Bea, direktor ng Maritime Industry Authority Region 5. (Danilo Garcia)



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Solons call for collective action for Mindoro oil spill

By CAMILLE
BALAGTAS

SENATOR Nancy Binay urged the need for collective action from both government and non-government to resolve the negative effect of the recent massive oil spill in Oriental Mindoro.

Binay said Mindoro is known as the summer alternative for Boracay, considering that Holy Week is fast approaching and this destination has been known to be famous among local and international tourists during this time.

"Nakakalungkot din dahil maraming nag-cancel ng bookings ngayong Holy Week, at panibagong dagok na naman itong nangyari sa ating mga tourism workers na kababangon lang mula sa pandemic. Time is of the essence here, at kailangan ng collective action

from both government and non-government groups na agapan na huwag nang lumala pa ang sitwasyon lalo na't ilang libong pamilya at kabuhayan na ang apektado," Binay said.

According to Binay, the negative impact has already affected nearby provinces, and she urged the government to ask for whatever help it can get to resolve this as soon as possible.

"Lubha nang naka-kaalarma ang impact ng spillage, at mas nakakabahala pa dahil malaki ang posibilidad na umabot po ito sa Batangas at Palawan kung walang gagawing organized action. What we can do right away is to set into motion the assistance facilities of DSWD and activate the TUPAD program. Aside from the fisherfolks, we can tap displaced tourism workers, community-based

organizations, and those livelihoods were affected to help in the cleanup and in setting up barriers to mitigate the environmental impact and public health risks. Hindi lang ito localized na problema - SOS call na ito," Binay insisted.

Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, who also expressed alarm over possible fish shortage and livelihood loss for the residents of Oriental Mindoro, explained that fishing is a primary source of livelihood in the affected area.

Locals fear more fishermen will bear the brunt as some 13,000 fisherfolks and their families in Mindoro alone have already been affected. Fish production is expected to decline in the coming months as the oil spill has now reached Antique and Palawan and could possibly reach Romblon and Aklan, where the country's premier tourist des-

tinuation of Boracay is located, Gatchalian bewailed.

Several tourism activities in the whole Mimaropa (Mindoro Occidental, Mindoro Oriental, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan) region will likely be affected, which can deprive stakeholders of their livelihood. The oil spill also threatens to damage different forms of wildlife, including mangroves and seaweeds.

Gatchalian visited the affected municipalities of Oriental Mindoro during relief operations on Friday. He is joined by Valenzuela City Vice Mayor Lorie Natividad-Borja and representatives from Valenzuela's local DSWD, and donated sacks of rice worth P5 million to the municipalities of Bansud, Bongabong, Bulalacao, Gloria, Naujan, Pinamalayan, Pola, Roxas, and Mansalay.



MARINA at PCG sa oil spill!

SIKRETA



CRIS A. IBON

USAD-PAGONG

ang aksyon ng Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) at Philippine Coastguard (PCG) laban sa management ng M/T Princess Empress na naghatid ng walang kapantay na kapinsalaan hindi lamang sa daan libong Mindoreno kundi maging sa mahigit 1.5 milyon

mamayan sa MIMAROPA Region at ilang lalawigan ng CALABARZON area dahil sa polusyong idinulot ng naturang tanker vessel matapos ang paglubog nito sa karagatan ng Naujan, Oriental Mindoro noong February 28, 2023.

Dahil sa kabagalan ng ginagawang pagsisiyasat ng dalawang ahensyang ito ng pamahalaan ay maraming espekulasyon sa likod ng mabagal ng mga itong pagkilos.

Hinala tuloy ng mga nasalantang mga mamamayan, posibleng may "niluluto" ang tanggapan ng MARINA at PCG, kung kaya't kailangang pumagitna na si Pangulong Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos (PBBM) at paimbestigahan ang ilang opisyaes ng naturang ahensya ng pamahalaan para mabigyan ng hustisya ang mga nasalantang mamamayan.

Liban sa coastal area ng Mindoro Oriental, apektado din ng oil spill ang mga residente ng lalawigan ng MIMAROPA area (Mindoro Oriental, Mindoro Occidental, Marinduque, Romblon, Palawan) at ilang bahagi ng CALABRAZON area tulad ng Batangas, Quezon at Cavite.

Madilim ang landas na kinakaharap ng mga biktima ng oil spill lalo na sa mga coastal town ng Calapan City, Naujan, Pola, Pinamalayan at Bongabong, Mansalay, Roxas sa Oriental Mindoro at mga kalapit na lugar sa nabanggit na lalawigan dahil sa kawalan ng hanapbuhay ng mga mangingisda at magsasaka.

Matinding taggutom din ang kinakaharap ng mga naturang mamamayan dahil sa kawalan ng likas na yamang dagat at produktong pang-agrikultura resulta ng malawakang polusyon sa karagatan dahil sa pagkalat ng may 900,000 litro ng industrial oil na hulán ng lumubog na M/T Empress.

Nakapagtataakang lumubog ang naturang tanker bagama't di naman masungit ang panahon noong February 28, 2023. Ang oil spill ay pinangangambahang kumalat pa hanggang sa Verde Island Passage sakop ng Batangas City sa lalawigan ng Batangas.

Nadamay din ang karagatang nakapalibot sa anim na barangay ng Verde Island passage (San Andres, San Agustin Silangan, Liponpon, San Agustin Kanluran, San Agapito at San Antonio) kaya't malamang na malipol ang ibat-ibang uri ng isda na tanging sa nasabing pulo lamang matatagpuan.

Bilyones na halaga ang tinatayang pinsalang idinulot na ng nasabing oil spill sa marine aquatic resources at agricultural product ng mga naturang lalawigan. Ngunit sa halip na kondenahin ang may-ari at management ng nasabing shipping vessel ay tila may pulitiko pa at ilang opisyaes ng MARINA at Coastguard ang mukhang nais pang mag-abo-abogadohan pabor sa nagmamay-ari ng 508 GRT (Gross Registered Tons) na motor tanker.

Paanong hindi magdududa ang mga nasalantang mamamayan gayong hanggang sa kasalukuyan ayon kay Coastguard Spokesman Vice Admiral Armand Balillo ay beniberipika pa lamang nila kung may kapabayaan ang may-ari ng barko at kung may balidong CPC (Certificate of Public Conveyance) ang nabanggit na sasakyang dagat?

Ibig sabihin, hanggang sa puntong ito na mahigit sa kalahating buwan nang nanalanta ang polusyong resulta ng oil spill sa paglubog ng M/T Princess Empress sa karagatan ng Oriental Mindoro ay wala pang malinaw na resulta ang pagsisiyasat ng MARINA at PCG?

Walang karapatang maglayag ang M/T Princess Empress kung tunay na expired na ang CPC (Certificate of Public Conveyance) ng nasabing tanker vessel, at ito ang nakapagdududang hindi pa nakukumpirma ng MARINA at ng tanggapan ng PCG hanggang ngayon?

Unang naiulat na may karga lamang na tinatayang 800,000 na litro ng industrial oil product ang nasabing motor tanker na may kapasidad lamang na 508 GRT (Gross Register Ton) na M/T Princess Empress) ngunit lumilitaw na mahigit pala sa 900,000 litro ng industrial oil ang kargamento nito.

Tahimik din ang tanggapan ng Enforcement Division



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Collective action needed to resolve oil spill crisis

By Camille P. Balagtas

SENATORS urged the need for a collective action from both government and non-government to resolve the negative effect of the recent massive oil spill in Oriental Mindoro.

Senator Nancy Binay said Mindoro has been known as the summer alternative for Boracay considering that Holy Week is fast approaching and this destination has been known to be famous among local and international tourists during this time.

"Nakakalungkot din dahil maraming nag-cancel ng bookings ngayong Holy Week, at panibagong dagok na naman itong nangyari sa ating mga tourism workers na kababangon lang mula sa pandemic. Time is of the essence here, at kailangan ng collective action from both government and non-government groups na agapan na huwag nang lumala pa ang sitwasyon lalo na't ilang libong pamilya at kabuhayan na ang apektado." Binay lamented.

According to Binay, the negative impact has already affected

nearby provinces as she urged the government to ask for whatever help it can get to resolve this as soon as possible.

"Lubha nang nakakaalman ang impact ng spillage, at mas nakakabahala pa dahil malaki ang posibilidad na umabot po ito sa Batangas at Palawan kung walang gagawing organized action. What we can do right away is to set into motion the assistance facilities of DSWD and activate the TUPAD program. Aside from the fisherfolks, we can tap displaced tourism workers, community-based organizations, and those livelihoods were affected to help in the clean-up and in setting up barriers to mitigate the environmental impact and public health risks. Hindi lang ito localized na problema—SOS call na ito," Binay said.

Senator Sherwin Gatchalian warned of possible fish shortage and livelihood loss for the residents of Oriental Mindoro and explained that fishing is a primary source of livelihood in this particular area.

Gatchalian said local residents fear more fishermen will bear the brunt as some 13,000 fisherfolk and their families in Mindoro alone have already

been affected.

Fish production is expected to decline in the coming months as the oil spill has now reached Antique and Palawan and could possibly reach Romblon and Aklan, where the country's premier tourist destination of Boracay is located.

Several tourism activities in the whole Mimaropa region will likely be affected which can deprive stakeholders of their livelihood.

The oil spill also threatens to damage different forms of wildlife, including mangroves and seaweeds.

"It would take us some time to recover from the horrendous impact of this incident, not only on the environment and the livelihood of our people including those in the tourism industry, and thus, we should extend whatever assistance we can give to help alleviate the plight of those affected by the oil spill," Gatchalian pointed out.

Gatchalian will visit the affected municipalities of Oriental Mindoro to lead a relief operation in the province.

He will be joined by Valenzuela City Vice Mayor Lorie

Natividad-Borja and representatives from Valenzuela's local DSWD and they will donate sacks of rice worth P5 million to the municipalities of Bansud, Bongabong, Bulalacao, Gloria, Naujan, Pinamalayan, Pola, Roxas, and Mansalay.

"Kailangang maging handa tayo sa lahat ng oras sa anumang pagkakataon. Sana natuto na tayo sa ganitong mga trahedyang kailangang mayroon na tayong pangmalawakang contingency plan upang maiwasan na ang muling pagtagas at pagkalat ng langis sa ating mga karagatan na pumapataysa ating kabuhayan," he said.



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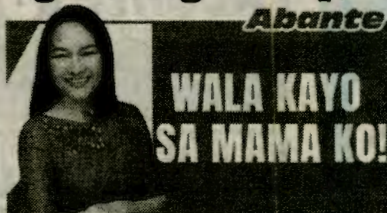
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Iligtas ang buhay, kabuhayan ng mga apektado sa Mindoro oil spill



SEN. RISA HONTIVEROS

Noong Martes ay nagkaroon ng hearing ang Senate Committee on Environment tungkol sa nangyaring oil spill sa karagatan ng Mindoro dahil sa paglubog ng MT Princess Empress. Hindi katulad ng paglubog ng pampasaherong barko, mas matindi pa ang epekto nito sa libo-libong buhay na umaasa sa dagat at turismo sa mga apektadong lugar. Nakasalalay ang buhay ng isa sa pinakamahalaga at pinakamayamang bahagi ng ating kalikasan. Dito rin nakasalalay ang kabuhayan at kalusugan ng ating mga kababayan sa Mindoro, Batangas, Palawan, Antique at iba pang karatig-pook. Kamakailan nga ay pumunta kami sa Min-

doro Oriental para maghatid ng tulong sa mga biktima ng malalang pagbaha doon. Nakakalungkot na isa na namang trahedyang ang harapin nila dahil sa pagtagas ng langis mula sa lumubog na oil tanker. Nanganganib ang ating karagatan, lalo na ang mga mangroves na nagsisilbing breeding ground ng ating mga isda, pati na ang Verde Island Passage na tinaguriang sentro ng marine shorefish biodiversity sa buong mundo. Ang banta na dulot nito sa Verde Island Passage, ay makakaapekto hindi lamang sa mga taong naninirahan sa Mindoro at mga kalapit na lalawigan, pati na sa suplay ng pagkain ng bansa. Paano na ang mga kababayan natin doon? Tigil ang kabuhayan sa pangingsda, tigil din ang turismo, at pati kalusugan ng mga residente, nalalagay sa bingit.

Sa Philippine Coast Guard, Tier 2 lang ang idineklarang level of response dahil hindi pa raw umabot sa isang milyong litro ng gasolina ang tumagas. Pero sa posibleng pinsala sa mga yamang-dagat, kabuhayan ng mga mangingisda, at tourism workers, at sa atin din na mga kumukunsumo ng isda, buong bansa ang tata-

maan ng trahedyang ito. Kaya sa totoo lang, hindi lang dapat nakabatay sa dami ng tumagas na langis ang level of response natin, kundi sa lawak ng apektadong lugar, impact nito sa ating marine biodiversity at hanapbuhay at kalusugan ng mga taga doon. Kailangang pag-isipan na gawing pormal na ang paghingi natin ng tulong sa marami pang mga bansa at iangat ang response level natin sa Tier 3.

Natapos ang hearing at naging malinaw na walang permit ang barko para pumalaot. Pero biglang kinagabihan sa balita, mayroon naman daw permit umano. Hindi na malaman kung sino ba ang nagsasabi talaga ng totoo. Dapat ay alamin ang pinakaugat, ang tunay na dahilan ng trahedyang sa pagkalubog ng MT Princess Empress. Kailangan nating sama-samang hanapan ng solusyon at bigyan ng suporta ang ating mga kababayang sa pangingsda kumukuha ng ikabubuhay, at kilalanin ang kanilang mga pag-sisikap na maprotektahan ang kanilang kabuhayan. Kasabay ng paghanap ng solusyon ay pagpapanagot sa mga awtoridad na maaaring nagkulang o naging pabaya kaya nangyari ang lahat ng ito.



MT Princess Empress owner yari sa bulok na tanker - DOJ

Pinoporma na umano ngayon ng Department of Justice (DOJ) ang pagsasampa ng kaso laban sa may-ari ng MT Princess Empress na nagdulot ng oil spill matapos lumubog sa karagatan ng Oriental Mindoro.

Kasunod ito ng nadiskubre ng DOJ na 'scrap ship' na umano ang MT Princess Empress ngunit pinagawa pa upang gamitin bilang tanker.

"Scrap na siya na ni-rebuilt para maging liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) carrier tapos ni-rebuilt na naman, pinahaba para maging tanker," sabi ni Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla.

Ayon kay Remulla, mayroon silang testigo na nagbigay ng sinumpaang salaysay na nagsasabing 'rebuilt scrap ship' ang MT Princess Empress.

"There is a possible case, there are possible cases to be filed. Ide-definite ito ng legal office ng DOJ," ani Remulla.

Sabi ni Remulla, sinisilip na rin nila ang anggulo ng insurance ng barko sa naganap na insidente.

"And we're looking at the angle of insurance also kasi parang may insurance siyang napakalaki," wika pa ng kalihim.

Samantala, sinabi ni Senador Risa Hontiveros

na batay sa mga nadiskubre ng DOJ ay kinumpirma lamang nito ang initial findings sa pagdinig ng Senado sa Oriental Mindoro oil spill na dapat managot ang mga opisyal ng Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) at Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) dahil sa kapabayaari.

"I trust that the Senate Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change will be able to ensure that the officials responsible for this environmental nightmare will be held to account for their actions," ayon sa pahayag ni Hontiveros.



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Ni: **SONNY ANGARA**

TULONG PANGKABUHAYAN AT CASH PARA SA ORIENTAL MINDORO RESIDENTS NA APEKTADO NG OIL SPILL, MADALIIN!

NITONG nakaraang buwan, dumanas ng matinding pagsubok ang lalawigan ng Oriental Mindoro, partikular ang siyam na munisipalidad nito.

Ito ay matapos lumubog sa katubigan ng bayan ng Naujan ang oil tanker na MT Princess Empress nitong Pebrero 28, habang may kargang 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel oil.

Kamakailan, sa tulong ng National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA), natunton ng Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) sa katubigan ng Pola, Oriental Mindoro ang mga labi ng MT Princess Empress.

Bilang tulong, nagpadala na rin sa bansa ng 8-man team ang Japan para umayuda sa

paglilinis ng oil spill dahil sa kakulangan natin sa oil blotters, oil snares at oil-proof working gloves para resolbahin ang problema sa mga kumalat na langis sa mga katubigang sakop ng mga apektadong bayan.

Nabatid din natin na pinasimulan na ng Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) sa pangunguna ni DSWD Secretary Rex Gatchalian ang cash-for-work program nitong Marso 15, Miyerkules, sa affected municipalities at nakapag-distribute na ng relief goods sa may 19,000 residente ng Oriental Mindoro na apektado ng oil spill.

Sa totoo lang, pangingsda ang ikinabubuhay ng karamihan sa mga residente ng mga munisipalidad na ito. At dahil pinahinto ng mga lokal na lider ang pangingsda, dumaranas ngayon ng matinding gutom at hirap ang mga taga-roon.

Kaya panawagan natin sa DSWD, lalo na kay Sec. Rex at kay Labor Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma ng Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), sana'y mas lalo pa nating agapan ang pagkilos dahil kaawa-awa na ang kalagayan ng ating mga kababayang apektado.

Sa ilalim ng DSWD, may programa tayong Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation o AICS, habang sa DOLE, mayroon tayong Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) na

maaaring pagkakitaan ng mga mangingisdang nawalan ng hanapbuhay dahil sa insidente.

Sa pamamagitan ng TUPAD, kikita na sila, makatutulong pa sa pagbabalik-normal, hindi lang ng kani-kanilang pamumuhay kundi ng kanilang buong komunidad.

Sa kasalukuyan, nasa ilalim ng state of calamity ang may 77 coastal villages ng Oriental Mindoro, kung saan ayon na rin sa datos ng DSWD ay pinaninirahan ng higit-kumulang 19,500 pamilya.



THE BROADER VIEW

HARRY ROQUE

The Mindoro oil spill

Being a scuba diver, I find absolute serenity under our archipelagic waters. Having logged more than 1,000 dives in top sites like Mindoro Island's Puerto Galera and Apo Reef and Negros Oriental's Apo Island, the recent oil spill in Oriental Mindoro has hit close to home. It also reminds me of the horrors of the infamous 2006 disaster in Guimaras Strait.



When I served as a party-list representative in the 17th Congress, I filed House Resolution 523, which called for the approval of the compromise agreement between the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and the International Oil Pollution Compensation (IOPC) Funds related to Guimaras oil spill clean-up. The agreed compensation of P104.7 million would also fund a National Oil Spill Contingency Plan to address similar cases.

My resolution came out in 2016. In 2021, the IOPC said the civil proceeding against the 1992 Fund remains unsettled.

The Mindoro incident, caused by the sinking of *MT Princess Empress* that carried 800,000 liters of fuel oil, has started to wreak environmental havoc on the island's marine ecosystem and economic repercussions to its coastal populace. The spillage could potentially destroy the Verde Island Passage which, according to the Asian Development Bank, sits at the center of the Coral Triangle, one of the world's richest areas of marine life. It has reportedly reached the shores of Palawan and may even impact the beaches of Boracay.

At a recent Senate hearing chaired by Senator Cynthia Villar, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said the spill has extended to 70 areas in the Mimaropa region and affected 22,000 families in Oriental Mindoro and Palawan. It also caused livelihood disruption to 13,588 fishers and caused illness to 122 persons in Oriental Mindoro. To date, the Marcos government and non-government organizations have provided some P43 million in aid to affected residents, according to a STAR news story.

Obviously, the longer the spill is uncontained, the greater the damage is to the country's marine biodiversity and the lives and livelihoods of coastal communities. In a press statement, the IOPC is closely monitoring the incident and will make a report to the 1992 Fund Convention executive committee in May.

Our country acceded to the IOPC Funds in 1997, which the Senate ratified two years later. The Funds are made up of two intergovernmental organizations, the 1992 Fund and the 2003 Supplementary Fund Protocol, which provide compensation for oil pollution damage resulting from spills of persistent oil from tankers.

The Funds form an international compensation regime for oil pollution victims pursuant to the Civil Liability Convention (CLC) of 1992. Under Section 1 Article 4 of the Convention, the IOPC shall compensate any qualified person if the shipowner is: (1) found not to be liable under CLC of 1992, (2) financially incapable to meet its obligations in full and the

insurance does not cover or is insufficient to cover the claim, or (3) the damage exceeds the liability of the shipowner under the CLC of 1992.

In 2006, a sunken motor tanker owned by Sunshine Maritime Development Corporation spilled an estimated 2,000 tons of bunker oil off Guimaras Island. For nearly five months, the Coast Guard deployed its assets for the clean-up and pumping operations that incurred P279.3 million in public funds.

In 2007, the PCG filed a civil case against the shipowners and the 1992 Fund for damages. It cited the Convention's Article 4 as a legal basis. When the Manila Regional Trial Court dismissed the case for PCG's lack of interest, the IOPC offered to pay a compromise amount of P14 million. In 2011, the Coast Guard accepted the IOPC's second settlement offer of P104.7 million. From 2018 to 2021, the failure of PCG to obtain congressional approval, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, further delayed the final settlement of the case.

Of course, we do not want a repeat of the Guimaras case. Unfortunately, the PCG seems reluctant to tap an immediate remedy provided by the IOPC. In case of an oil spill, a State Party like the Philippines can utilize the 1992 Fund to get the services of international experts to clean up the affected areas. The emergency access to the Fund, however, should be without prejudice to the pursuit by PCG of further claims. In my view, it is gross negligence on PCG's part if it fails to access the Funds that can immediately contain the Mindoro oil spill.

Paying last respects to Governor Degamo

A few days ago, I attended the funeral of my friend, Governor Roel Degamo, in Siaton, Negros Oriental. I condoled and prayed with his wife and only son. Pamplona Mayor Janice is a churchmate in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. At the height of the pandemic, Governor Degamo fully supported the Duterte administration's efforts to mitigate the spread of the Covid virus. He was also a pillar of the UniTeam alliance that catapulted President Marcos Jr. and Vice President Duterte into power. Further, he endorsed my congressional run in 2016 and my senatorial candidacy last year.

His assassination is a barbarous act of political violence that has no place in our democracy.

The police have apprehended several suspects linked to the governor's murder. Allegedly, two suspects have pointed to Representative Arnolfo Teves Jr. as the mastermind. On a medical trip to the United States, Teves has relayed his safety concerns to House Speaker Martin Romualdez upon his return to the country.

I urge the congressman to come home and clear his name. The government has assured him of safe passage and protection. As a legislator, he should have faith in the fairness of our criminal justice system. After all, he is presumed innocent of any crime until proven otherwise. Flight, on the other hand, would be an indication of guilt.



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'TERRIFYING' DISCOVERY IN BRAZIL

'Plastic rocks': Pollution shapes island's geology

IBA PA 'YAN SA
NAKA-PLASTIK
NA 'BATO'?



TRINDADE ISLAND, BRAZIL—The geology of Brazil's volcanic Trindade Island has fascinated scientists for years, but the discovery of rocks made from plastic debris in this remote turtle refuge is sparking alarm.

Melted plastic has become intertwined with rocks on the island, located 1,140 kilometers (708 miles) from the southeastern state of Espirito Santo, which researchers say is evidence of humans' growing influence over the earth's geological cycles.

"This is new and terrifying at the same time, because pollution has reached geology," **A3**

said Fernanda Avelar Santos, a geologist at the Federal University of Parana.

Santos and her team ran chemical tests to find out what kind of plastics are in the rocks called "plastiglomerates" because they are made of a mixture of sedimentary granules and other debris held together by plastic.

"We identified (the pollution) mainly comes from fishing nets, which is very common debris on Trindade Island's beaches," Santos said. "The (nets) are dragged by the marine currents and accumulate on the beach. When the temperature rises, this plastic melts and becomes embedded with the beach's natural material."

Conservation spot

Trindade Island is one of the world's most important conservation spots for green turtles, or *Chelonia mydas*, with thousands arriving each year to lay their eggs. The only human inhabitants on Trindade are members of the Brazilian Navy, which maintains a base on the island and protects the nesting turtles.

"The place where we found



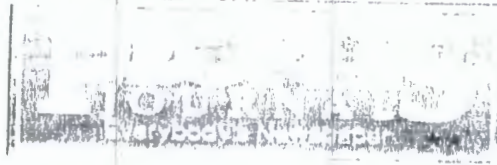
MAN-MADE A researcher holds "plastic rocks" found on Trindade Island in the state of Espirito Santo, Brazil, at the lab of the Federal University of Parana on March 7. —REUTERS

these samples (of plastic) is a permanently preserved area in Brazil, near the place green turtles lay their eggs," Santos said.

The discovery stirs questions about humans' legacy on the earth, she said.

"We talk so much about the Anthropocene, and this is it," Santos said, referring to a proposed geological epoch defined by humans' impact on the planet's geology and ecosystems.

"The pollution, the garbage in the sea and the plastic dumped incorrectly in the oceans is becoming geological material ... preserved in the earth's geological records," she added. —REUTERS



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MMDA inaugurates warehouse for solid waste in Taguig

THE Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) inaugurated a new solid waste management warehouse yesterday in Taguig City and distributed tools and equipment for managing waste collection to nine barangays that are part of the Metro Manila Flood Management Project (MMFMP) Phase 1.

The Labasan Warehouse, located at the Labasan Pumping Station, will serve as a secured holding area and stockyard for the solid waste management tools and

equipment.

MMDA General Manager Usec. Procopio Lipana said the warehouse would help streamline the process of solid waste management collection.

"With the establishment of the Labasan Warehouse, these barangays are assured that the tools and equipment needed for solid waste management are well taken care of and maintained before distribution," said GM Lipana during the inauguration rites.

The warehouse also includes office space,

quarters, and storage room for the Mobile Materials Recovery Facility (MMRF) goods under the "Recyclables Mo, Palit Grocery Ko" project.

Meanwhile, the MMDA solid waste management tools were distributed to leaders of barangays 51, 52, 55, 56, 58, 60, 61, 137 of Tondo and Barangay 137 in Paco, Manila. Donated items include chariots to be used for waste collection in accessible streets and communities, collection bins, safety equipment, among others. **Edd Reyes**



DENR releases hawk eagle back to wild

A JUVENILE Pinsker's hawk-eagle rescued by a farmer early this week in Magpet, North Cotabato was released back to the wild, an official said Thursday.

Forester Rosie Camiguing, community chief of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Protected and Wildlife Unit, said the raptor lost its ability to take flight when found on Monday at a farm in Barangay Amabel, town of Magpet.

"The unidentified farmer had fed and taken care of the raptor for about a day, enabling it to regain its energy," Camiguing said.

Camiguing added that the farmer brought the bird to the Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office of Magpet the following day.

The Pinsker's hawk-eagle, also known as the Philippine hawk-eagle or Mindanao hawk-eagle, is a bird of prey in the family of Accipitridae.

Dr. Mylene Reniedo, Magpet municipal veterinarian, said that upon inspection, the hawk-eagle is found to be healthy and ready to be sent back to its natural habitat.

She said it has a length of 63 centimeters, a wingspan of 125 centimeters, and weighs 1.2 kilograms.

The bird was turned over to the Community and Environment and Natural Resources Office of Matalam last Wednesday and was released on the same day.

Data from the International Union for Conservation of Nature indicated that the adult population of the endangered Pinsker's hawk-eagle is only around 600 to 800 in the wild.

Magpet is situated at the foot of Mount Apo, the country's highest peak where hawk-eagles thrive.

FRANZ SUMANGIL



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17-STORY HIGH 'TOOG'

WITH FREQUENT QUAKES, AGUSAN FOLK WARY OF DANGER FROM GIANT TREE

By Chris Panganiban
@InqNational

SAN FRANCISCO, AGUSAN DEL SUR—Residents here are worried that the 300-year-old giant Philippine rosewood tree, known locally as “toog,” will fall due to continuing earthquakes in nearby Davao de Oro province that are also felt here.

The concern was especially raised by villagers in Alegria where the 54-meter-high (177.16 feet, or about 17-story high) tree is located, towering over the national highway.

The Alegria barangay council earlier passed a resolution asking Mayor Grace Carmel Paredes-Bravo to conduct another assessment by a joint team of government experts on the health status of the giant tree, which is a reminder of the town’s history as a rich source of forest products.

The municipal council’s committee on the environment, headed by Councilor Jay-Ar de Asis, held a public hearing on Tuesday to discuss the villagers’ concerns. Local officials preferred cutting the tree to protect the people from a potential accident should it fall during a storm or strong tremor.

Alegria village chief Blandina Rufila said many residents living near the tree were sleepless for many nights following the magnitude 6 earthquake that struck Compostela town in Davao de Oro on the night of Feb. 1.

The series of strong earthquakes in New Bataan, Davao de Oro, starting March 6 again raised fears that the tree might fall over them. The magnitude 5.3 quake at 4:43 a.m. on March 6 was felt at Intensity 4 in Agusan del Sur.

Elsie Teola, a retired public school teacher, whose house stands next to the toog, told officials she saw the tree swinging toward them during the earthquake, prompting them to seek refuge at the covered court for many nights.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said 1,713 earthquakes, with magnitude ranging from



HERITAGE TREE The iconic 300-year-old “toog” in San Francisco, Agusan del Sur, towers over the village in this photo taken on March 14. The fate of the 54-meter-high tree will be decided after its health assessment next week.

—CHRIS PANGANIBAN

1.4 to 5.9, were recorded in New Bataan from March 6 to March 16.

Bravo said they would conduct another assessment next week, the result of which will determine the fate of the tallest and oldest tree in the country.

“The protection and safety of the greater number of people is my utmost concern,” Bravo said.

In 2019, the tree was set to be torn down due to hazard worries, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources had given the go-signal for it. However, local conservationists and foresters convinced officials to scrap the plan.

The tree had since been treated to ward off a fungus that was attacking its buttress. Two sets of guy-wires moored to the ground were attached to the tree to help assure residents of its ability to withstand calamities.

After they examined the toog in 2020, tree surgeons Armando Palijon and Marcelina Pacho assured members of the Agusan del Sur Environment and Sustainable Development Council that the tree was healthy and stable, and that it could handle the impact of natural calamities, such as typhoons and earthquakes. INQ



NWRB orders Bohol town to explain water extraction activity in neighboring municipality

THE National Water Resources Board (NWRB) has ordered the municipality of Balilihan in Bohol to explain the validity of its conditional water permit to extract water from its neighboring town of Sevilla.

The order was in response to Sevilla town's petition dated January 18, 2023 asking NWRB to restrain the municipality of Balilihan from extracting water from Bugwak Spring located in Barangay Magsaysay, Sevilla.

In its petition, the local government unit (LGU) of Sevilla stressed that Balilihan town "does not have a valid water permit issued by NWRB to appropriate water from the Bugwak Spring at Barangay Magsaysay, Sevilla, Bohol."

Based on the NWRB order, the Balilihan LGU, was directed to file an answer, not a motion to dismiss, to the said petition within 10 days from receipt. The order was signed by NWRB Litigation and Adjudication Section lawyer, Rebyanne Giselle Diaz.

Aside from lacking proper permits, LGU Sevilla stressed "the requirements of Posting and Sending of Notice under Sec. 9 of the Amended Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Water Code were not complied with."

Last year, on June 6, 2022, NWRB received a letter from Sevilla town opposing the conditional water permit issued to Balilihan "on the ground, among others, that LGU Balilihan failed to secure the necessary legal permit from Brgy. Magsaysay

and LGU Sevilla."

The case started in May 2022 when residents of Barangay Magsaysay, Sevilla complained to their mayor, Juliet Dano, about the ongoing construction in their community, including the installation of water lines.

In a related development, a private lot owner has sued LGU Balilihan for building a P95-million water facility on its property.

In a petition filed before the Court of Appeals, Richli Corporation, represented by lawyer Eldrige Marvin Acheron, said the water permit that LGU Balilihan secured from NWRB contained "inaccurate" information on the location of Bugwak Spring's diversion point.

"[NWRB] gave credence to [LGU Balilihan's] submission that [LGU Balilihan] will utilize an unclassified dry land, which forms part of publicland... to install the pipelines from the end of the barangay road down to Bugwak Spring. [NWRB] supported [LGU Balilihan] submission that construction of new water supply system will not pass through Richli's properties," Richli said in its petition.

But as proof that the company owns the property on which the project was built, Richli presented the deeds of absolute sale on three lots surrounding Bugwak Spring. The company's Court of Appeals petition also support earlier petitions of LGU Sevilla, which insists that the project is located in Sevilla and not in Balilihan.



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DENR wants industries to fast-track decarbonization

ENVIRONMENT Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga called for a whole-of-society approach to accelerate the decarbonization of industries to achieve the government's net-zero targets.

She pointed out that the country's commitments in the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and the Paris Agreement can only be achieved if all stakeholders work together by using nature-based solutions for carbon reduction as the primary strategy in achieving net-zero targets.

Under the NDC, the Philippines pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 75 percent by 2030 while committing to

helping limit global warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius under the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

"Every fraction of a degree counts ... we must all work together to achieve what we must envision as our common goal for a safe and sustainable planet," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

She also emphasized prioritizing the opportunities identified in the Philippine Development Plan including capacity development on sustainability; environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting; conduct of capacity assessments; developing biodiversity-friendly enterprises

and ecotourism sites; investments in forestry; and integration between sustainable land, coastal and marine planning.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR) current priorities include the sectors of energy, solid waste, transportation, mining and urban resilience.

Investment and assessment

The DENR is reviewing the environmental processes on all on-shore and off-shore solar, wind and power projects to facilitate more capital investments in the renewable energy sector and

speed up the country's global standard competitiveness. It is also conducting an assessment of all waste-to-fuel and waste-to-energy technologies to address the country's growing solid waste problem and move it toward a circular economy.

The DENR has recently released the implementing rules and regulations for the Extended Producer Responsibility Act of 2022, which requires large companies to establish a mechanism for the proper management of plastic packaging waste. It also focuses on sustainable mobility, particularly in the shipping sector, which involves the transition to alternative sources of fuel

and looking at the upskilling and reskilling of professional seafarers to make the Filipino workforce more competitive in a more digital and complex world.

Yulo-Loyzaga said the administration is pushing for responsible mining as an effective economic driver toward sustainable development.

She added that there is a need to stimulate the industry and push it toward a safe and sustainable practice called the mitigation hierarchy, which follows the steps of avoidance, minimization, restoration and offsetting compensation for affected communities.

BELLA CARIASO



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BusinessMirror

A weekly journal of industry business

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How a landmark biodiversity treaty will change life on the high seas

By TODD WOODY
Bloomberg News

AN agreement reached this month on the language of a landmark United Nations treaty to preserve marine biodiversity will transform how countries, corporations and scientific organizations do business on the high seas, the 60 percent of the ocean beyond any nation's jurisdiction.

A SEA turtle swims over corals on Moore Reef in Gunggandji Sea Country off the coast of Queensland in eastern Australia on November 13, 2020. For the first time, United Nations members have agreed on a unified treaty on Saturday, March 4, 2023, to protect biodiversity on the high seas—nearly half the planet's surface. AP/SAM MCNEIL

If the accord is ratified as expected, what was once an essentially lawless ocean will be managed to protect ecosystems that maintain life on Earth at a time when climate impacts are intensifying.

The high seas biodiversity treaty is the most far-reaching ocean agreement since the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos), which regulates activities in international waters, including seabed mining. While Unclos doesn't mention the word "biodiversity," the new treaty specifies 21st-century threats to marine life that include plastic pollution and

climate-caused ocean acidification and deoxygenation.

The treaty also creates institutions for implementation, including a secretariat to manage day-to-day affairs and a Scientific and Technical Body that will review environmental impact assessments and proposals to create marine protected areas (MPAs) and advise on other matters.

Final decisions will be made by member-states meeting periodically as a Conference of the Parties (COP). (The treaty does not regulate fishing on the high seas, which is managed by other international organizations.)



How a landmark biodiversity

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treaty will change life on the high seas

The product of nearly five years of negotiations that often deadlocked over differences between rich and poor nations, the treaty also reflects compromises, some of which were hammered out in a final nonstop 36-hour negotiating session on March 4.

Sixty nations must ratify the marine biodiversity treaty for it to come into force, and that timeline depends on each country's process for approval of international agreements. If and when the accord is ratified, here's how its major provisions will change life and commerce on the high seas.

Marine Protected Areas

FOR the first time, nations will be able to propose the establishment of marine sanctuaries in international waters to "conserve and sustainably use areas requiring protections," according to the treaty.

A bid to create an MPA must include data on the area's biological uniqueness, threats to species and a management and monitoring plan. After the Scientific and Technical Body reviews and comments on the proposal, it will be released for consultation with other nations, scientists, indigenous communities and the general public.

Other UN treaty organizations require consensus before action can be taken. Such a condition in the Antarctic Treaty, for instance, has allowed one or two nations to repeatedly stymie efforts to expand protected areas on the continent. The high seas biodiversity treaty, on the other hand, allows approval of an MPA with a three-quarters vote by the COP if consensus can't be reached.

"That is definitely a huge step forward and can make this treaty workable," says Kristina Gjerde, senior high seas advisor at the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

Duncan Currie, an international environmental lawyer who specializes in ocean issues, says he's already working with organizations in Chile on a proposal to establish an MPA off the west coast of South America. "Boats are going to be out in the water this year" to collect scientific data for the proposal, he says. "There will be other efforts to develop MPAs that are a priority as ratification of the treaty proceeds."

The creation of high seas preserves could come into conflict

with the International Seabed Authority (ISA), a UN-affiliated organization established under UNCLOS in 1994 to regulate mining of the ocean floor. A memo the ISA secretariat recently submitted to high seas treaty negotiators asserted the ISA's authority over the seabed and stated it has the expertise to develop MPAs.

The biodiversity treaty requires the COP to not undermine other international organizations' jurisdictions. But Pradeep Singh, an ocean governance scholar at the University of Bremen in Germany, noted the conundrum of establishing high seas marine sanctuaries when industrial activity on the seabed below could pollute them.

"It doesn't make sense from an ecological perspective if we're going to have high seas protected areas but then the ISA allows mining to happen on the seabed," he says.

The treaty authorizes the COP to take emergency measures if a natural or human-triggered disaster threatens serious or irreparable harm to marine biodiversity on the high seas. Rutgers Law School associate professor Cymie Payne, an expert on international ocean governance, says such measures could be invoked if there's an oil spill or other industrial incident. "You might completely close the area for a period of time until it's possible to either to clean up the spill or natural degradation has addressed the pollution problem," she says.

Environmental impact assessments

THE treaty's requirement that environmental impact assessments (EIAs) be conducted for activities that could have a harmful or an unknown impact on the high seas comes amid growing interest in using the ocean to absorb and store carbon dioxide.

Under the treaty, national governments will be responsible for determining if a proposed action by an entity under their authority requires an EIA. If so, the government must conduct the assessment and submit the report to the Scientific and Technical Body for review. (If a government decides an EIA is not warranted, it still must notify the organization.)

While the Scientific and Technical Body and other nations and organizations can comment on the EIA, the COP can't stop an activity on the high seas it deems potentially harmful. That remains the

decision of the national government. "That was one of the controversial issues and compromises made at the last minute during negotiations," says Gjerde.

Some observers have questioned whether companies will "forum shop" for countries with less stringent environmental-review requirements or that lack the resources to conduct comprehensive evaluations. Payne says that while most nations have environmental review laws, those procedures may need to be amended to require EIAs for activities proposed for the high seas.

"That's something that the treaty tries to deal with by setting out basic standards and guidelines for EIAs as well as transparency measures," says Payne. She notes that another provision, called "capacity building" in UN argot, requires developed nations to provide resources and assistance to developing countries so they can institute procedures to enforce the treaty.

Marine genetic resources

COMPANIES and countries have long eyed the ocean as a potential source of riches from bioprospecting marine organisms to make novel pharmaceuticals, cosmetics and other products. Under the treaty, marine genetic resources—which include marine molecules, bacteria and algae—are designated as the common heritage of humankind whose bounty is to be shared among nations.

At least six months before the launch of an expedition to collect marine genetic resources, organizers must submit their destination, what they intend to gather and other details of the mission to a publicly accessible clearinghouse established by the treaty. The location of stored specimens and their genetic sequencing data must also be provided to the clearinghouse, along with information on patents and sales for any products derived from marine genetic resources.

How those financial benefits will be divided among nations will be later determined by the COP.

"This treaty has a very strong institutional framework," says Currie, the international lawyer. "Until now there has been no regular place for ocean biodiversity matters to be considered."



VIP UNDER SIEGE

Oil spill seriously imperils one of the 'most productive' marine ecosystems in the world

AERIAL view of the low-lying Bonito Island in the foreground and the larger Maricaban Island in the center, located in the Verde Island Passage. In the background is Mabini, Batangas. CHERYL RAMALHO | DREAMSTIME.COM

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

THE industrial oil from the sunken MT *Princess Empress* is threatening to affect the Verde Island Passage (VIP), a region described by scientists as the center of marine biodiversity in the world.

According to Conservation International, the VIP is "one of the most productive ecosystems in the world." From fishing to shipping, the VIP provides food, livelihoods and other benefits to over 2 million people.

It is also home to "charismatic species such as whale sharks, sea turtles, nudibranchs, and an impressive array of corals."

More importantly, Conservation International declared that the strait is "the backbone of the local economy, thriving upon coastal tourism, fisheries, and as a shipping route to the international ports of Batangas, Manila and Subic Bay."

Further damage feared

SPEAKING during a recent Senate inquiry following the disastrous Mindoro oil spill, Dr. Cesar L. Villanoy of the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute said it is imperative to stop the seepage from the sunken vessel to prevent further damage to marine and coastal environments.



He said it is also imperative to do it before the *amihan* season ends, which also signifies the onset of the summer season, which, he also estimates, will start to happen before the Holy Week or a week from now.

Citing trajectory models used by the United States' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the ocean current and strong wind brought about by *amihan* is bringing the oil seep-

OCEANA Philippines VP Gloria Estenzo Ramos: "The oil spill is a disaster of epic proportions to our biodiversity and ecosystems, including the iconic Verde Island Passage, as the center of the world's marine biodiversity, and the seafood-eating Filipino people who are largely dependent on a healthy ocean for sustenance and nutrition."

ing from the sunken vessel to the shores of Naujan and Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

However, he warned that without the wind, the trajectory model indicates it will move to the direction of the VIP in the next few weeks.

Villanoy said the oil that is severely affecting the nine coastal towns of Oriental Mindoro and the islands of Semirara and Antique province is just a fraction of the oil seepage.

He explained that when Bunker C oil is released in the water, 9 percent evaporates, while 70 percent breaks up into smaller spills. What remains is 22 percent, which is now spreading in various areas.



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So far, he said, the spill is going south, mostly to Semirara and Caluya Island and eventually to Cuyo. However, in the next few days, it will reach the Taytay area in Palawan.

"The currents are starting to move to the west—towards the Verde Passage, sometime next week, it will start to affect Verde Island Passage," says Villanoy.

He added various government agencies working to contain the spill have until, at the latest, Monday, 19th of March, or the oil will start going in the direction of the VIP without the *amihan* that continues to push oil towards the direction of Nauhan and Pola towns.

"Without the wind, with currents only, the oil will spill towards Calapan and then VIP," he said.

"We need to contain the seepage before the *amihan* stops, otherwise, other areas will be affected," he said.

"We need to stop the seepage from the sunken vessel," he said.

Government response

DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said together with the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and other responders from the local governments, ground remediation is being conducted in affected areas in Oriental Mindoro, which is hardest hit by the oil slick, and Semirara Island and Cuyo, in Antique.

She said the operation is being conducted with the assumption that the seepage will not be stopped, hence, anticipating the worst-case scenario.

Undersecretary Peter Tiangco of the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority, the central mapping agency of the government, has pinpointed the location of the ill-fated vessel some 7.49 nautical miles northeast of Balingawan, Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

The distance of the vessel from the last known position is 264 miles (about 424 kilometers) southeast.

The shallowest depth in the area is 389.10 meters or 1,000 feet deep, making it hard for divers to work to stop the seepage, he said.

Meanwhile, a rapid assessment conducted by the Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) from March 6 to 10, says Assistant Secretary Marcial Amaro, revealed that 10 hectares of mangrove areas in Pola town are now affected by the oil slick.

In the eight other towns of Oriental Mindoro, it was estimated that over 2,000 hectares of coral and 1,600 mangroves and 1,000 hectares of seagrass were also affected.

Secretary Carlito Galvez of the Office of Civil Defense said all in all, a total of 162,000 persons in 118 barangays were affected in Oriental Mindoro and Palawan. A total of 13,588 fisherfolk were also affected by the oil spill.

He said that so far, cleanup operations in various affected areas resulted in the recovery of 4,128 liters of oily water, along with tons of oil-soaked waste or debris, collected. A total of 8,300 families or 32,000 persons in Caluya, Antique, were affected, together with close to 70 fisherfolk.

International ocean conservation advocacy group Oceana said with the testimonies made by national government agencies during the Senate hearing, it is clear that government agencies still have to learn to closely coordinate with one another, including with local authorities and stakeholders for disaster prevention, effective disaster risk communication, and disaster response, as aptly pointed out by Sen. Loren Legarda.

Potential disaster of 'epic proportions'

DESPITE similar occurrences in the past and present, the country does not have implementation plans for contingencies, such as the oil pollution now ravaging our seas and coastal communities, Oceana Philippines vice president Gloria



Estenzo Ramos pointed out.

According to Ramos, despite several disasters hitting the country, largely human-inflicted, Republic Act 10124, or the Philippine Disaster Risk and Reduction Management Act of 2010, still has to be fully implemented and appreciated by key decision-makers.

"The oil spill is a disaster of epic proportions to our biodiversity and ecosystems, including the iconic Verde Island Passage, as the center of the world's marine biodiversity, and the seafood-eating Filipino people who are largely dependent on a healthy ocean for sustenance and nutrition," she lamented.

According to Ramos, it was appalling to hear of the lapses in procedure that regulatory agencies have allowed to take place, noting that Sen. Cynthia Villar and further questioning from Senators Risa Hontiveros and Chiz Escudero revealed that MT *Princess Empress* had no permit to operate.

"So why was it cleared by the

Philippine Coast Guard for nine voyages from ports in Bataan and Manila?" she asked.

According to Ramos, an environmental lawyer, the Anti-Red Tape Act must be made applicable to the operations of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) as well—as it should apply to all government agencies—because they don't seem to be aware of the services and timeline required of them, especially when disasters occur.

In addition, it is high time that we seriously implemented the Renewable Energy Act of 2008, RA 9513. Without a definite push away from fossil fuel and towards renewable energy, we will remain sitting ducks to oil spills, pollution, and climate change impacts and become extremely vulnerable to the dire consequences they bring, Ramos said.

"We cannot be flirting with disasters forever while anybody is free to spill oil in our ocean, without accountability," she ended.