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VERDE ISLAND PASSAGE IN DANGER

World's center of shore fish

biodiversity under siege



By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

WITH the Northeast Monsoon ending soon, the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) expressed concern that the ocean current would bring the industrial oil slick from the seepage of the sunken MT Princess Empress tanker to the Verde Island Passage (VIP).

In his presentation during a Senate inquiry on March 14, oceanography expert Cesar L. Villanoy said the only thing that is preventing this to happen is the Northeast Monsoon, or the Hanging Amihan, which is blowing the oil spill toward the direction of Naujan and Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

Using oil spill trajectory models based on the most recent satellite images, Villanoy said the responders to the Mindoro oil spill now have a very short window of opportunity, or until the Holy Week, at the latest, to stop the seepage from the ill-fated vessel, or the oil is expected to affect others, including the coastal towns in Palawan that is considered as the country's last ecological frontier and host to one of the richest fishing grounds in the country.

Another important area that will be hugely affected is the Verde Island Passage, which is declared by scientists as the world's "center of the center of shore fish biodiversity."

Villanoy, the project leader of the Benham Bank expedition in 2014 and 2016, has a master's and Ph.D. in Physical Oceanography from the University of Sydney in Australia.

Man-made calamity

MT Princess Empress sank at Balingawan point off Naujan town in Oriental Mindoro province after its engine overheated while traveling to central Iloilo province, the Philippine Coast Guard said.

Oil spill is considered a disastrous man-made calamity. This became clear during the Senate hearing.

The MT Princess Empress had no updated permit to operate in the form of an amendment to its Certificate



MEMBERS of the Philippine Coast Guard remove oil from mangrove plants on the coast of Pola, Oriental Mindoro, that is among the hardest hit by the oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empire tanker. Noel Guevara, Greenpeace PHILIPPINES PHOTO

of Public Convenience issued to its owner, RDC Reield Marine Services Inc., the Senate was informed.

This should have been enough for the Philippine Coast Guard to keep the vessel from sailing pending compliance of the regulatory requirement.

However, the vessel was able to sail—nine times—before the tragedy,

With such violation, RDC's insurance is at risk of forfeiture, and would make it difficult for the company to finance the massive remediation measures, provide livelihood assistance to affected communities and pay the communities for the penalties and fines to be slapped by the government.

Reminiscent of Guimaras

THE scenes on the coastal areas of Oriental Mindoro affected by the oil spill days after the sinking of the oil tanker were reminiscent of the scenes several days into the Guimaras oil spill in 2006, the worst of such event in the country's history.

MT Solar 1 tanker was then carrying more than 2-million liters of bunker fuel of Petron when it sank during a violent storm some 20.5 kilometers off the southern coast of Guimaras province.

The oil slick spread through the straits of Guimaras and Iloilo, and

affected marine sanctuaries and mangrove reserves in three out of five municipalities on Guimaras Island.

The oil spill also reached the shores of Iloilo and Negros Occidental.

MT Solar 1 should not have been allowed to sail because of the violent storm.

According to Environment Assistant Secretary Marcial C. Amaro, the oil seepage from the sunken MT Princess Empress that was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil, has already affected around 8,000 hectares of mangrove areas in Pola, Oriental Mindoro, and over 2,000 hectares of mangroves, 1,600 hectares of corals and 1,000 hectares of seagrass in the other eight towns of the province.

Economically important

THE Mindoro oil spill is seriously threatening the rich biodiversity in Verde Island Passage, a strait that separates the islands of Luzon and Mindoro.

In a study by world renowned marine scientist Dr. Kent Carpenter and other marine scientists in 2005, the Verde Island Passage Marine Corridor covers around 1.14 million hectares of the marine area along portions of the provinces of Batangas, Oriental and Occidental Mindoro, Marinduque



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MEMBERS of the Philippine Coast Guard remove oil from mangrove plants on the coast of Pola, Oriental Mindoro, that is among the hardest hit by the oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empire tanker. NOEL GUEVARA, GREENPEACE PHILIPPINES PHOTO

and Romblon.

It has the highest concentration of marine species in the world, thus it is dubbed as the "center of the center of marine shore fish biodiversity in the world."

Meanwhile, 10 years later, in 2015, a study done by a group of scientists from the California Academy of Science yielded around 100 new species discoveries in the VIP, raising further its importance for global biodiversity.

According to Dr. Theresa Mundita S. Lim, executive director of Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), its richness has contributed to the sustainability of the livelihoods of over 7 million people living in the coastal provinces of VIP.

Fishing, aquaculture and tourism are thriving in the region. Even though it is a strait, the VIP is also an important passageway for both commercial and industrial ships from Manila or Batangas and going to and from the southern parts of the Philippines.

An Asean concern

OIL spills do not recognize national or

regional boundaries, Lim pointed out, citing the interconnectivity of marine ecosystems in the Asean.

ACB, which is Asean's response to biodiversity loss in the region, is ready to spring into action to help cushion the impact of disastrous oil spills.

"As part of the Coral Triangle, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines stand to lose much more of globally significant marine biodiversity, to man-made threats, such as oil spills," said Lim, a former director of the Biodiversity Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The regional group recognizes the transboundary nature of such threats, making it pursue the adoption of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) on Asean Cooperation Mechanism for Joint Oil Spill Preparedness and Response in 2018," Lim said.

The ACB has also recently undertaken a study on the interconnectivity of marine resources in the region, demonstrating how stresses on high coastal and marine biodiversity areas in the Philippines can impact fishery

productivity, marine ecotourism, and other biodiversity-based industries across the region.

"It is in this light that the ACB, as the only Asean center hosted by the Philippines and a center focused on addressing biodiversity loss in the region, would be ready to support, as deemed appropriate by the Philippine government, measures that will facilitate coordination with other AMS [Asean member states] in responding to oil spills in accordance with the MOU," Lim explained.

She added that ACB is ready to assist "most especially, on steps toward long-term prevention and on the enhancement and development of nature-based solutions that would increase the resiliency of our coastal and marine ecosystems and allow faster recovery from such disasters."

"With the current situation, the focus should still be on the quick response and immediate measures to prevent the spill from moving toward the VIP," Lim said.

'Polluter must pay'

ENVIRONMENTAL groups are demanding full responsibility and accountability from the owners of the MT Princess Empress for the 800,000 liters of industrial oil that has now affected and caused the declaration of state calamity in nine Oriental Mindoro coastal towns, and nearby areas on Semirara Island and Antique province.

Joining calls for accountability, the group Protect Verde Island Passage (Protect VIP), through its lead convenor, Fr. Edwin Gariguez, issued a statement condemning the company responsible for the oil spill and the catastrophe it has been causing.

The Protect VIP campaign network has earlier said the incident must serve as an "eye opener" to the neglect the Verde Island Passage has long suffered despite its socioeconomic and ecological significance.

It said the oil spill, besides putting VIP in danger, has put at risk more than 30 of Oriental Mindoro's marine-protected areas.



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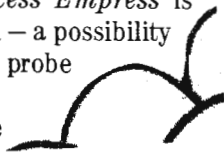
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ENRILE: PROBE SHOULD BE COMPLETE

'Tanker carried smuggled oil?'

Knowing the background of the sunken *MT Princess Empress* is essential to determine if it was smuggling bunker oil – a possibility due to the many infractions that came to light in the initial probe into its sinking.

Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Juan Ponce Enrile





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'Tanker carried smuggled oil?'

The owner instead of retiring the ship converted it to a cargo vessel to carry sand but it ended up as an oil tanker.

From page 1

said the probers should find out who are the people behind RDC Reield Marine Services, which was identified as the owner of the vessel.

Enrile said it is important to know the vessel's history to find out how it was able to change its name.

"The fact that the tanker was able to sail nine times without a complete license means that powerful forces are behind it," Enrile said. "The tanker's owner has strong protectors."

"Also, since there was a gale

warning, how was the ship able to proceed? The probe should also consider the possibility that it is a smuggler of crude oil," he added.

The Philippine Coast Guard said the oil tanker has a certificate of public convenience or license which was supposedly issued by the Maritime Industry Authority but the shipping sector regulator, in a recent Senate investigation, denied it issued the license that was seen by the PCG.

"You can trace the origin of the vessel 50 years back and determine who built it and for what purpose," the veteran lawyer added.

"The investigation should be systematic. The findings will bear out the truth."

Enrile suggested the investigation could likewise be used to the

advantage of those who want to divert the issue.

"Just ask questions, it's that simple. The vessel has requirements for registration (that can be looked into)," he said.

Enrile, in his weekly program "Bayan ni Juan," said there are government cases where collusion happened to defraud the public coffers.

"The other day, we, together with President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., found a public corporation that had existed for the past 30 years without contributing any income or any kind of benefit to the government," he revealed.

He added: "The officials and staff just kept on drawing salaries from the corporation but it has not provided any gains."

The state firm's board did not even follow rules in the naming of directors, he revealed.

"So President Marcos asked the Cabinet to investigate it and the directors running the corporation," he said. "There are many Judases in the National Treasury."

50-year old vessel

Initial investigation following the tanker mishap showed that it was not brand new.

Department of Justice findings showed the 50-year-old vessel was used to be known as the *MT Dorothy I*. It was originally a tanker that carried liquefied petroleum gas.

The owner, instead of retiring the ship, converted it into a cargo vessel to carry sand but it ended up

as an oil tanker.

What is very suspicious about the circumstances behind the continued sailing of the ship is the conflict between the PCG and Marina regarding its license.

"Who authorized the refurbished tanker to carry bunker oil? And where was the destination of the cargo?" Enrile asked. "Who was the importer (or charterer)? Who engaged the services of the tanker?"

An investigation also pointed to SL Harbor Bulk Terminal Corporation, a subsidiary of San Miguel Corporation, as the charterer of the tanker and it was thus the operator of the ship when it met its end.

"The investigation can't be wishy-washy," Enrile said.

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OIL SPILL IN ORIENTAL MINDORO

Ship's owner must

BY JAVIER JOE ISMAEL

SEN. Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go is urging concerned authorities to take necessary and immediate actions to address the oil spill incident in Oriental Mindoro caused by the capsizing of MT Princess Empress.

"The owner of the vessel must answer. We should not rely solely on the government in cleaning the coastal areas affected by the oil spill. Many families will go hungry, especially those who depend on fishing for their daily sustenance. Their health is already affected," said Go in an interview after he led a relief operation in Romblon, Romblon on Thursday, March 16.

MT Princess Empress, which was carrying 900,000 liters of industrial fuel, sank in the waters off the coast of Naujan town in Oriental Mindoro on February 28.

The Maritime Industry Authority earlier claimed that the oil tanker had no authority to operate as the application for its amended Certificate of Public Convenience was still pending.

However, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) belied this. Still, Go urged the ship owners to take full responsibility for the incident regardless if they had a permit or not.

According to the PCG, the oil spill has also already affected the provinces of Palawan and Antique.

"The presence of oil at sea is dangerous to our health, especially now that the entire coastline of the island of Oriental Mindoro is affected by the oil spill," said Go in a separate interview during his visit in Taytay, Rizal on March 14.

Emphasizing the adverse impact of the incident on the economy, particularly on local industries such as fisheries, tourism and recreation, Go urged the government to expedite the clean up operations and other interventions, saying, "For me, the government has to fast-track the intervention, let's help one another. Our coast guards and the local government units are there doing their jobs."

According to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, more than 2,000 hectares of coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass are estimated to be potentially affected by the oil spill.

Meanwhile, the senator shared that he was able to discuss with Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerlito Dolor and Pola town Mayor Jennifer Cruz separately the situation of the residents who have been affected, especially in the town of Pola.

Governor Dolor likewise said that there are more than a hundred residents who went ill because of the oil spill, some of them suffering from vomiting and diarrhea while others are having respiratory problems.

"In my case as a senator, I am ready to help our countrymen, especially our 'hand-to-mouth' countrymen, the poor who are hungry because their livelihood is affected by the oil spill," Go reassured.

"This should not happen again

answer
Bong Go



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NO BUYERS This photo on Saturday, March 18, 2023, shows empty stalls along the national highway going to Baco town in Barangay Sta. Isabel despite clarification by the Office of Calapan City Mayor Malou Morillo that there is no ban in the selling of fish. People have shied away from buying fish amid reports that oil slick from a sunken tanker in a nearby town in Oriental Mindoro has reached Calapan City. On normal days, the area is teeming with patrons that sometimes causes traffic. Fishing and swimming are only banned in the three adjacent villages of Navotas, Maidlang and Silonay that had been monitored with traces of the oil slick. PHOTO BY IRE JOE V.C. LAURENTE

and let those responsible be made to account for their mistakes. We should also act fast to prevent the oil spill from going to other islands or provinces."

Lawyers want accountability

Meanwhile, a group of lawyers have raised their concern over what they claim as "the lackluster response of the government in addressing the oil spill contamination ravaging our seas, biodiversity, health and income of affected coastal residents in Oriental Mindoro.

"In a statement signed by different lawyers, led by Oceana Vice President Gloria Ramos, said that the oil spill is a grave evolving environmental catastrophe that has caused significant harm to the sacred ecosystems in the area and has af-

ected the lives and livelihood of local communities who depend upon fishing and tourism for their income and is posing serious health risks, and is compromising the well-being of the people including the elderly, the women and the children.

The statement added that the Verde Island Passage, which can be broadly damaged by the oil spill according to a study by the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute, is an ecologically significant and one of the most highly productive ecosystems in the Philippines.

"The protection and conservation of this area should be a top priority for the government," the lawyers said.

The oil spill contamination is a devastating threat to the marine biodiversity of the Verde Island Passage. The government must

take immediate and effective measures to address this ecological nightmare and prevent similar incidents from happening in the future by ensuring that our laws and regulations are strictly enforced."

The lawyers also said that the spillage is a disaster of national and international proportions, and urgently call on President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to take immediate action and declare a state of national calamity in the affected areas to provide necessary relief and assistance to the affected communities.

They suggested that immediate action is to thoroughly assess the impact area and contain the oil spill. Likewise, whole-of-nation actions are needed to address the urgent needs of affected communities, including providing adequate compensation, short-term and long-term health care, and rehabilitation measures.

"We demand a thorough investigation into this disaster and hold accountable those responsible, including those in agencies who were in dereliction of their duties.

There should be transparency and strict accountability in the conduct of the impartial investigation and full disclosure of parties involved in this mess.

It was only owing to a Senate inquiry that critical details finally came to light two weeks after the tragedy struck, such as the relevant permits, or the lack thereof, of the shipowner RDC Reield Marines Services Inc., the necessary measures taken to ensure the seaworthiness of the tanker MT Princess Empress, and the lack of clear coordination among the government agencies supposed to be responding to this disaster," the lawyers said.

WITH REPORTS FROM IRE JOE V.C. LAURENTE



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Bataan CG refuses to disclose details on sunken vessel's permit

By **CHRISTIAN
D. SUPNAD**

LIMAY, Bataan - In an apparent avoiding responsibility for the ill-fated MT Princess Empress, Bataan Coast Guard commander Jonathan Serote refused to answer questions about why the local coast guard here allowed it to depart allegedly without proper clearance.

People's Journal Tonight, through this writer,

went all the way to the coast guard station in Barangay Lamao here to seek clarification following reports that the coast guard personnel "allowed" the sunken vessel to sail "without proper inspection and clearance."

But Serote kept mum regarding the MT Princess Empress' permit.

When pressed by this writer if there were "lapses" in allowing the oil tanker to depart from this port that resulted in its sinking, Serote declined to answer

but pointed to the spokesperson of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) in their national headquarters for an official answer.

"I am not allowed and authorized to speak about it as we have an official spokesman to answer it in Manila," said Serote, the head of the coast guard personnel here.

He said that an investigation is ongoing and that they are just waiting for its outcome.

Asked if he is willing to testify in a congressional

hearing, he said in affirmative.

PCG on Wednesday said it is investigating the "authenticity" of the permit presented to its personnel to allow MT Princess Empress to sail at least four times before it sank off the waters of Oriental Mindoro, causing an oil spill that threatens ecosystems and communities.

The shipowners denied that they had an approved CPC (certificate of public convenience) at the recent Senate hearing.



Editorial

'Scrap ship'

KUMALAT na ang natapong langis mula sa MT Princess Empress sa maraming bayan sa Oriental Mindoro at pinangangambahang pati sa Puerto Galera ay umabot na rin. Kahapon, nakaabot na sa Calapan City ang oil spill. Maraming residente naman ng Pola ang nabigyan ng ayuda ng Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Ang Pola ang pinakamatinding nasapol ng oil spill makaraang lumubog ang tanker noong Pebrero 28 sa baybayin ng Naujan. Ang Naujan ay katabing bayan ng Pola. Maraming mangingisda ang nawalan ng ikinabubuhay makaraang ibawal ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) na huwag munang pumalaot. Marami rin ang nagkasakit na sa Pola makaraang makalanghap ng masangsang na amoy mula sa dagat. Nangangamba ang mga taga-Pola na pagtumagal pa ang oil spill, magugutom na sila.

Nang kapanayamin si Pola Mayor Jennifer Cruz sa telebisyon, sinabi nito na apektado na ang kabuhayan ng kanyang constituents. Bukod dito, pati ang kanilang turismo ay nasira rin. At ang ikinadidismaya ni Cruz, wala umanong ipinadadalang tulong ang may-ari nang lumubog na tanker sa kanila. Ayon pa sa mayor, hindi biro ang tumapong langis at ang kanyang bayan ang napuruhan.

Mahigit 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel oil ang karga ng MT Princess Empress. Patungong Iloilo ang tanker galing Bataan nang magkaaberya at lumubog. Hanggang sa kasalukuyan, patuloy pa ang pagtapon ng langis mula sa tanker. Gumagawa ng paraan ang Philippine Coast Guard kung paano makokontrol ang pagtapon ng langis mula sa tanker.

Ang nakapanlulumo ay ang natuklasan ng Department of Justice na scrap ship at dalawang beses nang ginawa bilang isang tanker ang lumubog na MT Princess Empress. Ayon kay Justice secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla, mayroong misinterpretations sa kondisyon ng barko. Sinabi umano ng may-ari sa DOJ at Philippine Coast Guard na dalawang taong gulang lamang ang tanker. Sabi ng DOJ, nangangalap pa ng ibang impormasyon ang gobyerno para sa posibleng pagsasampa ng reklamo sa tanker.

Imbestigahan pa ang may-ari ng MT Princess. Malaking perwisyo ang idinulot nang paglubog hindi lamang sa kabuhayan kundi sa kalikasan.



What's SMC waiting for?

“Half a month has passed and none of the officials of the companies involved has stepped forward to face the public.”

Foreign investors of San Miguel Corp. are starting to inquire about the real score of the conglomerate's involvement in the oil spill off Oriental Mindoro which is threatening the Verde Island Passage or VIP, the global center of marine biodiversity.

European companies, particularly, are very meticulous about the businesses that they get into do not harm the environment, and are proactive in ecological protection.

SMC, thus far, has yet to manifest its presence in the worsening tragedy despite it being the known charterer of the sunken *MT Princess Empress*.

As charterer, it was the owner of the vessel when it sank with 900,000 liters of industrial oil last 28 February.

A leak in the vessel is spilling about 50,000 liters of oil per day and the toxic substance has spread as far as Palawan.

Swift action is needed as environment watchdogs said a shift in the wind direction will be fatal to the rich marine resources between Batangas and Oriental Mindoro. Coastal communities as far as Antique are worried about the wind shift.

“We're worried about the wind conditions which can bring the oil spill to our area. It's tuna season here in our area and tons of fish are being caught through sustainable fishing. We have the biggest number of mangroves and well-managed coastal resources here in Northern Antique,” said Mayor Mary Jean Te of Libertad, Antique.

The mayor should ask Senator Loren Legarda, who hails from the province, to seek compensation from SMC.

Green organizations indicated historical data and past experiences showed oil leaks cause long-term damage to communities and the environment, leading to significant losses and staggering costs of recovery.

Paul Horsman, Greenpeace Strategy Advisor, for instance, said, “30 years after the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989, traces of the oil can still be found in the sediment in affected areas.”

If the areas across the VIP were to be damaged by the extensive impact of the oil spill, fisheries in other areas would be affected as well.

The law provides for a “polluter pays” principle. “Republic Act 9483 spells out the liability of those responsible for the oil spill,” said Liza Osorio, legal and policy director of ecology watchdog Oceana.

Osorio added that the cost that responsible companies should shoulder covers cleanup operations at sea, preventive measures, consequential laws or loss of earnings, pure economic loss, and even damage to human health or loss of life, among others.

The slick has snaked its way to the economic centers of the country.



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A leak in
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as far as
Palawan.**

The City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office of Calapan confirmed traces of oil on the shores of Barangay Navotas. Calapan is a major economic center of the Mimaropa region.

Fr. Edwin Gariguez, Protect VIP convener, said fisherfolk organizations in provinces surrounded by the VIP are worried about livelihood support and response.

The economic cost of the oil spill is huge. The fishing sector in the VIP area, which includes Oriental Mindoro, was valued at P11.8 billion in 2021, while in 2019 its tourism industry generated P3.5 billion.

“There must be decisive action to minimize the impact and demand accountability from the charterer and ship owner which seems to be heading towards a bailout based on how the Senate hearing last week went,” said Gerry Arances, executive director of Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development.

The ecology groups are demanding reparation for the affected communities from RDC Reield Marine Services, the owner of the *MT Princess Empress*, and SL Harbor Bulk Terminal Corporation, a subsidiary of San Miguel Corporation, which owned the cargo.

Half a month has passed and none of the officials of the companies involved has stepped forward to face the public.

One of the big partners of SMC in the New Manila International Airport project is the Dutch government-backed infrastructure giant Boskalis Westminster NV.

It is under pressure from European ecology groups to demand that SMC take responsibility for actions that threaten nature.

SMC, without prodding, should take the lead in assuming the huge cost of averting a natural disaster caused by the reckless shipment of its bunker fuel.



Philippine Army
203rd Infantry Division
Department of Strategic Communication and Initiatives Service

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Libong Army sinabak sa

Umaabot sa may 1,000 puwersa ng mga sundalo ang minobilisa ng 2nd Infantry Division (ID) ng Philippine Army na tumutulong sa clean-up drive sa matinding epekto ng oil spill sa karagatan ng Oriental Mindoro, ayon sa opisyal ng militar nitong Sabado.

Sinabi ni Lt. Col. Hec-

tor Estolas, spokesman ng 2nd ID, ang hakbang ay base sa direktiba ni 2nd ID Commander Major Gen. Roberto Capulong. Ang binuong Task Group ay nasa ilalim ng pangangasiwa ng Army's 203rd Infantry Brigade na saklaw ng hurisdiksiyon ng Army's 2nd Infantry Division (ID).

Ang MT Princess Em-

press oil tanker na may kargang 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel ay lumubog sa karagatan ng Naujan, Oriental Mindoro noong Pebrero 28 ng taong ito na nagresulta sa oil spill na nakaapekto sa 13,755 pamilya na naninirahan sa mga baybaying munisipalidad ng Pola, Gloria, Naujan, Bansud, Bong-

NI JOY CANTOS

abong, Roxas, Mansalay at Bulalacao.

Habang isinusulat ang balitang ito, ang oil spill ay nakarating na sa Caluya, Antique at namemeligro na ring maminsala sa iba pang mga lugar.

Samantalang ang 203rd Infantry "Bantay

clean-up drive vs oil spill

Kapayapaan" Brigade ay minobilisa na rin ang 203rd Task Group sa pamamagitan ng Joint Task Force Katagalugan na nag-iimplementa ng "Sagip Kalikasan Oriental Mindoro" katuwang ng mga disaster response teams mula sa 76th Infantry Battalion, 68th Infantry Battalion at 4th Infantry Battalion ng PH Army.

Ang operasyon ay nasa

ilalim ng pangangasiwa ng Office of Civil Defense Region IV B gayundin ang Alpha Company ng 2nd Civil-Military Operations Battalion upang suportahan ang Office of Civil Defense Region 4B, Philippine Coast Guard, iba pang Risk Reduction Management Offices at mga Local Government Units (LGUs) ng Oriental Mindoro LGUs sa pagtugon sa oil spill.

Ang Task Group ay inatasan ding magsagawa ng emergency response sa mga lugar na apektado ng oil spill na nagdulot ng krisis sa kabuhayan ng mga mangingisda sa Oriental Mindoro. Kabilang sa kanilang isasagawa ay ang loud speaker operations, pagkontrol, coastal clean-up drive at pagtulong sa pamamahagi ng relief goods.



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1,000 sundalo sinabak sa clean-up drive vs oil spill

Nasa 1,000 na sundalo ng 2nd Infantry Division (ID) sa ilalim ng Philippine Army ang isinabak na sa clean-up drive bundod ng matinding epekto ng oil spill mula sa tanker

na lumubog sa karagatan ng Oriental Mindoro.

Ayon kay Lt. Col. Hector Estolas, spokesman ng 2nd ID, ang hakbang ay base sa direktiba ni 2nd ID commander Major Gen. Roberto Capulong. Ang binuong Task Group ay nasa ilalim ng pangangasiwa ng Army's 203rd Infantry Brigade na saklaw ng hurisdiksiyon ng 2nd Infantry Division (ID).

Ang MT Princess Empress oil tanker na may kargang 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel ay lumubog sa karagatan ng Naujan, Oriental Mindoro nitong Pebrero

28 na nagresulta sa oil spill na nakaapekto sa 13,755 pamilya sa mga baybaying munisipalidad ng Pola, Gloria, Naujan, Bansud, Bongabong, Roxas, Mansalay at Bulalacao. Ang oil spill ay nakarating na sa Caluya, Antique at namemeligro na ring maminsala sa iba pang lugar.

Samantala, ang 203rd Infantry "Bantay Kapayapaan" Brigade ay minobilisa na rin ang 203rd Task Group sa pamamagitan ng Joint Task Force Katagalugan na nag-iimplementa ng "Sagip Kalikasan Oriental Mindoro" katuwang

ng mga disaster response teams mula sa 76th Infantry Battalion, 68th Infantry Battalion at 4th Infantry Battalion ng PH Army.

Ang operasyon ay nasa ilalim ng pangangasiwa ng Office of Civil Defense Region IV B gayundin ang Alpha Company ng 2nd Civil-Military Operations Battalion upang suportahan ang Office of Civil Defense Region 4B, Philippine Coast Guard, iba pang Risk Reduction Management Offices at mga Local Government Units (LGUs) ng Oriental Mindoro LGUs sa pagtugon sa oil spill. -Joy Cantos-



Philippine Army tumulong sa paglilinis ng oil spill

NASA libong puwersa na ng mga sundalo ang pinakalat ng 2nd Infantry Division (ID) ng Philippine Army para tumutulong sa clean-up drive sa matinding epekto ng oil spill sa karagatan ng Oriental Mindoro, ayon sa opisyal ng militar nitong Sabado.

Ayon kay Lt. Col. Hector Estolas, Spokesman ng 2nd ID ng PA, ang hakbang ay base sa direktiba ni 2nd ID Commander Major Gen. Roberto Capulong. Ang binuong Task Group ay nasa ilalim ng pangangasiwa ng Army's 203rd Infantry Brigade na saklaw ng hurisdiksiyon ng 2nd ID ng PA.

Ang MT Princess Empress oil tanker na may kargang 800,000 litro ng industrial fuel ay lumubog sa karagatan ng Naujan, Oriental Mindoro noong Pebrero 28 ng taong ito na nagresulta

sa oil spill na nakaapekto sa 13, 755 pamilya na naninirahan sa mga baybaying munisipalidad ng Pola, Gloria, Naujan; Bansud, Bongabong, Roxas, Mansalay at Bulalacao.

Sa ngayon ang oil spill ay nakarating na sa Caluya, Antique at namemeligro na ring maapektuhan ang iba pang mga lugar.

Samantala, ang 203rd Infantry "Bantay Kapayapaan" Brigade ay mobilisa na rin ang 203rd Task Group sa pamamagitan ng Joint Task Force Katagalugan na nag-iimplementa ng "Sagip Kalikasan Oriental Mindoro" katuwang ng mga disaster response teams mula sa 76th Infantry Battalion, 68th Infantry Battalion at 4th Infantry Battalion. **(Edwin Balasa)**



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PH Army pinakilos ang task group kontra oil spill

PINAKILOS na rin ng 2nd Infantry Division (ID) ng Philippine Army (PA) ang kanilang "task group" upang tumulong sa Office of Civil Defense-Region 4B (OCD-R4B) sa kanilang isinagawang cleanup operations sa perwisyong dulot ng oil spill sa Mindoro.

Ayon kay Lt. Col. Hector A. Estolas, hepe ng Public Affairs Office (PAO) ng 2nd ID, sa kasalukuyan, umabot na sa 13,755 pamilya mula sa mga munisipalidad ng Pola, Gloria, Naujan, Bansud, Bongabong, Roxas, Mansalay, at Bulalacao ang apektado ng oil spill. Umabot na rin ito sa Caluya, Antique.

Sundan sa Pahina 13



LIBU-LIBONG PAMILYA NA APEKTADO NG OIL SPILL SA MINDORO, TULUNGAN

LUBHA nang nakakaalarma ang impact ng oil spillage na naganap sa Oriental Mindoro noong Pebrero 28.

Hanggang ngayong araw na sinusulat ang pitak na ito, hindi pa rin nalilinis ang oil spill, na malaki ang posibilidad na umabot sa Batangas at Palawan kung walang mangyayaring organized action para supilin ito.

Ayon sa University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute, aabot sa higit 20,000 ektaryang coral reef, 9,900 ektarya ng mangrove at 6,000 ektarya ng seagrass and maaaring maapektuhan.

Bukod pa ito sa fish kill o pagkalason ng mga isda na maaaring mangyari dahil sa kontaminasyon ng tubig.

□□□

As of March 15, 31,497 na pamilya sa MIMAROPA at Western Visayas ang naapektuhan ng oil spill base sa datos mula sa Office of Civil Defense (OCD).

Ayon naman kay Oriental Mindoro Governor Humerlito Dolor, tinatayang aabot sa

100,000 residente ng probinsya ng Mindoro ang naapektuhan.

Dagdag pa niya, higit sa 100 residente na rin ang nagkaroon ng respiratory-related symptoms at nakaranas ng pagsusuka at pagtatae.

□□□

Naniniwala tayong time is of the essence, at kailangan ng collective action from both government at non-government groups para maagapan at huwag nang lumala pa ang sitwasyon lalo na't ilang libong pamilya at kabuhayan na ang apektado.

Isa sa maaari nating gawin ay ang gamitin ang assistance facilities ng Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) at gamitin din ang Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) program ng pamahalaan para tumulong sa paglilinis.

Bukod sa mga mangingisda, maaari nating maging katuwang ang mga displaced tourism workers, community-based organizations, at iba pang mga naapektuhan ang kabuhayan para sa cleanup at paglalagay ng mga barriers na makakatulong sa pagbawas sa environmental impact at public health risks na kaakibat ng oil spill.

Hindi lang ito localized na problema— SOS call na ito.

□□□

Paalala lamang sa lahat na patuloy pa ring mag-ingat sa paglabas ng bahay, magsuot ng face mask, ugaliing maghugas ng kamay, bigyang-halaga ang kalusugan, at huwag kalilimutang magdasal.

Malalagpasan din natin ito.

Be Safe. Be Well. Be Nice!

□□□

Kung mayroon kayong nais idulog o ipaabot sa inyong abang lingkod, maaari kayong sumulat sa BE NICE TAYO ni Sen. Nancy Binay, BULGAR Bldg., 538 Quezon Ave., Quezon City o mag-email sa benicetayo@gmail.com.

Paalala lamang na sana ay isama ninyo sa inyong mga liham ang inyong contact number upang mas madali namin kayong mapaglingkuran. Always Be Nice!

□□□

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PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF PHILIPPINE COAST GUARD

RESIDENTS help members of government response teams in bringing down oil spill booms or temporary floating barriers to contain marine spills along the coast of Barangay Navotas, Calapan, Oriental Mindoro on 17 March. Authorities confirmed the presence of oil tar balls with a length of 500 meters along the coast believed to be from the ill-fated oil tanker MT Princess Empress that sank off the waters of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on 28 February.



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SAVE CALAPAN: Photo from the Philippine Coast Guard shows teams carrying an improvised oil spill containment boom on the shores of Barangay Navotas, Calapan, Oriental Mindoro on March 17. The Coast Guard, local government and residents are working together to prevent an environmental disaster as the oil spill from the tanker that sank off Naujan waters had reached the city's shorelines last Thursday evening.





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Thousands of families living in Pola, Oriental Mindoro are affected by the disaster caused by oil owned by San Miguel Corp. but two weeks after the sinking of *MT Princess Empress*, not a word has been issued by the conglomerate regarding the disaster.



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Mga hayop apektado ng oil spill sa Mindoro

Apektado rin ang mga hayop sa oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro na nagmula sa lumubog na MT Princess Empress.

Base sa dokumentaryo ng "Born to be Wild", ilang species ng mga ibon ang natagpuang patay at nabalutan ng langis sa ilang komunidad sa naturalang lugar.

Samantalá, hindi pa alam ng mga awtoridad ang epekto ng pagtagas ng langis sa underwater species sapagkat hindi pa ligtas ang sumisid dito.

"If it's not managed properly, we're looking at years. With proper management, probably, it will require three to five years but without proper containment, it can last longer than that. We're looking at decades for complete rehabilitation," pahayag ni Dr. Irene Rodriguez of the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute.



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Documentary offers hope for vanishing mangroves

MANGROVE deforestation is a global crisis, but this scientist-turned-filmmaker has found hope in a small Southern Tagalog town where culture and nature intersect in surprising ways.

The Philippines is the second worst country in terms of mangrove losses in Asean: it suffered a 10.5 percent decline between 1990 and 2010, according to independent studies cited in a recent comprehensive survey. The country is surpassed only by Myanmar, which suffered a 27.6 percent loss between 2000 and 2014.

With mangrove decline continuing largely unchecked, coastal communities that have depended on these forests for generations face losing the heart not just of their food, fuel, shelter, and livelihood, but also of their very culture.

But for Dr. Lemnuel Aragonés, a marine biologist and former director of the University of the Philippines Diliman-College of Science Institute of Environmental Science and Meteorology (UPD-CS IESM), all is not yet lost.

Aragonés's debut documentary, *Bakawan* (the Tagalog term for mangroves), tells the story of the people of Alabat Island in Quezon province, a five-hour drive and an hour's ferry ride away from the nation's capital.

Shot during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, the film delves into the townspeople's renewed relationship with the mangroves that they call home.



VIEW the full teaser trailer of Dr. Lemnuel Aragonés' *Bakawan* at <https://youtu.be/VlnSo3gn73U>. The documentary is set to have its free public premiere on March 27 at 1 pm at the Institute of Biology Auditorium, UP Diliman. UPD-CS IESM PHOTO

With the theme, "Kahalagahan, isyus at pagpapanumbalik," *Bakawan* explores the human story of living in and with Alabat's estuarian mangrove forest.

A collaboration between Aragonés and UP Film Institute Associate Professor and filmmaker Nick Deocampo, *Bakawan* is part of the IESM's 20th founding anniversary celebration this year.

It is the only science-oriented video among the 10 entries to the UP Emerging Interdisciplinary Research Grant's (EIDR's) "Cinema for Education: Rationalizing the Philippine Audio-visual Industry to Promote Inclusive Education Through Film Literacy."

Funded by the UP Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, the Cinema Education research project explored ways to improve audio-visual materials for Philippine schools, such

as by looking at how documentaries could be used to supplement and augment existing teaching and learning methods.

The Covid-19 pandemic emphasized the need to improve the traditional Philippine education system, with educators and students around the globe relying on technology to teach and learn.

With a vision to have an audio-visual industry that complements digital technology in creating educational content, Cinema for Education aims to integrate image-based learning, such as utilizing films and videos, and digital technologies into the current word-based Philippine education system.

"We are exploring ways to maximize the utility of cinema for education by promoting inclusive education in the Philippines," Aragonés explained.



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PHL eco-social warriors bag Eco-Business A-List 2022 award

By RODERICK L. ABAD
Contributor

SUSTAINABILITY champions, entrepreneurs and social innovators from the Philippines who lead and represent both the public and private sectors that create positive impacts across the Asia Pacific (AsPac) region for prioritizing the environment and society, have been recognized and celebrated at the fourth edition of the Eco-Business A-List.

Mary Jean Feliciano, vice mayor of Brooke's Point town in Palawan, was named among the 10 winners in the Eco-Business A-List 2022 for protecting communities in her hometown from unsustainable mining.

The event was held at a hybrid awards ceremony at a hotel in Singapore on March 3 with participants including local and international media.

It can be recalled that Feliciano was suspended from her mayoralty post without pay after the Ombudsman ruled in July 2021 that she went beyond her mandate for taking actions against Ipilan Nickel Corp., a subsidiary of Global Ferronickel Holdings.

Feliciano enforced in 2018 a cease-and-desist, closure and demolition orders against the firm that was reported a year prior by local residents for clearing forests in its concession bounded within Mount Mantalingahan Protected Landscape, a conservation area that acts as the town's watershed.

She returned to the City Hall after a landslide victory in her vice-mayoral bid in the May 9 elections last year.

"It hurts to be suspended for doing what is right," she said. "But I am happy that the people believe in me and believe in my message that we should protect Brook's Point and we should protect our mountains, the rivers, and the trees that gives us abundance."

Joining Feliciano in the same category was GerWeiss Motors Corp. Chief Executive Officer Sean Gabriel Villoria for his mission to electrify three-wheelers in the Philippines.

Meanwhile, Ann Adeline Dumaliang, trustee of Masungi Georeserve; and Niels Gabriel Nable, head of sustainability reporting and partnerships at Meralco, completed the roster of 10 honorees for the Eco-

Business Youth A-List 2022.

The former was feted for her conservation efforts in the country's last green corridor, while the latter was recognized for raising sustainability and environmental, social and governance reporting practices in the private sector.

The Filipino awardees in the 2022 Eco-Business A-List and A-List Youth bested more than 120 nominees across the AsPac region, including China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

According to Eco-Business Founder and Managing Director Jessica Cheam, they came from diverse backgrounds yet one in their commitment to create a positive impact in their respective fields.

"Faced with urgent challenges from the climate crisis to resource use and improving livelihoods, it is more important than ever for those in decision-making positions to demonstrate sustainability leadership," she said.

"We hope that by spotlighting the efforts of these individuals, others will also be inspired," Cheam added.



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Masungi defender Asia-Pacific's young among eco-champions



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Ann Dumaliang, Managing Trustee of Masungi Georeserve Foundation, was recognized as one of 10 Asia-Pacific youth who are creating impact in environmental and social sustainability “in provinces and cities outside urban capitals.”

The award was given during the Eco-Business Youth A-List Awards Ceremony held last 3 March 2023 at the Four Seasons Hotel in Singapore.

The judging panel praised Masungi’s efforts that led to the cancellation of three Mineral Production Sharing Agreements in the Masungi Geopark Project and the Upper Marikina Watershed, which are considered to be few of the remaining green corridors close to Metro Manila.

In February 2023, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources confirmed the cancellation of the MPSAs occupying more than 1,300 hectares of the protected area.

This comes after a three-year campaign against quarrying that amassed support from more than 20,000 citizens and groups, including government, environment, education, and indigenous leaders.

“We recognize that it is worth taking a few hits for the benefit of the greater good, to endure the threats and backlash just to make things happen. We are thankful for the thousands of Filipinos who have supported our campaign. That has been really inspiring,” Dumaliang said.

Along with fellow youth A-listers, Dumaliang also served as a panelist in a plenary discussion on sustainability leadership and shared current issues the foundation is facing.

‘We recognize that it is worth taking a few hits for the benefit of the greater good, to endure the threats and backlash just to make things happen,’ said Ann Dumaliang, Managing Trustee of Masungi Georeserve Foundation.

Earlier this February, the government’s Bureau of Corrections expressed plans to construct its headquarters in the conservation area, which was met with opposition from several environmental groups and citizens.

Following a series of new campaigns led by Masungi volunteers and supporters, BuCor officer-in-charge Gregorio Catapang Jr. announced on 7 March 2023 that it is deferring its plans to build its facilities in the area.

Awardees of the Youth A-List include Bintang Ekananda, Director and Co-founder of Alner; Gary Benchehib, Co-founder of Sungai Watch; Kate Yeo, Founder of BYOBottle Campaign; Melati Wijsen, Co-founder of Bye-bye Plastic Bags and YOUTHOPIA; Neo Xiaoyun, Facilitator and Programmes Executive of The Untamed Paths; Niels Gabriel Nable, Head of Sustainability Reporting at the Manila Electric Company; Tan Shi-Zhou, Global Sustainability Consultant at Razer Inc.; Vriko Yu, Chief Executive Officer and Co-founder of Archireef; and Zagy Berian, Founder of Society of Renewable Energy.



Established in 2009, Eco-Business is Asia Pacific’s largest media and business intelligence organization dedicated to sustainable development and Environmental, Social, and Governance performance.

Now in its fourth year, the Eco-Business A-List is a who’s who of the most influential individuals driving the sustainability agenda in Asia Pacific. Each year, it recognizes the movers and shakers who have demonstrated outstanding results in driving positive change in their respective fields over the past 12 months.





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PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF ECO-BUSINESS

ANN Dumaliang, Managing Trustee of Masungi Georeserve Foundation (left photo, receiving award), was recognized as one of 10 Asia-Pacific youth who are creating impact in environmental and social sustainability 'in provinces and cities outside urban capitals,' at the Eco-Business Youth A-List Awards Ceremony last 3 March in Singapore.



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Explain water permit, NWRB orders Bohol LGU

The National Water Resources Board (NWRB) has ordered the municipal government of Balilihan in Bohol to explain the permit it issued to extract water from the neighboring town of Sevilla.

In a petition dated Jan. 18, the Sevilla local government unit (LGU) asked the NWRB to restrain Balilihan from extracting water from Bugwak Spring in Barangay Magsaysay. It said Balilihan does not have a water permit issued by the NWRB.

Aside from lack of proper permit, the Sevilla LGU said requirements of posting and sending of notice under Section 9 of the amended implementing rules and regulations of the Water Code were not complied with.

The case against the LGU of Balilihan started in May 2022 when residents of Barangay Magsaysay reported construction works, including the installation of water lines, in their community to Mayor Juliet Dano.

A private lot owner had earlier sued the Balilihan LGU for building a P95-million water facility on its property.

- Bella Cariaso



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Boosting dev't cooperation on climate action

THE Climate Change Commission and the Embassy of France and Micronesia have expressed commitment to strengthen partnership and development cooperation on climate action.

CCC Vice Chairman and Executive Director Robert E.A. Borje received French Amb. Michele Boccoz and exchanged priorities and strategies for implementing local climate action.

"We express our gratitude to the government of France and the French Development Agency for supporting the Philippines in implementing policy initiatives and sustainable solutions to address major climate and environmental challenges in the country," Borje said.

Among the priorities of CCC and French Embassy is the development and updating of risk-informed Local Climate Change Action Plans by local government units.

Through AFD's ongoing technical support, LGUs would be provided with capacity development and enhancement activities, as well as tools which are useful in the formulation and updating of LCCAPs.

"AFD will continuously provide necessary assistance to the CCC in policy formulation and updating, as well as in enhancing local capacities on LCCAP development towards improved climate resilience," Boccoz said.

As of March 2, 1,399 or 81.57 percent of the 1,715 LGUs had submitted their LCCAPs to the CCC. Currently, the LCCAP Quality Assurance Mechanism is being developed based on guidelines set by CCC and DILG.

Following the Philippines Country Climate and Development Report by the World Bank Group, both officials explored other possible areas of collaboration aligned with the priorities

specified in Chapter 15 of the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028, such as the updating of the National Framework Strategy on Climate Change and the Nationally Determined Contribution.

The NFSCC and the NDC are policies and frameworks which serve as basis of local climate action plans.

Consistent with the pronouncements of President Marcos on strengthening cooperation with allied countries and development partners, the CCC institutionalized a contact group called "ENACT: Empowering Nurtured Alliance for Climate Action and Transformation".

ENACT would serve as a platform among CCC, embassies and development partners to discuss, collaborate, and collectively implement investment-led transformative climate action.



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Reducing food waste starts at home

Food waste and hunger are problems around the world, including the Philippines.

A Food Consumption Survey of the Department of Science and Technology-Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-FNRI) states: 1,717 metric tons of food are wasted every day in the Philippines.

Every Filipino wastes one tablespoon or 14 grams of rice every day, accounting for P23 million a day worth of wasted rice a day, according to the WWF Philippines website.

Last week, a study conducted by the DOST-FNRI showed that rice, vegetables and meat are the top three most wasted food. The study is titled "Does plate waste matter: A two-stage cluster survey to assess the household plate waste in the Philippines." Plate waste is the edible portions of food which are left after a household has finished a meal.

The Philippines was ranked 69 of 119 countries with a serious level of hunger incidence by the Global Hunger Index of 2018.

About 11.8 percent of Filipino families, or an estimated three million households, experienced hunger in the fourth quarter of 2022, according to the results of the Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey released in January 2023.

The DOST-FNRI study reveals many uncomfortable truths about the factors that cause food waste in the country with a poverty incidence of 18.1 percent or around 19.99 million Filipinos. (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021).

Although these are obvious factors, it's worth reading them again: Larger meal portion size, a greater number of household members, and higher wealth status lead to food waste.

There is more food wasted in households with five or more members; smaller households are more efficient in consuming food. Rice wastage is more common in households with a

head of 50 to 69 year old compared to those with a younger household head.

The initiative to reduce food waste starts at home. WWF Philippines lists ways to do that:

- Buy "ugly produce" or oddly-shaped produce, which are just as nutritious; those will end up in the thrash if not purchased.

- Plan your meals and create a shopping list to avoid buying what is not needed that will be thrown away. Practice FIFO (first in, first out) to avoid food spoilage.

- Know your family's serving size to reduce what you throw away after a meal.

- Cook leftovers, transforming them into another dish.

- Share excess food; avoid stashing them in the ref only to be thrown days later after it becomes spoiled food.

Meanwhile, Senator Loren Legarda has filed Senate Bill 240 or the Zero Food Waste Act of 2022, aiming to adopt a system that promotes food waste reduction through redistribution and recycling. "The measure also seeks to task specific government agencies to undertake the National Zero Food Waste Campaign and raise awareness of these issues and construct a Food-related Business Waste Reduction Strategy and a Household and Local Government Unit Waste Reduction Strategy."

"Millions of Filipinos under poverty and experiencing food insecurity are struggling to be fed, and the food that is simply thrown away or discarded might actually be enough to feed them," Dr. Imelda Angeles Agdeppa, lead researcher, Director IV and Scientist IV of DOST-FNRI, said.

The top three food wasted - rice, vegetables and meat - can become real meals for the hungry.

Today, do your share in reducing food waste. Check what you have at home before buying new food stuff.



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Roni Santiago
MANILA BULLETIN
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