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Mining groups seek update of mining law

By DANESSA RIVERA

As the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) reviews the decades old Philippine mining law, both pro and anti-mining groups are in agreement that the measure must be updated amid new trends and the impact of climate change.

The divergence between the two sides lie in what should "responsible mining" means for the country, which is part of the review of the mining law.

In a recent luncheon of the Philippine Mining Club, DENR Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said the review of mining laws aims to address the gaps in the procedures, in the people aspect of mining and in the economic and financial impact delivered to our country.

The review is also timely as the Marcos administration sees the mining sector's high growth potential. "The net effect of the review is to have a positive effect on the industry. That is the direction of this government - mining as a contributor to economic recovery. The review of the legislation is really to enhance the positive contributions of the sector to the country's development plan," Loyzaga said.

By June, updates on the Philippine mining law review will be communicated by the DENR.

"We will be releasing our first communications on the review in June. But we will not stop in June. The law has been in place since 1995. There is a lot to review on this law," Loyzaga said.

The "rolling" review is because the Philippine Mining Act will be updated along with other environmental laws and in consultation within and outside the agency.

"We do not review the Philippine mining law in isolation. There's the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Solid Waste Management Act. All of

these intersect with each other. We cannot just review the mining law solely," Loyzaga said.

"The way we work now in the department is that the bureaus must consult each other. Our processes and procedures are taking a little longer - you will understand that the principle of intersectionality has to do with dealing with vulnerabilities and risks in its many dimensions. We cannot do a bureau mandate solely in asylum. We have to intersect with each other to determine how good a job are we doing," she said.

The Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) welcomed the review of the country's mining law.

"We appreciate the attention being put into mining now. We understand where the Secretary is coming from. The mining act is almost 30 years old. It is time for a review," COMP executive director Ronald Recidoro said in an interview.

However, the COMP said the review should be a balanced one.

"It has to be a rational review. There are risks to opening up the law for a review. Areas of social development, environmental protection, those are (the ones that need) to be updated. We need to bring the mining act up to speed with latest regulations, global trends," Recidoro said.

Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM) is also supporting the DENR in pushing for initiatives to review current mining policies.

"Our alliance feels RA 7942 is the root cause of many conflicts now in mining-affected areas, because the Philippine Mining Act fails to address the reality and new context of climate change impacts and disasters due to permanent changes in land-use," ATM national coordinator Jaybee Garganera said in a text message.

However, the amendment on the Philippine Mining Act should take into account a

new measure proposed in Congress, according to the anti-mining group.

"We believe that the proposed Alternative Minerals Management bill now under deliberations at the House of Representatives, at the House Committee on Natural Resources, captures the most comprehensive proposals enact a new mining law. In essence, together with the legislative advocacy group SoS-YB (Save our Sovereignty-Yamang Bayan), we propose a paradigm shift from 'profiting from minerals' to 'ensuring that Filipinos benefit from the minerals we extract,'" Garganera said.

Along with the review of the mining law, the DENR is also pushing for a Philippine-specific definition of "responsible mining."

Loyzaga said the agency would sit down with the mining industry to lay down the country's own definition of responsible mining.

"While the aim is for responsible mining within the context of our goals for inclusive, resilient and sustainable development, our main task moving forward is to frame and define together with all of you what responsible mining truly is in our country," she said.

The environment chief said the mining industry is in a unique position to achieve inclusive, resilient and sustainable development in the country.

"The DENR affirms our commitment toward responsible mining through the implementation of pro-people, pro-environment, and science-based policies and programs. We believe in evidence informed and innovative approaches. We believe in science and technology and also local and traditional knowledge and how both should inform both policy and practice," Loyzaga said.

One way of achieving responsible mining is pursuing

the mining industry's Social Development and Management Program (SDMP).

SDMP is the five-year plan of mining contractors and permit holders, which contains plans to support the development and empowerment of host and neighboring communities.

"The development trajectory of each of the different local communities in which you all are working are one of those contexts that need to be closely studied in order for this industry to be called responsible," Loyzaga said.

However, the SDMP needs to be reviewed to be able to achieve its goal, COMP's Recidoro said.

He said a lot of the projects implemented through the SDMP are "misguided" and "unsustainable."

"It just needs to be directed with proper planning, proper visioning. That's one of the areas where we think improvement is needed. We need to properly benchmark development, account for gender balance. Implement proper standards, proper regulations so that we can be assured of sustainable development. SDMP, it's really ripe for review," Recidoro said.

But for anti-mining groups, responsible mining is just fake news.

"From our experience, 'responsible mining' is a complex attempt of the mining industry to re-brand itself and a fallback position, as they were not able to defend their original proposal of 'sustainable mining,'" ATM's Garganera said.

The group said there is no legal definition of 'responsible mining' so there are no parameters to measure if companies are doing or complying with it.

"If we can't measure it, then it is almost impossible to hold anyone - either government or mining corporations - accountable if a mining project fails to comply with responsible mining," Garganera said.



BACK TO THE WILD

PINSKER'S HAWK-EAGLE RESCUED, FREED NEAR MT. APO

By Edwin O. Fernandez
@InqNational

COTABATO CITY—A young Pinsker's hawk-eagle (*Nisaetus pinskeri*) that strayed in an open farmland in Barangay Amabel of Magpet town in Cotabato province on March 14 was rescued by a farmer in the area, an environment official said.

The farmer took care of the bird that was already too weak to fly and fed it before he brought the raptor to the town's Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office, according to Rosie Camiguing, chief of the protected and wildlife unit of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato Province, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos City).

Pinsker's hawk-eagle, also known as Philippine hawk-eagle or Mindanao hawk-eagle, is a species of bird of prey in the family of *Accipitridae*. It is considered endangered, with the current population reaching only between 600 to 800 in the wild based on the data of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, Camiguing said.

Strength regained

When Mylene Reniedo, Magpet town veterinarian, checked on the juvenile raptor as soon as it reached her office, the bird—which measured 63 centimeters long, had a 125

cm wingspan and weighed 1.2 kilograms—had already regained its strength.

Reniedo declared the raptor healthy and ready to be sent back to its natural habitat.

It has been the standard procedure in Magpet that whenever a rescued wildlife is found and assessed to be healthy, it should immediately be released back to the wild to avoid further stress to the animal that may cause it more harm, Camiguing said.

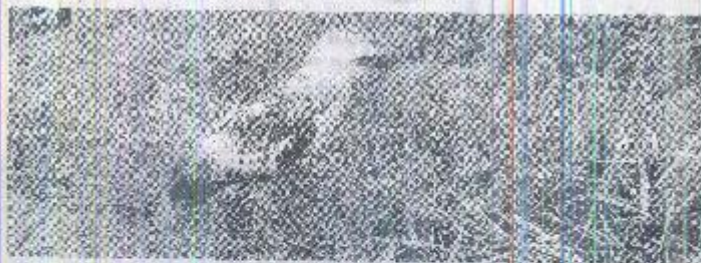
Magpet town is at the foot of Mt. Apo, the country's highest peak, where the Philippine eagles thrive.

Camiguing said she and other environment personnel in the town freed the rescued eagle back to the wild on Wednesday.

DENR regional director Felix Alicer said he was delighted that farmers and other residents in the town were already aware that endangered species rescued or captured must be turned over to the DENR.

"Our information drive has paid off," Alicer said.

In Cotabato province, where some of the endangered wildlife like the Philippine eagle and tarsiers thrive, the provincial environment and natural resources office has organized two groups for simultaneous wildlife lectures on Republic Act No. 9147 (Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act) in Kidapawan City, Matalam, Arakan and Midsayap this month. INQ



READY TO FLY The rescued Pinsker's hawk-eagle, which was weak and unable to fly when it strayed into a farmer's land in Magpet, Cotabato, on March 14, is freed on Wednesday after an examination by the municipal veterinarian. —PHOTO COURTESY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES



US Coast Guard eyes aid in oil spill response

By EVELYN MACAIRAN

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The United States Coast Guard (USCG) will be looking into the country's ongoing operation to contain the massive oil spill from the sunken *MT Princess Empress* off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, during a meeting with the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) scheduled today.

Rear Admiral Armand Balilo, PCG spokesperson, confirmed yesterday that USCG officials are set to pay a courtesy call on Admiral Artemio Abu, during which the PCG will be giving a presentation on the Philippines' oil spill response.

"We would just be making a presentation and there would be an executive briefing. They (USCG and Abu) would be briefed on the situation," said Balilo, adding that nothing is yet certain on "what topics they would discuss."

Earlier, Abu wrote to the US embassy to request for assistance in the oil spill cleanup.

"It will be up to the US Coast Guard on how it would respond to the request of the Commandant - if they will immediately respond and what kind of assistance they could extend," Balilo said. "What is important is they would know the situation in the area."

At present, while there are oil spill booms in the vicinity of Pola, Oriental Mindoro, where the oil slick from the motor tanker has drifted, these

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are removed in the evening, said the PCG spokesman.

Once the oil spill booms are removed,

it creates the possibility that the oil would be able to reach shore, he said.

He explained that the oil spill booms were put in place by the company of *MT Princess Empress*, RDC Reield Marine Services, and that it also hired tugboats to keep the booms in place.

But there are limitations. At nighttime the waves become bigger and the tugboats have to leave the area. If there are no tugboats to keep the oil spill booms in place, these would drift out to sea.

The PCG is there to assist in the cleanup and does not have big oil spill booms that could have prevented the oil from crossing over and reaching the shorelines.

Balilo is hoping that the arrival of the remotely operated vessel (ROV) from Japan would solve the problem.

"From what I heard from the

owner of the vessel, the ROV has siphoning capability so it could siphon the oil from the water," he said.

The *Princess Empress* was reportedly carrying 900,000 liters of industrial oil when it sank last Feb. 28 some 400 meters deep in the waters of Naujan town.

Yesterday, an expert from the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) warned that the country's fish supply would be affected once the oil slick reaches the Verde Island Passage (VIP).

In a radio interview, UP-MSI associate professor Irene Rodriguez said that based on the spill's trajectory, the oil slick is heading northward with Calapan possibly receiving most of it from March 20 to 22.

"Based on our observation on the extent of the oil slick, the

tanker continues to discharge oil," said Rodriguez, adding that with the weakening of the *amihan*, water currents would move the oil slick toward Calapan and Puerto Galera in Oriental Mindoro and the shores of Batangas.

She said that once the oil slick reaches VIP - the body of water between the two provinces - it will immediately result in the death of marine resources at the water's surface, including eggs, juveniles and other organisms.

"For the long-term impact, if the oil contaminates the Verde Island Passage, it will have an impact on the source of food and diversity in the area as the (VIP) is called the center of center of marine biodiversity. As the center, all the marine resources in the Verde Island Passage are concentrated and very important in our food source and the livelihood of af-



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affected residents," Rodriguez added.

The UP-MSI said that the damage from the oil spill may affect endemic species found only in the Philippines as well as species yet to be discovered.

"More than the food source, the decline in the population of marine resources can affect the ecosystem that provides the breeding ground, nursery ground and habitat for marine organisms," she noted.

Rodriguez said that the use of remotely operated vehicle is crucial to finally stop the leakage and seal the sunken vessel.

"It's been more than two weeks and it is now March 19. We still have a window of opportunity as we are at the end of amihan. We should take advantage while the area is still calm. We need to do all the things we can implement to control the spread of oil slick," Rodriguez said.

She also suggested that the government should ban all vessels transporting oil from passing the VIP to protect the area.

"Big vessels should avoid the Verde Island Passage and instead use the west side of Occidental Mindoro. Although it is a longer route, it is safer. Crew members should also be trained on how to handle such situations," she said.

Based on the latest bulletin of the UP-MSI, westward currents along the coast of northern Mindoro toward the VIP are forecast to be more pronounced.

'See you in court'

In Pola, Mayor Jennifer Cruz said yesterday she is decided on filing charges against the owners of the sunken vessel over the destruction caused by the oil slick over the municipality.

"We will see them in court," Cruz said in a radio interview, noting how Pola has not even received any compensatory assistance from the owners of *MT Princess Empress* 20 days after it sank and leaked oil.

"There is none," Cruz replied when asked if any form of recompense was extended by the vessel's owners to the town adversely affected by the oil slick. "Until now, I have yet to see them," she added.

The mayor revealed that the Department of Justice and National Bureau of Investigation are already busy building up a case.

"The DOJ and the NBI are conducting the investigation so that justice will be given to our town through the filing of a case against them," she said.

Cruz bemoaned the oil spill's impact on Pola as having a domino effect. "Right now, we are encountering more problems. It's not only on food. Our problem becomes bigger, it has a domino effect as all are affected, including tourism and employment," she said.

She emphasized that long-term assistance should be given to the fisherfolk displaced by the fishing ban. Pola has a total of 533 hectares of mangrove areas and a 50-kilometer shoreline affected by the oil slick.

"We want alternative programs for our fisherfolks as experts said the cleanup will last for six months. This means our fishermen will have no source of income. Alternative livelihood programs should be given to the affected residents," Cruz said.

Villar: Insurance payment may be in jeopardy

However, Sen. Cynthia Villar said the company that owns the ill-fated *Princess Empress* may not be able to collect insurance that it urgently needs to compensate both local government units and families affected by the oil spill.

The Senate committee on environment, chaired by Villar, launched an inquiry last week into the sinking of the tanker that is now causing an environmental disaster.

During the hearing, officials of the Maritime Industry Authority and the PCG admitted that RDC Reield Maritime Services did not have an updated certificate of public convenience (CPC), which is one of the requirements for such vessels to sail.

"Definitely (RDC) must pay compensation but the problem is that it is a small company. Even if they give all their resources, it will not be enough. The damage is in the billions (of pesos)," Villar, speaking in Filipino, told *dzBB* radio yesterday.

"There is damage to our coral reefs, to our environment—this is huge. I don't think they can survive and will go bankrupt if they don't have insurance," she said, adding the committee will verify reports that the insurer has an office in the country.

The senator said if the insurance company is "kind, maybe it will pay but based on experience," such firms find all possible ways not to pay their clients.

Reports said RDC executives assured provincial officials that they have some \$1 billion in insurance but senators are skeptical due to the company's lack of a CPC for the sunken tanker.

The company has a CPC but regulations require that it be amended to reflect the acquisition of a new vessel. The *Princess Empress* was acquired last November and the company filed an application for an amended CPC in December but MARINA officials told the hearing the papers are still being processed when the mishap occurred.

— With Bella Cariaso, Paolo Romero



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Abante

— HINO SA BAYAN —



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Barzaga: PCG, Marina swak sa gross negligence

COVER-UP SA MINDORO

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OIL SPILL SUMINGAW

COVER-UP SA MINDORO OIL SPILL SUMINGAW

INUSISA ni Cavite Rep. Elpidio "Pidi" Barzaga Jr. na tila nagkaroon ng cover-up upang hindi lumaktang ang pananagutan ng may-ari ng MT Princess Empress, Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) at Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) sa paglubog ng oil tanker na nagdulot ng malawakang oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro at mga kalapit na lalawigan.

Ayon kay Barzaga, chairman ng House committee on natural resource, hanggang ngayon ay hindi pa rin lumilitaw ang kapitan ng oil tanker upang makapagbigay ng detalye sa mga awtoridad hinggil sa mga kaga-

napan bago lumubog ang barko sa karagatan ng Oriental Mindoro noong Pebrero 28.

Malaking isyu rin aniya lang bakit ngayon lang lumabas na kolorum o walang certificate of public convenience ang MT Princess Express at ang pagtatago ng impormasyong hindi sumampa ang mga tauhan ng PCG upang inspeksyunin ang barko bago ito nag-

layag. "Definitely (cover-up) sapagkat up to now hindi nagsasalita ang kapitan. Pagkatapos 'yong issue regarding the certificate of public convenience ngayon lang lumabas at lumabas din sa hearing sa Senado na talagang

'yong pre-departure check list na dapat ginawa ng Philippine Coast Guard ay hindi nila ginawa. Unchecked 'yong seven boxes,' paliwanag ni Barzaga sa interview ng DZBB nitong Linggo, Marso 19.

"Hindi ito simple negligence, it is gross negligence at nakita naman natin ang epekto," dagdag ni Barzaga hinggil sa naging kapabayaang PCG at Marina.

Aniya, tambak na kaso ang maaaring harapin ng RDC Reield Marine Services, ang operator ng lumubog na oil tanker.

Maging si Senadora

Cynthia Villar, chair ng Senate committee on environment, natural resources and climate change, nanindigan na maaaring makasuhan ang PCG at ang Marina.

Naniniwala rin ang senadora na peke ang CPC ng MT Princess Express na nilabas ng PCG sa media.

"Paano magkakaroon ng permit to operate eh hindi binigyan ng Marina, eh Marina ang nagbibigay ng permit to operate? Bakit ang Coast Guard ang magsasabi na meron silang permit to operate, baka fake!" bululas ni Villar. (Dindo Matining)



Princess Empress owner tatambakan ng criminal, civil case

Tuloy ang pagsasampa ng mga kaso ng lokal na pamahalaan ng Oriental Mindoro at mga residente laban sa kompanya na nasa likod ng lumubog na barko na siyang pinagmumulan ngayon ng oil spill.

Sinabi ni Oriental Mindoro Governor Humerlito Dolor na ikinakasa na nila ang mga criminal at civil case laban sa RDC Reield Marine Services na siyang nagmamay-ari ng MT Princess Empress.

Ayon kay Dolor, maaari naman magsampa ang Philippine Coast Guard o kahit sino pa na sibilyan ng kaso pare sa pinsalang dulot ng oil spill.

Nagkakausap umano sa pagsasampa ng reklamo ang mga bayan at barangay sa Oriental Mindoro na appektado ng pagkalat ng langis sa dagat.

Sa ngayon, ani Dolor, prayoridad na matapos ang clean-up drive at ang paninigurado na hindi na makakapunta ang langis sa tabi ng dagat.

Samantala, inihayag ng University

of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) na maaaring umabot sa Puerto Galera at Batangas ang oil spill.

"Based on projections, ang oil slick ay posibleng madala towards the north. So, pa-hilaga ang direksyon ng oil slick at ito ay maaaring makaapekto sa munisipalidad o coastal environments ng Calapan, Puerto Galera, at areas sa Batangas," paliwanag ni UP-MSI associate professor Dr. Irene Rodriguez sa panayam ng dzBB ni-rog Linggo.

Inihayag din ng UP-MSI na patuloy ang pagtagas ng langis mula sa lumubog na MT Princess Empress.

Batay umano sa pinakahuling satellite image noong Marso 15, nakitang may tumatagas pa na langis mula sa lumubog na barko tungkaya't kinakailangang magapen ito upang hindi na makarating pa sa ibang lugar at lumawak ang pinsala sa karagatan. (Catherine Reyes/Dolly Cabreza)



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Amerika at S. Korea tutulong sa oil spill clean-up sa Oriental Mindoro

NAGPAHAYAG ng intensyong tumulong sa oil spill clean-up sa Oriental Mindoro ang Estados Unidos at South Korea.

Ayon kay Office of Civil Defense Information officer Diego Agustin Mariano, nasa Pilipinas pa rin ang desisyon kung papahintutatang tumulong sa clean-up ang ulahwang nahanggitan na bansa.

Ayon kay Mariano, sa ngayon nasa bansa na kasi ang ilang eksperto mula sa Japan upang tumulong sa oil spill clean-up.

Sa ngayon, nakoy na ng Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) ang eksaktong lokasyon nang pinaghiubagan ng MI Princess Empress kung saan base sa kanilang pagtaya mayroon pa ring tamatugas na langis mula dito.

Kasunod nito, doble kayod ang mga otoridad upang malinis ang oil spill sa posibleng umabot ng taon bago tuluyang mawala sa karagatan.

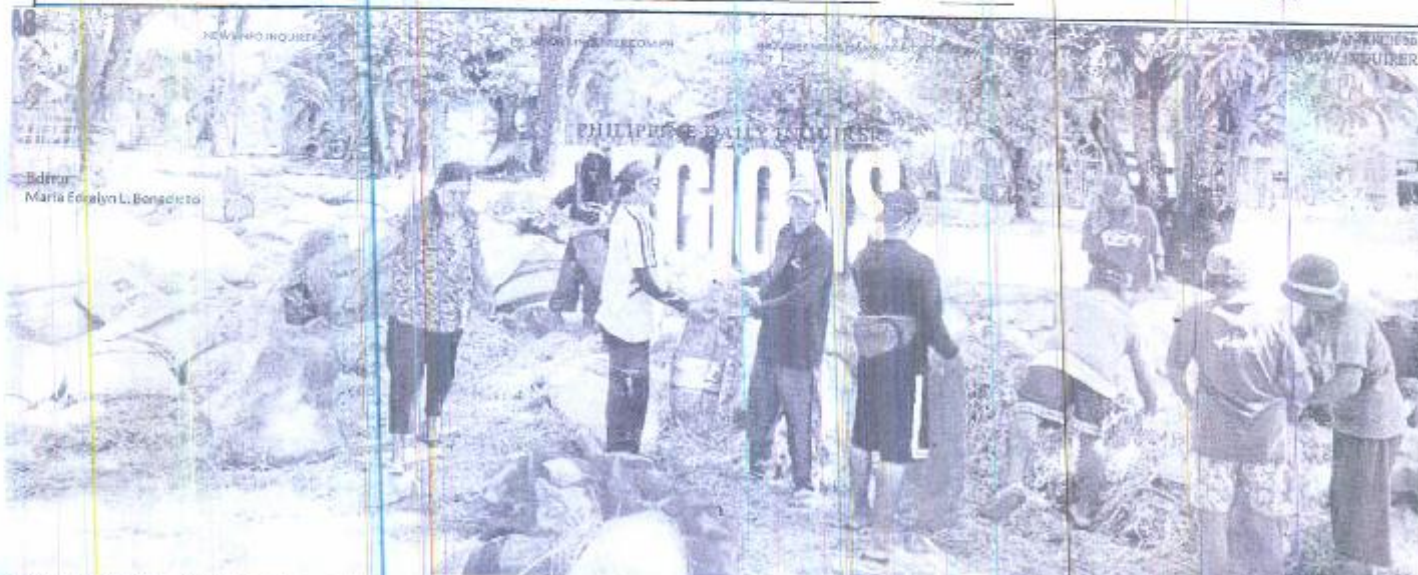
Sa pinakahuling datos ng National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, sumampa na sa mahigit 31,000 mga pamilya sa MIMAROPA at Western Visayas ang naapektuhan ng mawakang oil spill sa Oriental Mindoro.



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COMMUNITY EFFORT Residents of the coastal village of Navotas in Calapan City in Oriental Mindoro province work together on March 15 to make improvised oil spill booms to protect their shores from the oil spill coming from a fuel tanker that sank off Naujan town on Feb. 28. —NERI MAGBANUA/CONTRIBUTOR

More Calapan areas seen to be hit by spill

Local execs, residents join hands to protect coastline as UP-MSI says industrial oil still leaking from sunken fuel tanker

By **Madonna T. Virola**
@mvirolaINQ

CITY OF CALAPAN—Officials and residents here have doubled their efforts to protect their coastal communities as the threat of more spilled industrial oil reaching its shores loomed with the end of the "amihan" or the northeast monsoon.

Traces of oil spill from MT Princess Empress, which carried 800,000 liters of industrial fuel when sank off the town of Naujan in Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28, has reached this provincial capital on Thursday, with city workers, residents and Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) personnel immediately mobilized to clean up the waters.

But efforts to ward it off became more urgent after the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI), warned in a bulletin on Saturday night that more oil spill was expected to reach this city's shores in three days.

"Oil spill trajectories for March 16 to [March] 22 shows a northward shift with Calapan possibly receiving most of the oil from March 20 to [March] 22," said the bulletin.

'More pronounced'

The UP-MSI said the latest satellite image on March 15 showed that the oil was "still leaking out of the sunken vessel (MT Princess Empress)."

Calapan, some 23 kilometers from where the oil tanker sank, was the latest locality affected by the oil spill that had so far damaged the waters and coastal resources of 10 towns in Oriental Mindoro, affecting the livelihood of nearly 30,000 residents.

The spill has also reached the shores of Caluya town in Antique province, where some

P4 million worth of farmed seaweeds were damaged; and the waters of Palawan.

The UP-MSI also warned that the westward direction of current along the coast of northern Mindoro leading to the Verde Island Passage, the marine resource-rich corridor between Mindoro Island and Batangas, became "more pronounced for this period."

The institute said stopping the seepage of oil from the tanker should be a priority "before the end of the amihan season, otherwise more critical biodiversity areas along the Verde Island Passage may be affected."

PCG Commodore Geronimo Tuvilla, head of the Incident Management Team in Oriental Mindoro, told local officials in a meeting here on Saturday that the remote operated vehicle (ROV) that would help locate the oil tanker, estimated to have sank at a depth of 400 meters, was expected to arrive on March 20. The ROV would be accompanied by its Japanese operators, he said.

Proactive mode

Calapan Mayor Malou Morillo, in a social media post on Sunday, said they had been on the proactive mode by employing various ways to prevent the oil spill from causing more damage to their coastal areas.

Morillo said they had been mobilizing communities and partner agencies in producing more improvised spill booms made from rice straws, ropes, empty plastic bottles and sacks to protect the city's waters.

City Health Officer Dr. Basilia Llanto advised residents in affected areas to wear protective N95 masks, especially those with respiratory conditions to avoid inhaling the toxic chemical fumes of the oil.

The city has also procured personal protective equipment, gloves and protective boots that would be used by government workers and volunteers involved in the cleanup work.

Local gas stations and depot were also asked to donate drums and barrels where the collected oil clamps would be stored.

While the oil spill was not yet severe, the city government advised residents to be careful in buying fish and check them thoroughly for traces or scent of oil.

Morillo, in a televised program on Sunday, said local fishers who have trouble selling their catch could "bring them to the city hall and we will buy them."

She assured food packs had been readied for distribution to families whose livelihood would be affected by the spill.

Recovery in sight

In Antique, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) was optimistic the seaweed industry in Caluyan town would recover soon.

BFAR-Western Visayas Director Remia Aparri said most of the oil in the waters surrounding Barangays Semirara, Sibolo and Tinogboc have been cleaned up, with some 50 drums of oil collected from Tinogboc and Sibolo.

As of March 7, damage sustained by 73 fishers and seaweed growers in Caluya has reached P4,080,500, he said.

He stressed it was still unsafe to consume fish from oil spill-affected areas.

Caluya Mayor Rigil Kent Lim, on March 4, temporarily banned fishing activities in the town's waters until further notice. Fishers have to wait for the BFAR's advisory when it would be safe to go fishing again, Aparri said.

Environmental groups have been urging the government to initiate legal action that would compel the tanker's owner, RDC Reield Marine Services Inc., to pay not just for the cleanup but for the damage it caused to affected communities.

No assurance

However, Sen. Cynthia Villar on Sunday doubted if RDC would be able to collect its \$1-billion insurance for the sunken vessel to compensate fishermen and residents affected by the oil spill since MT Princess Empress had no certificate of public convenience (CPC) from the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina).

"Will the insurance company pay you if you did not have a permit to operate?" Villar asked.

Villar, who spearheaded the Senate Inquiry into the Feb. 28 sea tragedy, said RDC is a "small company" that might go bankrupt due to the massive oil spill.

"Even if they give up all the assets of their company, that will not be enough for the damages this has caused," she said in a radio interview.

According to Villar, she got an "informal" report supposedly from Marina, which showed that MT Princess Empress was manufactured by a small shipyard in Bataan province that has no capability to build an oil tanker.

She questioned the authenticity of the sunken ship's CPC that the PCG had shared to the media last week, adding: "I spoke to Marina and they confirmed that the ship had no permit."

She said the about 30,000 affected fishermen would have to find another way to earn a living for the next six months, as various state agencies were still trying to contain the oil spill. —WITH REPORTS FROM JOEY MARZAN AND MARLON RAMOS (INQ)



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More oil slicks to reach Calapan this week — experts

By ELISA K. CABATO, HANNAH TORREGOZA, and ELLSON QUISMORIO

The coasts of Calapan City, Oriental Mindoro could receive more oil slicks from sunken MT Princess Empress on March 20 to 22, the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP MSI) warned in its bulletin on Saturday, March 18.

"Oil spill trajectories for March 16-22 show a northward shift with Calapan possibly receiving most of the oil from March 20-22," it said.

Moreover, the westward currents along the coast of northern Mindoro towards the Verde Island Passage were also seen to be more evident during this period.

"The Amihan winds, which contained most of the oil to the coasts of Nauhan and Pola in the previous weeks, are now more variable, allowing the oil to spread northwards," the UP MSI added.

The institute also noted that the Amihan season has a critical role in the effects of the oil slick on the biodiversity of Verde Island Passage.

"It is critical to stop the seepage before the end of the Amihan season, otherwise more critical biodiversity areas along the Verde Island Passage may be affected," it said.

PCG, Marina accountability

The Senate Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change will look into the possible administrative liabilities of both the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) on the oil spill that ruined the waters of Oriental Mindoro due to the sinking of the ill-fated MT Princess Empress.

Senator Cynthia Villar, head of the Senate panel, said she firmly believes some officials of both agencies have a liability on the issue considering they are in charge of the issuance of permits and regulating maritime movements in the country.

Marina, the country's maritime regulator, had earlier claimed that RDC Reield Marine Services, Inc., the owner of the vessel, had no permit to

sail but that it filed an amended certificate of public convenience (CPC).

But the PCG, in response, posted documents on social media seeking to discredit the Marina chief's statements.

"Hindi ko alam kung sa civil service yan eh, kasi mga government officials sila and employees (I don't know if this will fall under the civil service law because they are government officials and employees)," Villar said in an interview on Radio DZBB, on Sunday, March 19.

"Hindi ko pa nare-review yung civil service; ang ni-rereview namin ngayon ay yung pananagutan ng may-ari ng bapor sa tao na napanahirapan nila (I haven't reviewed the civil service regulations; what we are reviewing right now is the liability of the owner of the ship to the people who suffered) because of this," she said.

Nevertheless, Villar said she believes aside from RDC, both Marina and PCG should also face liabilities for the oil spill.

"Meron 'yan...Syempre meron (They have liability, of course there is)," Villar said.

"Re-reviewhin ko pa yung pananagutan ng government officials na nag cause nitong problemang ito (I will review the liabilities of the government officials that caused this problem)," the senator assured.

Asked if she sees possible collusion on the part of these officials and the ship owner, Villar said there should be concrete evidence to prove it.

"Mahirap magsalita kasi tayo na-

man, kahit pakiramdam lang natin (na meron), pero (It's difficult to say because on our part, even if we feel there is, still) we have to prove it," the senator said.

Villar also said the panel will continue its hearings on the Mindoro oil spill even after the Senate goes into recess for the Holy Week.

The Senate's plenary session will adjourn on March 25 and will resume on May 8, 2023.

But for now, she said, the panel is looking into the accountability of the owner of the MT Princess Empress, which was reported to be a rebuilt scrap ship.

Villar said RDC is a small company, and may not have sufficient assets to pay off its obligations to the people of Mindoro and the damage to the environment that the oil spill caused.

"Ang problema nila, maliit silang kumpanya. Kahit maski ibigay nila lahat ng pag-aari ng kumpanya eh tingin ko kulang pa (kabayaran) sa naging cause nito (Their problem is, they are a small company. Even if they give all the company's property, I think it is still insufficient (compensation) for this)," she said.

"Maliit eh, billion ang halaga nito. Kasi yung nawalan ng trabaho, mga fishermen...Tapos yung damage pa sa ating coral reefs, sa ating tourism...lahat, malaki yun (It's a small company, yet this costs billions. He has to take into account those who lost their livelihood, the fishermen... Then the damage to our coral reefs, on our tourism...everything, that's a huge amount)," Villar pointed out.

"Malaki ito, baka hindi niya kaya ito. Maba-bankrupt siya dito (This is huge; they might not be able to make it. They will go bankrupt here)," she pointed out.



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More oil slicks to reach Calapan this week — experts

Compensation claims

The owner of the ill-fated MT Princess Empress will be flooded with compensation claims as a result of the oil spill, and rightfully so.

Surigao del Sur 2nd district Rep. Johnny Pimentel, said that the law "imposes strict liability for pollution damage resulting from spills of persistent oil from tankers, and ensures compensation for those who suffer economic losses or incur costs due to the toxic discharges."

"We expect the oil tanker's owner to be swamped with compensation claims from individuals and entities harmed by the spill, including those forced to conduct their own cleanup activities," Pimentel, a member of the powerful Commission on Appointments (CA), said.

The veteran solon cited Republic Act (RA) No. 9483, or the Oil Pollution Compensation Law of 2007.

Pimentel, a House Ecology Committee member, said owners of tankers that cause oil pollution damage are legally responsible for:

- Costs incurred in cleanup operations at sea or on shore, including expenses for preventive measures;
- Consequential loss or loss of earnings suffered by owners or users of property contaminated or damaged;
- Pure economic loss or loss of earnings sustained by people, even if the property contaminated or damaged does not belong to them;
- Damage to human health or loss of life; and
- Environmental damages and measures of restoration.

The unmitigated oil spill disaster also exposed how ill-equipped the country is in responding to such

disasters, said AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert T. Lee.

As such, Lee is batting for the allocation of more funds for the acquisition of booms and other equipment for oil spill containment.

"Mas mabilis tayong makakapag-respond sa ganitong sakuna kung mayroon tayong sapat na kagamitan (Having these equipment will allow us to respond faster to these accidents)," the neophyte congressman said in a statement Sunday, March 19.

"Dahil sa kakulangan natin, patuloy na nasisira ang mahabagang likas-yaman, at nawawalan ng kabuhayan ang mga kababayan nating nakaasa rito, lalo na ang mga mangingisda (The destruction of our natural resources, as well as the loss of livelihood of our people, especially the fishermen, continue because of the lack of these equipment)," he said.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) has admitted it does not have enough equipment to handle the oil spill caused by MT Princess Empress, which sank in the waters off Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28 while carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil.

The Japanese government, which has sent an eight-man team to help the Philippine government's task force, has also committed to providing equipment, such as oil blotters, oil snares, and oil-proof working gloves, to aid the clean-up of affected coastal barangays.

The United States (US) and South Korea also committed to help the country.

Lee said that the Philippines cannot always rely on the help of others, and should work toward having the necessary equipment to deal with such disasters.



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Mystery spreads along with slick



BY TRIBUNE STAFF

The government should acknowledge that a national emergency already exists as a result of the oil spill considering its widespread effect on the livelihood of affected residents and ultimately, the economy

As the slick from *MT Princess Empress* spreads all over the Visayas region, threatening to cause an unprecedented marine disaster, what has become notable is the piecemeal response from those being relied on for a quick response.

While stakeholders urge the declaration of a national emergency considering the enormity of the economic and health backlash from the oil spill, the response is moving too slowly.

The government should acknowledge that a national emergency already exists as a result of the oil spill considering its widespread effect on the livelihood of affected residents and ultimately, the economy, an industry veteran told *Daily Tribune*.

Agency heads have not called a meeting and it is already two weeks after oil leaked from *MT Princess Empress*, carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil, which sank in the waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

The sinking caused a massive oil spill that prompted the provincial government to declare a state of calamity in 77 coastal barangays.

"I was already suggesting even on day 2 that this is going to be a disaster of national proportions but nobody took action or even would take notice," a veteran in the maritime industry indicated.

The situation calls for immediate action from the government since industrial oil had started to seep out of the vessel.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga estimated that the spillage is about 35,000 to 50,000 liters a day.

"The fuel showing up on the beaches is of a thicker substance compared to the fuel oil used by the tanker and the situation has become very dangerous," an industry-veteran told *Daily Tribune*.

"A summit should be called by the government that should include international experts. The Japanese came but they only sent advisers. The Department of Transportation has been too slow to respond," according to the source.

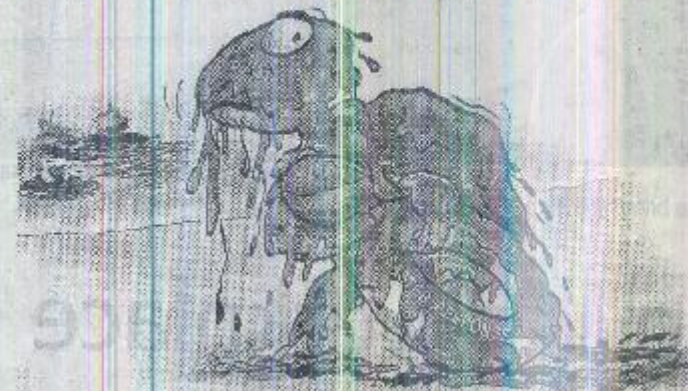
"The Japanese wanted to know what kind of assistance it can provide and sent experts, I guess they wanted to know what kind of assistance is needed from them," he said.

Japan is the nearest when it comes to international standard oil recovery equipment.

The tanker sunk to about 1,000 feet which makes it require sophisticated equipment to suction off oil from the beleaguered tanker.

Princess Empress is not even a brand-new tanker but was apparently assembled from pieces of old tankers.

"I think it is very important to determine the real age of the tanker since ship owners always lie about it. The engine may not even be brand new," the source indicated.



Int'l standard for tankers

Orient Classification Society or OCS certificate should be shown by the vessel owner. "The OCS seeks the submission of diagrams of the supposedly brand new vessel and will certify that they really supervised the construction and check if all the steel used were properly classed," the source indicated.

The industry source said the vessel can be compared to a museum relic. "There is talk that second-hand steel was used and that the Caterpillar engines in it may not be brand new."

Tankers also undergo SIRE which stands for Ship's Inspection Report which involves the audit of oil companies on vessels on charter.

"Under SIRE, the vessel, its owners, and its managers are vetted. Oil companies have their requirement sometimes higher than class rules, especially Shell," according to the industry source.

It was found that the vessel was chartered by a unit of conglomerate San Miguel Corp.

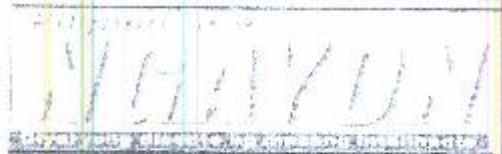
SL Harbor Bulk Terminal Corporation, under SMC unit San Miguel Shipping and Lighterage, chartered RDC Reield Marine Services to ship the 800,000 liters of industrial fuel through tanker *MT Princess Empress* that sank off the coast of Oriental Mindoro.

SIRE is usually required in the charter contract. Charterers put the condition in the contract that "vessels and managers must have SIRE approved by a major."

As a sign of cooperation among oil companies, approval by one major firm is recognized by the others.

In the Philippines, it is practiced by oil majors Shell, Caltex and Petron.

"I don't know if *Princess Empress* secured SIRE from Petron. It is possible, (the) vessel does not have one as it was chartered by SL Bulk, a subsidiary of SMC," the source added.



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Oil spill posibleng umabot sa Puerto Galera, Batangas

Inihayag ng isang educator mula sa University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) na maaaring umabot sa Puerto Galera at Batangas ang oil spill mula sa lumubog na motor tanker sa Oriental Mindoro.

Ayon kay UP-MSI associate professor Dr. Irene Rodriguez, sa isinagawang projection kamakailan, base na rin sa agos ng tubig at ihip ng hangin, bumagal ang Amihan at patungo na pa-norte sa Verde Island passage.

"Based on projections, ang oil slick ay posibleng madala towards the north. So, pa-hilaga ang direksyon ng oil slick at ito ay maaaring makaapekto sa munisipalidad o coastal environments ng Calapan, Puerto Galera, at areas sa Batangas," ani Rodriguez, sa pahayam sa radyo nitong Linggo.

Noong Biyernes, uha naman nang kinumpirma ni Oriental Mindoro Governor Humerito Dolor na ang oil spill mula sa lumubog na MT Princess Empress ay umabot na sa Calapan City.

Sinabi naman ni Mayor Rocky Ilagan na hangang nitong Huwebes ay hindi pa naman ito nakakaabot sa Puerto Galera o nakakaapekto sa mga lada doon.

Upang mapigilan naman ang laio pang pagkalat ng oil spill, iminungkahi ni Rodriguez na maglagay ng mga fireproof spill booms at sunugin ang langis.

"Certain volume lang, hindi 'yung kalahatan. Maghiwalay ka lang ilang volumes, 20,000 to 30,000 liters, mula sa major oil slick. Kapag nadala na sa mas kalmadong lugar ng dagat, saka siya sisindihan... and then repeat again the process," paliwanag pa niya.

Sinuportahan din niya ang panukalang pagbawalan muna ang malalaking barko na dumaraan sa Verde Island dahil ikinukonsidera itong sentro ng marine biodiversity.

Matatandaang may kargang industrial fuel oil ang MT Princess Empress nang lumubog ito sa karatang sakop ng Oriental Mindoro dahil sa malalakas na alon noong Pebrero 28. (Mer Layson)



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Puerto Galera posibleng abutin ng oil spill

POSIBLENG umebot sa pamosang tourist destination na Puerto Galera ang oil spill mula sa lumubog na motor tanker sa Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

Iti ang sinabi ni University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) associate professor Dr. Irene Rodriguez, kung saan ipinaliwanag niya na sa kanilang nakahuling paglaya, ang water current at galaw ng hangin ay patungo sa Verde Island passage, at pahilaga.

"Based on projections, ang oil slick ay posibleng madaa towards the north. So, pa-hilaga ang direksyon ng oil slick at ito ay maaaring makaapekto sa munisipalidad o coastal environments ng Calapan, Puerto Galera, at arcos sa Batangas," ayon kay Rodriguez.

Matatandaang kirumpima ni Oriental Mindoro Governor Humerillo Dolor na ang oil spill ay nakarating na rin sa Calapan City, na malapit na halos sa Puerto Galera.

Kasunod nito, nilinaw naman ni Mayor Rocky Ilagan ng nasabing bayan na hindi pa nakaaabot sa Puerto Galera ang oil spill at hindi pa apektado ang pangangisda sa lugar.

Ayon sa Department of Tourism, mayroon nang 61 tourist sites sa probinsya ang naapektuhan ng oil spill mula sa lumubog na MT Princess Empress noong Pebrero 23 na may kargang 900,000 litro ng industrial fuel oil. **RNT**



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CARTOON

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More oil slicks seen to reach Calapan

By LUISA CABATO

More oil slicks could reach the coast of Calapan City,

Oriental Mindoro from March 20 to 22, the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP MSI) warned.

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More ...

(From Page 1)

"Oil spill trajectories for March 16 to 22 show a northward shift with Calapan possibly receiving most of the oil from March 20 to 22," it said in a bulletin last Saturday.

Moreover, the westward currents along the coast of northern Mindoro towards the Verde Island Passage were also seen to be more evident during

this same period.

"The 'amihan' (northeast monsoon) winds, which contained most of the oil to the coasts of Nauhan and Pola in the previous weeks, are now more variable, allowing the oil to spread northwards," UP MSI added.

The institute noted that the

amihan season has a crucial role in how the oil slicks can affect the biodiversity of the Verde Island Passage.

"It is critical to stop the seepage before the end of the amihan season, otherwise more critical biodiversity areas along the Verde Island Passage may be affected," it said.



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Oil spill equipment budget sought

Lee called for the procurement of oil spill containment equipment after the Philippine Coast Guard admitted that it lacks the equipment to deal with the oil spill now wreaking havoc on Philippine waters

BY EDJEN OLIQUINO
@tribunephl_eo

A lawmaker on Sunday pushed Congress to allocate more funds for resources that could help mitigate the effects of man-made disasters like the 900,000 liters of San Miguel oil spilling out of the sunken *MT Princess Empress* vessel.

Agri Partylist Rep. Wilbert Lee said the *MT Princess Empress* disaster has exposed "how ill-equipped we are in responding to threats to our aquatic resources due to oil spills."

Specifically, Lee called for the procurement of oil spill containment equipment after the Philippine Coast Guard admitted that it lacks the equipment to deal with the oil spill now wreaking havoc on Philippine

waters.

A team from Japan has come to the Philippines, with its equipment, to help the PCG in containing the oil spill off Oriental Mindoro.

Among the equipment brought by members of the Japanese Coast Guard were oil blotters, oil snares and oil-proof working gloves.

The United States and South Korea have also committed to helping the Philippines deal with the oil spill from the ship chartered by San Miguel from an operator said to be lacking a Certificate of Public Convenience.

MT Princess Empress had sailed nine times without the CPC that would have made its operations on Philippine waters legal.

Groups have called for accountability not only from the ship operator but also from San Miguel for chartering the ship allegedly without undertaking due diligence.

According to Associate Professor Dr. Irene Rodriguez of the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute, the oil may reach Puerto Galera and Batangas.

Meanwhile, Rep. Johnny Pimentel of Surigao del Sur stressed that coastal communities affected by the oil spill should be compensated by those responsible.

"We expect the oil tanker's owner to be swamped with compensation claims from individuals and entities harmed by the spill, including those forced to conduct their own cleanup activities," he said.

Environmentalists like those from the Protect the Verde Island Passages said San Miguel should also be held criminally and civilly accountable.

Members of Congress have been taking action to provide assistance

and probe the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the one-year-old ship.

The ill-fated tanker sank off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on 28 February 2023.



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Oil spill impact on livelihood, prices worsens

By Macon Ramos-Araneta and Rio N. Araja

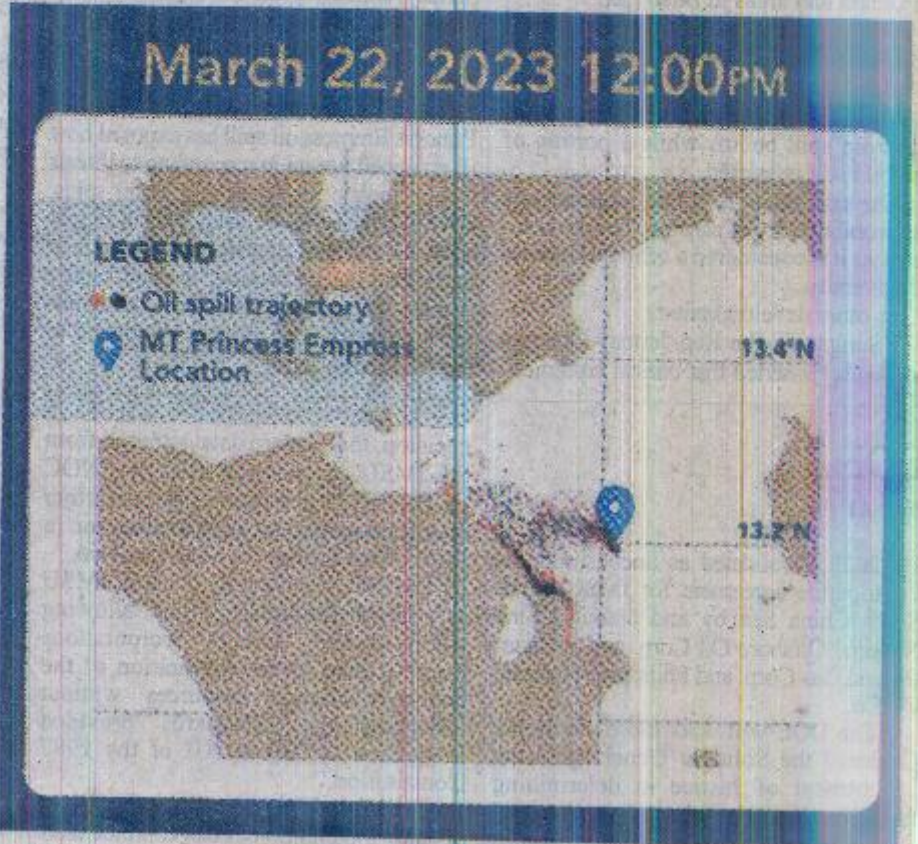
SENATOR Bong Revilla urged the government over the weekend to investigate the skyrocketing prices of basic commodities in many towns of Oriental Mindoro, following the oil spill caused by the MT Princess Empress, which sank off the Naujan coast with 800,000 liters of industrial fuel on Feb. 28.

This as Pola, Oriental Mindoro Mayor Jennifer Cruz appealed for an alternative livelihood program for her constituents as the impact of the oil slick worsens.

"Right now, it's getting harder

Next page

DIRE WARNING. The UP Marine Science Institute's latest trajectory of the oil spill shows it is critical to stop the seepage before the end of the Amihan season to prevent the oil slick from reaching Verde Island Passage.



Oil...

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and harder. We encounter more problems now," she said.

"At first, we were only concerned about food and how we would sue and find the shipowner. But right now, our growing problem seems to be its domino effect," Cruz said.

Revilla said Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerto Dolor told him about the unabated rise in the prices of food and basic commodities, including rice, meat, poultry and vegetables, since the oil spill two weeks ago.

"The continuing increase of basic commodities in affected municipalities in Oriental Mindoro is alarming," Revilla said, noting that many of the residents have already lost their livelihood because of a ban on fishing.

He said the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) should act on this to ensure nobody takes advantage of the situation.

Also, he said, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) has committed to tapping the Tulong Panghanap-

uhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (TUPAD) Project in the affected areas to help the people.

In the meantime, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) will immediately roll out a cash-for-work scheme for 19,000 affected residents for three more months.

Meanwhile, Senator Sherwin Gatchalian expressed alarm over a possible fish shortage and the loss of livelihood for residents of Oriental Mindoro, where fishing is a primary source of income.

Already, some 13,000 fishermen and their families in Mindoro alone have been affected by the oil spill.

He noted that production is expected to decline in the coming months as the oil spill has now reached Antique and Palawan, and may 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, as well, depriving stakeholders of their livelihood.

Gatchalian, who has visited the affected towns, said the government must extend whatever assistance it can to alleviate the

plight of those affected by the oil spill.

A professor from the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI), meanwhile, said the oil slick may reach Puerto Galera and Batangas.

In an interview on radio dzBB, Irene Rodriguez, UP-MSI associate professor, said that their recent projections based on the water currents and wind flow, the Northeast Monsoon or Amihan has slowed down and is going north along the Verde Island Passage.

This, she said, could carry the oil slick north and could affect the municipalities or coastal communities of Calapan, Puerto Galera and areas in Batangas.

Dolor confirmed on Friday that the oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress has already reached Caisipan City.

Rodriguez suggested the placement of fireproof spill booms while a portion of the oil itself is burned.

She said she agreed that large vessels be prohibited from passing the Verde Island, as it is considered a center of marine biodiversity.

In other developments:

• Sungao del Sur Rep. Johnny Pimentel on Sunday asserted that coastal communi-

ties adversely affected by the massive oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress in Oriental Mindoro are entitled to compensation from the tanker's owner. "The law imposes strict liability for pollution damage resulting from spills of persistent oil from tankers, and ensures compensation for those who suffer economic losses or incur costs due to the toxic discharges," he said. "We expect the oil tanker's owner to be swamped with compensation claims from individuals and entities harmed by the spill, including those forced to conduct their own cleanup activities."

• Agri party-list Rep. Wilbert Lee on Sunday bated for the allocation of more funds for booms and other equipment for oil spill containment to avoid the dire consequences of maritime disasters in the future. "The disaster caused by the MT Princess Empress oil spill has exposed how ill-equipped we are in responding to threats to our aquatic resources due to oil spills. This is why I will be asking for a bigger fund for oil spill containment equipment in the next budget hearing," he said, noting that the Philippine Coast Guard has admitted it does not have enough equipment to handle the disaster.



09-20-23

Communities harmed by oil spill entitled to reparation from tanker owner—solon

COASTAL communities adversely affected by the massive oil spill from the sunken MT *Princess Empress* are entitled to compensation from the tanker's owner, according to a lawmaker.

Rep. Johnny Pimentel of Surigao del Sur said on Sunday that "the law imposes strict liability for pollution damage resulting from spills of persistent oil from tankers, and ensures compensation for those who suffer economic losses or incur costs due to the toxic discharges."

Pimentel, who is a member of the Lower House's ecology committee

stated that "we expect the oil tanker's owner to be swamped with compensation claims from individuals and entities harmed by the spill—including those forced to conduct their own cleanup activities."

Under the Oil Pollution Compensation Law of 2007, or Republic Act 9483, Pimentel said owners of tankers that cause oil pollution

damage are legally responsible for (1) Costs incurred in cleanup operations at sea or on shore, including expenses for preventive measures; (2) Consequential loss or loss of earnings suffered by owners or users of property contaminated or damaged; (3) Pure economic loss or loss of earnings sustained by people, even if the property contaminated or damaged does not belong to them; (4) Damage to human health or loss of life; and (5) Environmental damages and measures of restoration.

MT *Princess Empress* was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil when it sank off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on February 28, which caused a widespread oil spill into the Tablas Strait.

Owned by RDC Reifield Marine

Services, the ill-fated oil tanker was sailing to Iloilo from Bataan when it experienced engine trouble and sank.

At least 10 municipalities in the provinces of Oriental Mindoro and Antique are now under a state of calamity due to the spill that has affected more than 143,000 people including 14,000 fisherfolk, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

Dozens of people have also fallen ill due to oil toxicity, with at least 55 kilometers of shoreline already spoiled by the spill.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has instructed the Philippine Coast Guard and other agencies to intensify their containment and cleanup operations.



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Nearly 150K persons affected by oil spill

BY VICTOR REYES

SOME 189 individuals, including children, have fallen ill while nearly 150,000 others have been affected by the oil spill caused by the sinking of MT Princess Empress last February 28 off Oriental Mindoro.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) said those who experienced illness are all from Pola town where the sunken ship was

located after it sank in the nearby town of Naujan.

In a situational report, the NDRRMC said the victims suffered difficulty in breathing, headaches, cough, colds, fever, sore throat, diarrhea, vomiting, and skin rashes, among others.

Citing information from the Pola municipal health office, NDRRMC said 16 have recovered while the

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rest are still being monitored.

NDRRMC also reported that 32,269 families or 149,503 individuals have been affected by the oil spill.

Oriental Mindoro had the highest number of affected persons, with 20,540 families or 102,567 individuals from 119 barangays in nine municipalities falling ill.

Antique reported 8,387 families or 30,226 individuals from four barangays in four municipalities who have fallen ill.

There were 3,342 families or 16,710 individuals from eight barangays in two municipalities who were likewise affected in Palawan, NDRRMC said.

The agency said P58.02 million worth of assistance have been provided to those affected, including food packs worth P18.78 million and P29.09 million in cash aid.

The cost of damage to the fishery sector was pegged at P3.85 million in Calaya, Antique alone. Negros Oriental officials earlier said they were still determining the extent of the oil spill's damage to the province.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and other agencies continue to exert efforts to address the oil slick, which has reached the town of Calapan in Oriental Mindoro.

Calapan local officials declared a fishing ban after finding out the oil slick has reached the town but lifted the ban last Saturday after experts established that fish in the area have not been affected yet.

PCG said some 35 bags of oil tarballs were collected in Calapan in a coastal clean-up operation. In coordination with other agencies, PCG said it has also installed a 100-meter oil-spill boom in the area.

Last Saturday, the PCG said it collected 6,803 liters of oily water mixture and 65 sacks of oil-contaminated materials during its offshore oil spill response operations in affected areas from March 1 to 17.

The PCG said a total of 1,726 sacks and 22 drums of waste were collected in the towns of Naujan, Bulalacao, and Pola in Oriental Mindoro during the same period.

OIL SPREADING

The University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) said more oil leaking from the sunken tanker is expected to reach the shores of Calapan City in three days.

"The latest satellite image on March 15 shows that oil is still leaking out of the sunken vessel. Oil spill trajectories for March 16 to 22 show a northward shift, with Calapan possibly receiving most of the oil from March 20 to 22," a bulletin issued by UP-MSI said late Saturday night.

It added that the westward currents along the coast of northern Mindoro towards the Verde Island Passage are expected to be more pronounced during the same period.

"The Amihan winds, which contained most of the oil to the coasts of Naujan and Pola in the previous weeks, are now more variable, allowing the oil to spread northwards," the UP-MSI said.

It said that authorities should prioritize stopping the oil seepage before the end of the Amihan period to prevent it from spreading further.

"It is critical to stop the seepage before the end of the Amihan season, otherwise more critical biodiversity areas along the Verde Island Passage may be affected. We need continuous monitoring along

the coasts for the presence of oil to inform the models," it said.

The UP-MSI also encouraged the public to contribute geotagged images using a GPS camera app so that coordinates can be used as starting locations for the oil in new model forecasts.

"Please submit these geotagged images through this form: https://bit.ly/MTPE_GPS," it added.

The oil spill threatens the ecosystem and coastal communities in southern Luzon as well as the livelihood of fishermen in affected areas.

MORE AREAS AFFECTED

Eleven more coastal barangays have been affected by the oil spill, raising the total to 131, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) revealed yesterday.

A report by the DSWD-Disaster Response Operations Monitoring and Information Center showed that a total of 32,269 families or 149,503 persons from 131 barangays in Regions IV-B (Mimaropa) and VI- (Western Visayas) have been affected.

Of the affected barangays, 119 are in Oriental Mindoro, eight in Palawan and four in Antique.

A total of P25 million worth of assistance has been provided to the affected families, including P23 million from the DSWD, P444,039 from the LGUs, P464,940 from non-government organizations (NGOs), and P801,066.08 from other private partners.

As of March 18, the DSWD has distributed 82,609 family food packs in Oriental Mindoro, including 23,180 to fishermen, while 5,685 beneficiaries in Oriental Mindoro and Palawan were provided financial assistance through



NEARLY

Individuals in Crisis Situations (AICS) amounting to a total of P17.109 million.

A total of 1,101 people from Pola and Bulalacao in Oriental Mindoro also received their wages for five days of work under the cash for work program or a total of P1.954 million.

The DSWD said it still has P2.056 billion worth of funds (P750.9 million) and stockpiles of food and non-food relief items (P1.3 billion) on standby and ready for distribution.

VILLAR STANDS GROUND

Sen. Cynthia Villar yesterday reiterated that the ill-fated MT Princess Empress had no authority to operate even as the PCG showed documents stating otherwise.

In a radio interview, Villar said her basis for saying that MT Princess Empress had no permit to operate was a written report given to her by the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) after the vessel sank last February 28.

"It's a written report. So, after I read it, I called Marina to ask if this is real. They (Marina) admitted it was true. It's a written report, not verbal," Villar said.

The Senate Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Climate Change led by Villar conducted its first hearing on the sinking of MT Princess Empress last Tuesday.

During that hearing, Villar said that RDC Reield Marine Services (RDC), the owner of MT Princess Empress, has a certificate of public convenience (CPC) but the ill-fated tanker has yet to be issued a permit to operate since it has not yet been included in the company's amended CPC.

RDC Vice President Fritzie Tee

admitted during the hearing that the tanker has not yet been issued an authority to operate as the company applied amendments to its CPC only last November and started to submit the documentary requirements only last December.

Hernani Fabia, Marina administrator, said RDC has yet to complete its papers in the amendments to its CPC. He added the company was not issued a special permit to operate or a temporary permit to operate because the company did not apply for one.

Later that day, however, the PCG posted on its Twitter account documents showing that RDC has a CPC, which included the MT Princess Empress on its supposed amended CPC.

PCG spokesman Rear Adm. Armand Balilo said their personnel checked the boat before it left Bataan, adding: "As far as we are concerned, they submitted to us (a CPC). Whether that's valid or if they made a misrepresentation, we are looking into that."

Villar said it would be unclear how RDC got a permit for MT Princess Empress to sail without proper authorities issuing one.

"How can it have a permit to operate if Marina will not grant it? Marina is the one issuing permits to operate. Why will the coast guard say that RDC has a permit to operate. Maybe it's fake," Villar said, adding she will schedule another hearing after the Holy Week.

She said she also saw a coast guard report showing a lot of "missing" items in its checklist regarding the MT Princess Empress.

"I have seen a written report from the coast guard that showed there were many missing items. It was written in that coast guard report. They should be making excuses and that they should be

talking with each other. If there were lapses, just admit that they erred," Villar said.

"It was confirmed by Marina that it really has no permit. The company has a permit but each time you add a ship to your fleet, you have to get a permit for that particular ship. MT Princess Empress started to sail in 2022 even without the permit to operate. The company has a permit to operate but that particular vessel which sank has none. They should get a permit for that," she added.

She said she also received an "informal report" that the ill-fated ship was built in Bataan by a small company that authorities said was not capable of building an oil tanker.

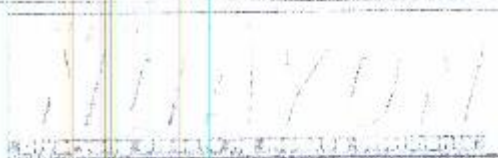
Villar said she did not disclose this information during the committee hearing since it has yet to be backed with evidence.

She said there was also an informal report the ship was overloaded since its capacity was only 800,000 liters but actually carried 900,000 liters.

She said RDC is also accountable for the oil spill but doubts if it can compensate all those affected.

"The problem is it (RDC) is a small company and even if it gives all its assets, that will not be enough. It will need billions of pesos because there are thousands of fishermen affected, and it will have to pay them for at least six months. Then the damage to the coral reefs, tourism, and other others. It will need a lot of money and I think they cannot afford it; the company will go bankrupt," she said.

She said the \$1 billion insurance claim of RDC may not be granted since MT Princess Empress has no legal documents to operate. — *With Ashzel Hachero, Jocelyn Montemayor, and Raymond Africa*



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Kumpanyang sangkot sa oil spill, dapat magbigay din ng ayuda

Hinimok ni ACT-CIS Cong. Edvic Yap ang kumpanya ng lumubog na MT Princess Empress na magbigay din ng ayuda sa mga naapektuhan ng oil spill sa Mindoro.

Ayon kay Cong. Yap, "napapansin ko na pawang gobyerno lang ang nagbibigay ng ayuda sa mga biktima ng oil spill at walang pakunswelo man lang ang kumpanya ng barko".

"Kahit man lang tig-two kilos na lang ng bigas, siguro makakatulong na sa mga biktima ito", ani Yap.

Dagdag pa ng mambabatas, "karamihan pa naman sa mga apektado ay pangingisda ang hanap-buhay. I am sure wala silang kita ngayon".

Pahabol ni Yap dapat na ring bilisan ang clean-up para hindi na umabot sa iba pang isla.



KUMPANYANG SANGKOT SA OIL SPILL, MAGBIGAY DIN NG AYUDA -- YAP

"Magbigay din ng ayuda sa mga naapektuhan ng oil spill sa Mindoco".

Ito ang ginawang paghimok ni ACI-CIS Cong. Edvic Yap sa kumpanya ng lumubog na MT Princess Empress.

Napapansin umano ni Yap na pawang gohyerno lang ang nagbibigay ng ayuda sa mga biktima ng oil spill at walang pakunswelo man lang ang kumpanya ng barko.

"Kahit man lang tig-two kilos na lang ng bigas, siguro makakatulong na sa mga biktima dahil ang karamihan sa mga apektado ay pangangisda ang hanap-buhay na walang kita. Pahabol ni Yap dapat na ring bilisan ang clean-up para hindi na umabot sa iba pang isla.

Matatandaan na noong Pebrero 28 ay lumubog ang MT Princess Empress sa dagat na sakop ng Naujan, Oriental Mindoro karga ang 900,000 litro ng industrial fuel oil sa lalim na 400 metro. -Doris Franche-Borja-



Department of Environment and Natural Resources
 DENR
 Quezon City



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Compensation for areas, folk affected by oil spill pressed

SURIGAO del Sur Rep. Johnny Pimentel on Sunday said coastal communities adversely affected by the massive oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress are entitled to compensation from the tanker's owner as AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert T. Lee called for the allocation of more funds for booms and other equip-

ment for oil spill containment.

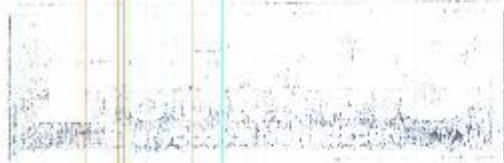
"The law imposes strict liability for pollution damage resulting from spills of persistent oil from tankers, and ensures compensation for those who suffer economic losses or incur costs due to the toxic discharges," Pimentel said.

"We expect the oil tanker's owner to be swamped

with compensation claims from individuals and entities harmed by the spill, including those forced to conduct their own cleanup activities," Pimentel, House ecology committee member, said.

Lee said his proposal will avoid the dire consequences of maritime disasters in the future.

Ryan Ponce Pacpaco



Compensation for oil spill-affected folk sought

By Ryan Ponce
Pacpaco

SURIGAO del Sur Representative Johnny Pimentel yesterday said coastal communities adversely affected by the massive oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress are entitled to compensation from the tanker's owner as AGRI Party-list Rep. Wilbert T. Lee called for the allocation of more funds for booms and other equipment for oil spill containment.

"The law imposes strict liability for pollution damage resulting from spills of persistent oil from tankers, and ensures compensation for those who suffer economic losses or incur costs due to the toxic discharges," Pimentel said.

"We expect the oil tanker's owner to be swamped with compensation claims from individuals and entities harmed by the spill, including those forced to conduct their own clean-up activities," added Pimentel.

Lee said his proposal will avoid the dire consequences of maritime disasters in the future.

"The disaster caused by the MT Princess Empress oil spill has exposed how ill-equipped we are in responding to threats to our aquatic resources due to oil spills. Kaya't hihingin po natin na magbigay ng mas malaking pondo para sa oil spill containment equipment sa susunod na budget hearing," said Lee.

Lee said the Philippines cannot always rely on the help of others, and should work towards hav-

ing the necessary equipment to deal with such disasters.

"Mas mahilis tayong makakapag-respond sa ganitong sakuna kung mayroon tayong sapat na kagamitan. Dahil sa kakulangan natin, patuloy na nasisira ang mahalagang likas-yaman, at nawawalan ng kabuhayan ang mga kababayan nating nakaasa rito, lalo na ang mga mangingisda," Lee said.

Lee reiterated his call for immediate aid to be given to communities affected by the oil spill.

The Office of Civil Defense said recently that over 108,000 people in 116 barangays in Oriental Mindoro and Palawan have now been affected by the oil spill.

Nearly 32,000 families in 68 areas in MIMAR-

OPA and Western Visayas have also been affected as of March 14, according to the OCD.

Under the Oil Pollution Compensation Law of 2007, or Republic Act No. 9483, Pimentel said owners of tankers that cause oil pollution damage are legally responsible for:

Costs incurred in clean-up operations at sea or on shore, including expenses for preventive measures; Consequential loss or loss of earnings suffered by owners or users of property contaminated or damaged; Pure economic loss or loss of earnings sustained by people, even if the property contaminated or damaged does not belong to them; Damage to human health or loss of life; and Environmental damages and measures of restoration.



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NEWS BRIEF

Fishing ban sa Calapan tinanggal na, paliligo 'di pa ubra

MAAARI na uli mangisda sa baybayin ng Calapan sa Oriental Mindoro makaraang alisin na ang fishing ban dito dahil sa oil spill na dulot ng paglubog ng MT Princess Empress.

Gayunman, iginhiit ni Calapan City Administrator Atty. Raymond Ussam na bawal pa rin ang paliligo sa mga baybayin ng Barangay Navotas, Maidlang at Silonay dahil sa posibilidad na

makalunok ng tubig at epekto nito sa balat.

Ani Ussam, siniguro ng mga eksperto na wala ng bakas ng oil spill sa baybayin dahilang para alisin nila ang ban sa pangangisda rito.

Samantala, patuloy naman aniya ang pamamahagi nila ng emergency assistance sa mga naapektuhang mangangisda at 20,540 pamilya mula sa 10 bayan dito.



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**Fishing ban sa Oriental Mindoro
inalis sa gitna ng oil spill**



INALIS na noong Sabado ang fishing ban na ipinataw sa Calapan, Oriental Mindoro kasunod ng oil spill mula sa paglubog ng MT Princess Empress.

Pahayag ni Calapan City Administrator Atty. Raymond Ussam, inalis ang fishing ban matapos iulat ng mga eksperto na walang indikasyon na apeltado ng oil spill ang mga isda sa lugar.

Gayumpaman, ipinaghabawal pa rin ang paglangoy sa baybayin ng Barangay Navotas, Maidlang, at Silonay.

Sinabi pa ni Atty. Ussam na patuloy silang magbibigay ng emergency assistance para sa mga apeltadong mangingisda at residente sa Calapan City.

Base sa datos ng Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office, nasa 20,540 pamilya sa 10 bayan ang naapek-

tuhan ng oil spill.

Ang RDC Reelfield Marine Services, ang kumpanyang nagmamay-ari ng Princess Empress, ay nagsabi na ang dayuhang sasakyang-dagat at malayuang pinapatakbo sa ilalim ng dagat na sasakyan ay makakatulong upang mahanap ang lubog na harko at masuri ang pinsala.



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Hey! Based on updates from the Philippine Coast Guard, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and National Mapping and Resource Information Authority, nine out of fifteen municipalities in Oriental Mindoro are currently affected by the oil spill, Greenpeace reported.



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NATIONWIDE ROUNDUP

Mindoro oil spill threatens long-term fish supply, key marine biodiversity area

THE CONTINUED oil spill from the sunken vessel off the waters of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro will have a long-term impact on fish supply and other marine resources, particularly in the Verde Island Passage (VIP), a marine expert said.

In a radio interview, Irene B. Rodriguez, associate professor at the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI), said that the oil slick has been seen moving northwards where VIP is located.

"The long-term impact if the oil (spill) reached Verde Island, this will create an impact to our source of food and diversity area because the Verde Island Passage is known as center of marine biodiversity," she said.

Marine resources, she noted, will immediately die upon contact with the oil slick.

The tanker *MT Princess Empress* was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil when it sank off Oriental Mindoro, one of the five provinces surrounding the VIP.

The passage, the body of water between Batangas and Mindoro, has the highest concentration of coastal fishes, corals, crustaceans, mollusks, seagrasses, and mangroves in the world.

It is also home to endangered and threatened species such as the hawksbill turtle, whale sharks, manta rays, sea cows or *dugong*, among others.

Ms. Rodriguez cited UP-MSI's projections that the oil slick may reach the coastal communities of Calapan City, capital of Oriental Mindoro, and the provinces of Puerto Galera and Batangas.

The projections are based on information on water currents and wind power.

The direction of the oil spill is affected by the weakening northeast monsoon or locally called *amihan*, she said.

In its latest bulletin, the trajectory models from the UP-MSI showed that more oil spill might reach Calapan City from March 20 to 22 as it moves towards the north.

Fish output from Oriental Mindoro in 2022 reached 6,497.49 metric tons (MT), a 33.35% decrease from 9,749.14 MT a year earlier,

based on data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).

The volume of fish supply from Batangas last year was 6,497.49 MT, also down by 19.41% from 9,749.14 MT in 2021.

Earlier, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources said that the fish supply from the affected areas will not have an impact on a national scale.

"It is critical to stop the seepage before the end of the *amihan* season, otherwise more critical biodiversity areas along the Verde Island Passage may be affected," said UP-MSI.

The institute also encouraged the public to contribute for new model forecasts by using a GPS camera application as it provided geotagged images. These will be used as "starting locations for the oil." — **Sheldene Joy Talavera**



Tubbataha bacteria has antibiotic, anti-cancer potentials

By RAINIER ALLAN RONDA

Filipino scientists have discovered marine bacteria in sediments of Tubbataha Reef in the Sulu Sea that can be developed into powerful antibiotics and anti-cancer compounds, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) revealed.

The DOST said its research team in Iloilo City's University of San Agustin (USA), led by three "Balik Scientists," uncovered the marine bacteria's potential at the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization had declared a World Heritage Site.

The marine bacteria touted to contain antibacterial and anti-cancer properties has been named *S. (Streptomyces) tubbatahanensis*, after the place where it was discovered, home to 1,200 marine species and one of the Philippines' oldest and most well-protected marine ecosystems.

Leading the research team were incumbent balik scientist, Dr. Emmanuel Lorenzo de los Santos, and former United States-based scientist-couple Dr. Jonel Saludes and Dr. Doralyn Dalisay.

Balik scientists refer to Filipinos who left the country and acquired knowledge and expertise abroad, then bring that back with them to serve under the auspices of the DOST and partner institutions.

The DOST revealed that the successful research team was also composed of Chuckris Tenebro, Dana Joanne Trono, Lex Aliko Balida, Leah Katrine Bayog, Julyanna Bruna, Edna Sabido and Dion Paul Caspe.

Their research paper on *S. tubbatahanensis* has been published last month in an international scientific journal, the *Microbiology Spectrum* of the American Society for Microbiology.

The research article, titled "Synergy between Genome Mining, Metabolomics, and Bioinformatics Uncovers

Antibacterial Chlorinated Carbazole Alkaloids and Their Biosynthetic Gene Cluster from *Streptomyces tubbatahanensis* sp. nov., a Novel Actinomycete Isolated from Sulu Sea, Philippines," said that the "specialized metabolites" of the newly "uncovered" marine bacteria have already been profiled using mass spectrometry and nuclear magnetic resonance analyses followed by antibacterial, anticancer and toxicity screening.

"By integrating bioinformatics-driven genome mining and metabolomics, we unearthed the hidden biosynthetic richness and mined the associated chemical entities from the novel *Streptomyces* species," the researchers said in their published research article.

"The bioprospecting of novel *Streptomyces* species from marine sediments of underexplored ecological niches serves as an important source of antibiotic and anticancer drug leads with unique chemical scaffolds," the researchers noted of their discovery.

The DOST, which has steadily poured research and development funds into USA to build its capability to house cutting-edge drug discovery research, hailed the achievement of the university's researchers.

"The emergence of drug-resistant pathogens and spread of these superbugs is a global concern," said DOST Undersecretary for R&D Leah Buendia. "DOST invests in studies to find novel sources of bioactive compounds found in the Philippine waters in which capabilities on drug discovery and development have yet to be explored. Through R&D, we open opportunities to Filipinos for better health, safety, and the easy and affordable access to new antibiotics."

The DOST has tapped their Grants-In-Aid funds to support USA's establishment of their Tuklas Lunas NMR (Nuclear magnetic resonance) Laboratory Visayas at the Center for Natural



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Drug Discovery; Mass Spectrometry Imaging Laboratory at the Center for Chemical Biology and Biotechnology (C2B2); Center for Advance New Materials Engineering and Emerging Technologies, and the Center for Informatics.

The USA is also the only biobank in the country with more than 3,000 samples of good bacteria collected under efforts led by Saludes and Dalisay with other researchers and scientists. These have all been harvested from different parts of the Philippines with the goal of developing locally sourced and developed antibiotics.

In April 2019, Dalisay, who graduated cum laude from the USA with a degree in pharmacy, gave a presentation at the National R&D Conference at the PICC in Manila, where she stressed the need for scientists and researchers to undertake research and drug discovery on the biodiversity riches in the country.

She noted that breakthrough antibiotic erythromycin was found in the marine soil off Iloilo City in 1949.

Dalisay, who earned her Master of Science in Biology at the University of the Philippines-Visayas, doctorate in Microbiology at University of New South Wales in Australia and a post-doctorate fellowship to specialize on marine natural products chemistry at the University of Cali-

fornia, San Diego, returned to the Philippines along with her husband as part of the DOST's Balik Scientist program in June 2015 to establish a research program on natural products drug discovery at the USA-C2B2, and had decided to stay and head the C2B2 and lead the R&D work on marine sediments in her alma mater.



Ecology group warns: US-banned cosmetics with mercury sold in PHL

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

@jonmayuga

A LOCAL waste-and-pollution watchdog on Sunday warned the public against buying cosmetics containing mercury that are being sold over the counter in the Philippines, despite already being banned in the United States.

EcoWaste Coalition revealed that it had purchased 11 skin-lightening products made in China, Pakistan and Thailand that were among those found to contain mercury by health authorities in the states of California, Minnesota and New York. Said cosmetic items were eventually banned in the US, but are still being sold online and in several local cosmetic outlets.

"We obtained the items from cosmetic stores and from online sellers during our market monitoring," revealed Aileen Lucero, who is the coalition's national coordinator. "Based on the chemical screening we conducted, the items are contaminated with high levels of mercury, ranging from 2,230 to 58,400 parts per million—way above the global limit of 1 ppm."

"Ten of these products were produced in 2021 or 2022, or after the global phase-out in 2020 of mercury-added cosmetics such as skin-lightening products," Lucero explained, "in clear defiance of the requirements of the Minamata Convention on mercury, as well as the Asean Cosmetic Directive (ACD)."

The ACD lists mercury and its compounds among the "substances which must not form part of the composition of cosmetic products," a decision adopted by the Asean Cosmetic Committee in 2007, while the

Minamata Convention sets 2020 as the "date after which the manufacture, import or export of the product shall not be allowed."

"Six of these products are already covered by separate health advisories issued by the... Food and Drug Authority warning consumers against buying and using them," she added. Among these 11 mercury-tainted products are five Pakistan-made cosmetics: Chandni Whitening Cream, Faiza Beauty Cream, Golden Pearl Beauty Cream, Goree Beauty Cream, and Sandal Beauty Cream. They were identified by the New York City Health Department as containing the lethal chemical.

Also sold locally are four Thailand-produced items with mercury: 88 Total White Underarm Cream, Meyyong Seaweed Super Whitening, Polla Gold Super White, and Snow White Armpit Whitening Underarm Cream. They were among those found to contain mercury by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Minnesota Department of Health.

According to the latter: "Skin-lightening products are rooted in colorism defined as discrimination that privileges light-skinned people over people with darker skin," then warned that "skin-lightening products may contain toxic chemicals (such as mercury, hydroquinone and/or steroids) that can negatively impact the consumer's health and family living in the same space, such as children or elders."

The group also procured two China-made Jiaoli Miraculous Cream and Jiaoli 7-Day Specific Eliminating Freckle AB Set, which were among those tested and found to contain mercury by the California Department of Health (CDH).



PAGBABAWAL SA SINGLE-USE PLASTIC, DAPAT IPATUPAD SA BUONG BANSA

TUWING nagmamaneho ako, kailangan kong sikapin na maging mahinahon at palapag mahaba ang pisi sa mga hindi kanais-nais na pangyayari sa kalye. Mahirap-hirap na hindi maanis at minsan ay magalit

pa sa mga garapal at walang galang na pagmamaneho ng marami, apat na gulong o dalawang gulong man ang kanilang dala.

Ang pinakanakakainis ay ang pagbusira nang walang dahilan. Inis na inis akong mabusinahan, ngunit dumadaldas-dalas na rin akong bumusina na kinaiinisan din ng mga inaabutan ng nakakainsultong ingay. Nakakainis din ang mga mahilig makipag-unahan at mag-cut sa linya na halos tamaan ang bumper ng sasakyang minamaneho ko. At kapag nagsunod-sunod ang mga nakakainis na pangyayari sa kalye, kailangang hulihin ko ang aking sarili at sabihing, "Kaunting lamig ng ulo," "Habacn ang pasensya," "Huwag papatol dahil hahaha ang gulo at baka hindi pa maganda ang mangyari."

Mabuti na lang at nakakayanan ko pang magpalamig ng ulo kaysa pumatol sa mga walang kuwentang konsumisyon sa kalye. Subalit, mayroong mga kaganapan sa kalye na halos hindi ko kayang palampasin.

Kapag nakita kong ginagawang basurahan ang kalye, kung saan napakaraming upos ng sigarilyo at sari-saring plastik na pambalot ng mga pagkain, tumitigil ako at pinupulot ko ang upos o plastic, styro o anumang basura na basta na lang inihagis sa kalye at isasauli ko ito sa kinauukulan na may kasabay na maikli at magalang na pangaral.

Nagpapasalamat ako kung inabot ng pagpula ng traffic light ang pagkakatat ng basura. Tanda ito na maari akong magpaalala sa pagsauli ng basura sa kinauukulan na mayroong kasabay na munting pangaral. Ngunit, isang munting bahagi lang ang mga kalye at highway na ginagawang basurahan ng kung ano-ano, lalo na ang plastic. Paano na ang iba't ibang tubigan mula sa mga estero hanggang lawa tulad ng Laguna de Bai, ang Seven Lakes sa San Pablo City? Ilang toneladang plastic ang nakalubog na sa mga lawa at karagatan, ilang toneladang plastik na rin ang hindi matunaw-tunaw sa mga tiyan at bituka ng mga isda, malaki man o maliit? Hindi ba't hindi nakakatuwang makita na napapaligiran ng sari-saring basurang plastik ang kontrobersyal na dolomite beach sa Roxas Boulevard?

Kahanga-hanga ang ipinatupad kamakailan na pagbabawal sa paggamit ng single-use plastics tuwing Miyerkules at Sabado sa Bayan ng Cordova sa Mactan Island, Cebu City. Ginawa rin ito ng siyudad ng Mandaluyong noong mga nakaraang taon,



ngunit hindi ko alam kung ipinatupad ito hanggang ngayon. Gayunman, magandang simula ito at sana'y gumaya na ang iba pang mga bayan, siyudad hanggang lakwigan. Hindi ito imposible, ngunit tiyak na maraming tutalol, lalo na ang malalaking kumpanya ng produktong plastik.

Maaring simulan din ito ng mga parokya na binubuo ng maliliit na pamayanan. Sa Parokya ng Inang Laging Saklolo sa Project 8, Quezon City, sinimulan na naming ipagbawal ang paggamit ng mga plastic water bottles. Hinihikayat nang magdala ng kani-kanyang reusable water bottle o tumbler ang mga kabataan.

Medyo mahirap ito sa simula, kaya handa pa rin kami para sa mga nakalimot na gdala. Mayroon na kaming sapat na matitigas at matitibay na basong plastik na hindi one-time use.

Ito ang dapat pag-aralan at gawin—ang pag-iwas sa paggamit sa mga single-use plastics na walang ibang paglalagyan kundi ang basurahan. Kung hindi na gagamit ng mga single-use plastics at anumang humili ha at dumadagdag sa sobra-sobra nang basura, unti-unting gaganda ang ating kapaligiran, lupa at lahat ng tubigan at karagatan. Unti-unting luhosog at lalakas ang mga isda, ibon at hayop sa tubig, hangin at lupa. Unti-unti tayong magiging mga tinay na anak ng Diyos at maaasahang kaibigan ng kalikasan.

Samantala, malaking kabutihan ding maidudulot ng pag-iwas ng plastik sa kamalayan at pag-uugali ng tao. Kung hindi plastik, ano naman ang gagamitin? Natural sa halip na plastik. Magandang makita ang mga dahon ng saging na pambalot ng meryendang kakanin para sa mga miting at handaan. Magandang magkamayan din at sama-samang mag-hoodle fight.

Marahil kaya nakakainis makita ang mga nagtatapon ng basura kung saan-saan, lalo na ng plastic dahil karamihan ay wala nang pakialam at pakiramdam sa pinsalang dinudulot ng plastik at hindi likas o natural na ugali.

Problema ba ang plastik? Sinagot na ito ng napakaraming burisa na nagbawal sa paggamit ng single-use plastics. Eh, ang plastik at hindi natural na ugali? Tingnan natin ang maraming sumisira sa kapaligiran. Tingnan natin ang mga sumasamba sa salapi at kapangyarihan na walang tigil na pinagkakaprahan ang kalikasan. Mayroon bang kapansin-pansin sa kanilang pag-uugali?



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**Poste, center
island, tulay,
estero
'wag gawing
basurahan
- Mayor Honey**

"BUWAG naman po nating gawing tambakan ng basura ang mga poste ng ilaw, center island, tulay at estero."

Ito ang scriyosong apela ni Mayor Honey Lacuna sa lahat ng residente ng Manila, kasabay ng kanyang anunsiyo na istriktong ipatupad ang waste segregation system at scheduling ng garbage collection sa kabisera ng bansa.

Napuna ng lady mayor na inilalabas na ng karamihan ng residente ang kanilang basura bago pa man dumating ang trak ng basura para kolektahin ito, kaya naman nagtambakan ito at nagsisilbing eyesores.

"Araw-araw po ay talagang walang tigil ang mga kawani ng DPS (department of public services) sa pagsubod sa mga basurang inilalagay sa mga di naman tamang lugar. Gusto ba ninyo paerang dating sa Marikina na 'yung alkalde, pag di pa panahon para ilabas ang basura at meron siyang nakita sa daan ay ibinabalik niya sa loob ng tahanan?," sabi nito.

Idinagdag pa nito na: "Ngayon, magiging mahigpit na kami sa pagpapatupad ng segregation at may mga takdang araw kung kelan kokolektahin ang nabubulok at di nabubulok."

Pinalalabanan ng alkalde ang mga residente na may umiral na city ordinance kaugnay ng 'tapat ko, linis ko' program ng local government na kung saan inoobliga ang bawat tahanan na panatilihin malinis ang kanilang harapan.

"Wag po nating ugaling madaling araw ay milalabas ang basura tapos nilalagay sa mga center island, poste, gilid ng bakod o tulay kasi di magandang tignan," giit ng alkalde.

Ipinaliwanag ni Lacuna na habang ang Executive Order No. 6 na nagtatakdang bawat Biyernes ng litago bilang 'cleanup day' sa loob at labas ng City Hall, kailangan pa ring panatilihin ang kalinisan kahit na anong araw.

Tungyang din ng alkalde ang kahalagahan ng pagpapantili ng kalinisan sa buong kapaligiran dahil nag-aanyaya ito ng mga turista at investors na tumatanghalagan ng pag-unlad ng lungsod maging na mamamayan nito.

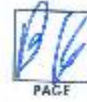
"Panatilihin po nating malinis ang ating lungsod dahil tayo dapat ang unang nagmamahal dito. Mas malinis, mas maganda para sa ating lahat. Ako ay nananawagan ul pauna nang pagpapasalamat sa mga tugon sa ating panawagan," sabi ni Lacuna.

Ayon pa sa alkalde, ang lokal na pamahalaan ay pat

...gawa ang isang upang mapantili ang kalinisan sa Manila, pero para



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COMMUNICATION
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NEWS BRIEFS

Burgos 'plastic-free' holiday kicks off

LAOAG CITY – The local government unit of Burgos town in the province of Ilocos Norte has declared every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday as a “plastic-free holiday” in all residential, commercial, agricultural, and institutional establishments within the municipality.

This means that the use of single-use plastics is prohibited in Burgos at least three times a week to control and minimize the production of plastic waste.

Ahead of World Environment Day on 5 June the municipal government approved Municipal Ordinance 2021-002, or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Code of Burgos to ban the use of single-use plastic in the municipality.

Anyone found violating the ordinance will be imposed a fine of P500 for the first offense, P1,000 for the second offense, P2,000 for the third offense and imprisonment of one to six months for the fourth offense.

PNA



Role of trees commonly overlooked—RSA

SAN Miguel Corp. (SMC) President and CEO Ramon S. Ang lamented recently that the role of trees and forests in people's lives is "commonly overlooked."

"The role of trees and forests in our lives is basic but commonly overlooked—or worse, ignored," Ang said in a speech during the celebration of the anniversary of the Million Trees Foundation Inc. (MTFI) Nursery and Eco-Learning Center last March 16 at the La Mesa Watershed.

"Apart from providing us with valuable resources such as food and building materials, trees also protect us against land erosion and flooding," Ang said in his speech read by Edgar L. Dona, operations head of San Miguel Holdings Corp. (SMHC).

"In the case of watersheds, they help ensure that there will be water for human survival," Ang added.

Fortunately, according to the SMC CEO, the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) and the MTFI have not let their guards down and have been successful in reforesting target watershed during the last couple of years.

"With the help of institutional partners and volunteers, they were able to surpass the five million trees target and have set another ambitious goal. And that is to plant 10 million more trees by the year 2030," Ang said.

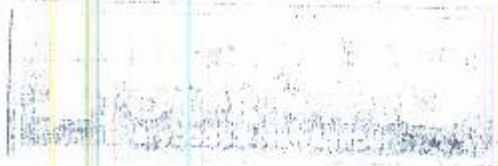
P1-M donation

DEMONSTRATING its continu-

ing support to the annual "Million Trees Challenge," the Manila Water Co. and the Manila Water Foundation (MWF) announced a donation of one P1 million to the MTFI on its second year anniversary as an organization.

This would be Manila Water's third donation as it has done so every year since 2021. That year, the donation was made for the development of the MTFI's onsite office and the establishment of a nursery at the 5-hectare property at the La Mesa Watershed.

At the anniversary event, the donation handover ceremony was held after the message of MWF President and Manila Water President and CEO Jose Victor Emmanuel A. De Dios. *Jonathan L. Mayuga*



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FPRDI enhances bamboo use in construction

The Forest Products Research and Development Institute, an attached agency of the Department of Science and Technology, is continuously experimenting on an improved connecting technique to promote the use of bamboo in construction, Sec. Rohan Saha said.

Among the challenges in using bamboo in construction is the connecting technique.

Saha said the FPRDI recently developed a technique that allows the bamboo joints to carry a maximum load capacity of 1,700 kilos.

The technique uses common construction materials such as round steel bars and plates, bolts and nuts to connect bamboo poles.



MAGNINYONG LINGKOD

DR. HILDA C. ONG

SA March 22, 2023 ay muli na namang makikitiisa ang Pilipinas sa pangunguna ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) at ng National Water Resources Board (NWRB) sa obserbasyon ng "World Water Day" na ang tema ngayong taon ay "Accelerating Change".

Naglalaan ng araw ang United Nations Water para bigyang importansya ang kalahagahan ng tubig partikular ng pangangailangan sa malinis na tubig. Alam naman natin na bagama't ang ating planeta ay 71% na napaliligiran ng tubig, nasa mahigit 3%

lamang ang maaaring maibang mula sa ice caps, glacier at permanent snow (1.74%) at ground water (1.69%) habang nasa 96.54% na ang mula sa karagatan, degat, at mga look.

Sa pagtalaya ng UN, nasa 1.1 billion ng tao sa buong mundo ang may problema sa malinis na tubig kung saan 3 million ay mga Pilipino.

Ise sa mga may problema sa suplay ng malinis na tubig ang buong Metro Manila at mga nakapaligid na kalawigan ng Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna at Rizal dulot ng mabilis na urbanisasyon at pagtaas ng populasyon. Tanging ang

WORLD WATER DAY 2023: MAKIISA AT MAKIBAHAGI

Angat dam, La Mesa dam at Laguna de Bay ang siyang pinagkukunan ng malinis na tubig ng dalawang water concessionaires. Mismo ang NWRB na ang nagsasabi na hindi na kakayanan pang NCR ang lubhang mataas na pangangailangan sa malinis na tubig. Isa itong nagtatabang problema at pangahib.

Highlight ng obserbasyon ang pagsasagawa ng "UN Water Conference" sa UN general headquarters sa New York, United States mula March 22 hanggang 24, 2023 at kasabay nito sa bansa ay ang "Water Philippines" na gaganapin sa SMX convention center, Pasay City.

Imbitado nito si President Ferdinand "BBM" Marcos,

Jr. na inaasalang magbibigay ng talumpati tungkol sa "water agenda" ng kanyang administrasyon.

Inanyayahan din si DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yu-lo Loyzaga at Senador Grace Poe-Llamanzares.

Kung nais ninyong malaman ang TAMANG IMPORMASYON, TAMANG SERBISYO ni AGARANG SERBISYO LADY, i-search sa YOUTUBE CHANNEL "HILDA ONG" at sa Facebook Fanpage "TV RADIO HILDA ONG". Huwag kalimutan i-click ang salitang "SUBSCRIBE", "LIKE" at "SHARE".



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CCC seeks funding for climate-related damage

THE Climate Change Commission (CCC) has called for the urgent delivery of global commitment on climate action, particularly the funding for climate-related loss and damage, at the 18th Meeting of the Warsaw International Mechanism Executive Committee (WIM Excom 18) in Manila.

Following the 27th Meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP27) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the WIM Excom convened on February 28 to discuss the milestone decision on funding arrangements for loss and damage, the enabling mechanisms to fully operationalize the Santiago Network and the Excom's second five-year rolling workplan.

CCC Vice Chairman and Executive Director Robert Borje recognized the effort of the WIM based on the mandates from the UNFCCC and COP, and encouraged the Excom and observers to further fast-track the work on the loss and damage agenda.

"There is still a lot of work ahead of us. We need to deliver on our mandates and our roles more urgently and collectively to transform developing countries' vulnerabilities and loss and damage to greater climate resilience," Borje said in a statement on Sunday.

He said it is important that the WIM Excom should further advance the gains achieved in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt in terms of a separate funding facility for loss and damage.

"The Excom is expected to provide input to the work of the

Transitional Committee. This, to us, provides the committee with the singular opportunity and the great responsibility to ensure the mainstreaming of action of support strategies under the second five-year rolling work plan adopted by the parties at COP27," he added.

The WIM Excom welcomed the participation of observers in the meeting, in which the Philippines engaged actively.

Among the Philippines' observations were on the work of the WIM with other UNFCCC constituted bodies and operating entities of the financial mechanisms, the Excom's work plan, the comprehensive risk management approaches, and the facilitation and cooperation on action and support for developing countries.

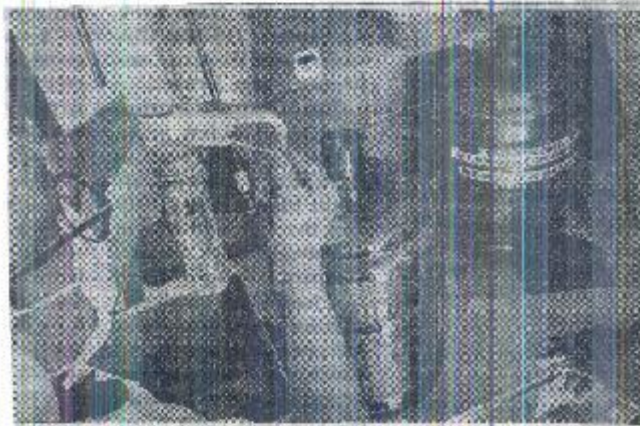
In particular, the CCC highlighted the need for the best available science and best available technology to guide the work on averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage.

"It is through the best available science and technology, governance, and investments that we can advance our transformation towards becoming climate-smart and climate-resilient nations," Borje said.

CCC emphasized that state-of-the-art methodologies for comprehensive risk assessments are crucial, as these will ensure that climate actions are science- and evidence-based and fit for purpose.

The Philippines has been actively engaged in the international discussion on loss and damage.

PNA



TUBIG TALINO. Production workers of Bilibinwang Multipurpose Cooperative demonstrate the iodine premix preparation for producing iodine-rich drinking water (Tubig Talino) through a technology transfer training held at their water purification facility in Bgy. Bilibinwang, Agoncillo, Batangas. "Tubig Talino" is soon to become available in Agoncillo, Batangas. The implementation of the "Tubig Talino" technology for Bilibinwang MPC is part of the Department of Science and Technology - Batangas' Grants-in-Aid Community-based project. The project aims to transfer "Tubig Talino" technology as the cooperative's new business venture that will help contribute to the government's program to control iodine deficiency disorders in the country. "Tubig Talino," developed by DOST Food and Nutrition Research Inc., is a purified or ordinary potable water mixed with Water Plus Iodine (12) that may be consumed to improve the iodine intake of Filipinos, resulting in better health. Like ordinary water, "Tubig Talino" has no adverse taste and has a stable shelf life of six months and two weeks. According to DOST-FNRI, sufficient consumption of iodine from water helps absorb essential micronutrients, speeding up brain development among children and preventing iodine deficiency disorders in adults. The body's thyroid gland also uses iodine to produce thyroid hormones that help control growth, repair damaged cells, and support a healthy metabolism. A study by the DOST-FNRI showed "Tubig Talino" could help improve students' academic performance. *Photo courtesy of DOST-Calabarzon*