

21 March 2023 Tuesday



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ROV arrives amid contrary PCG reports on oil spill

By Charles Dantes, Willie Casas and Macon Ramos-Araneta

THE Japanese vessel Shin Nichi Maru carrying the remotely operated vehicle (ROV) capable of finding the MT Prin-

cess Empress, which sank and spilled 800,000 liters of industrial oil off the coast of Oriental Mindoro, has arrived in Calapan City, authorities said Monday.

This was after the Philippine Coast Guard gave conflicting reports of the

oil spill finally reaching Isla Verde, a part of Batangas City, in the Verde Island Passage -- recognized as the center of global shore-fish biodiversity, and which provides food and livelihood to

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ROV CARRIER: As Philippine Coast Guard personnel gather oil-filled sand from the shores of three barangays on Isla Verde in Batangas City, the Japanese salvage vessel Shin Nichi Maru, with the remotely operated vehicle (ROV) Hakuyo on its deck, docks at the Calapan Bay in Oriental Mindoro on Monday (inset). It will help the Philippine Coast Guard ship BRP Bagacay in containing the oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress. **Danny Pata, Batangas Disaster Office**



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ROV...

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more than two million people.

Yesterday morning, the PCG Batangas Station under Capt. Victorino Acosta reported that oil had reached the shores of Isla Verde, with community officials on the island saying it reached Barangays San Agapito, San Antonio, and San Andres.

As Acosta confirmed the oil slick in radio interviews, pictures and videos posted by news organizations on social media also showed Coast Guard crews in Batangas gathering oil slick samples into pails and other containers.

"We are already combating it at around 4.4 nautical miles. There are oil sheens, but some are making a land-fall which are black in color," the PCG Batangas leader told radio DZBB.

But in the afternoon, Coast Guard spokesperson Armando Balilo said the island was "negative" for the oil spill after an aerial inspection.

"During the aerial inspection from 1PM to 4PM, the PCG confirmed that Verde Island and its vicinity waters no longer have traces of an oil spill," the spokesman said.

PCG Commandant Admiral Artemio Abu also said the aerial assessment revealed the full reach of the oil spill resulting from the sunken tanker, which went down on Feb. 28 near Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

Abu added that the PCG was coordinating with towns or coastal areas where the oil spill might reach.

Acosta, meanwhile, assured that Batangas province has already been preparing for the spill and has put in place improvised oil spill booms and other equipment.

The PCG also said it has contracted experts from the United States and Japan who are in the country to help in the clean-up.

Balilo said the PCG requested help from the US, including another ROV that could help find the sunken tanker.

"Getting the sunken ship is not part of the plan," said Balilo. "What we're initially planning is to patch up a hole in the ship, if there's any, and then have the oil siphoned out."

The ROV Hakuyo from Japan would get first crack in locating the MT Princess Empress, which is reportedly moored 400 meters below sea level, a depth local ROVs or divers could not reach.

Environment Secretary Ma. Antonio Yulo-Loyzaga said it was important to pinpoint where the oil tanker sank to determine the extent of the damage to marine protected areas and the livelihood of the fishermen in the province.

Environmental groups including Oceana Philippines, Greenpeace Philippines, and Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED) on Monday raised the alarm over the continued spread of the oil spill from the sunken tanker and called for a sustained and thorough investigation.

In a statement read during a public forum, the groups decried the "disruption caused by the oil spill from MT Princess Empress to the lives and livelihood of coastal communities and the health of critical marine biodiversity -- as the fuel tanker sank in waters belonging to the Verde Island Passage, the most biodiverse marine habitat in the world that is undeniably a national ecological treasure for the Philippines."



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Top photo shows the Philippine Coast Guard continuing clean-up operations using oil spill containment booms and manual scooping around the area believed to be where an oil tanker sank off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro. Top inset shows a Philippine Space Agency image of the possible extent of the oil spill using satellite maps from US and international agencies. Lower photo shows the US Coast Guard Oil Spill Response Team, led by US Coast Guard Pacific Strike Team commanding officer Stacey Crecy, and the Japanese Disaster Relief Team, led by Daisuke Nihei, minister for economic affairs at the Japan embassy, meeting with PCG spokesperson Rear Admiral Armando Balilo yesterday in Manila.

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Oil spill reaches Verde Island

By EVELYN MACAIRAN

Almost three weeks since the incident, the oil spill from the sunken tanker *MT Princess Empress* has reached Verde Island, a Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) official said yesterday.

"Around 7:30 in the morning... we received information from our men in the area that the oil spill has reached the waters of Verde Island," PCG Batangas Station commander Capt. Victorino Acosta confirmed.

"As of now, it is confirmed that there are sightings (of the oil spill) in Verde Island... at some 4.4 nautical miles. There is already an oil sheen,

but some of those that made landfall were black in color," he added.

However, during an aerial inspection in the afternoon, the PCG said there were no longer traces of oil in the vicinity of waters off Verde Island, although traces of the oil spill could be found in three coastal barangays of the island – San Antonio, San Agustin and San Agapito.

The Coast Guard official also said that even before the oil spill reached Verde Island, the PCG and the local government had taken precautionary measures such as deploying strike teams, improvised oil

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spill booms and other equipment to contain the spread of the oil.

Acosta appealed to the public, especially the residents of the island barangays, to donate plastic bottles to use as floaters, nets and nylon cords for making improvised oil spill booms.

But even with their effort, Acosta said they could not guarantee that the oil spill would only cause minimal damage.

The PCG so far has collected approximately 230 liters of oil during yesterday's shoreline cleanup. Since the start of cleanup operations last March 1, the PCG recovered 6,803 liters of oily water mixture and 65 sacks of oil-contaminated materials.

For shoreline ops, the PCG has collected 215 sacks of oil-contaminated materials resulting in 2,353 sacks and 22 drums of waste in 13 affected barangays.

Verde Island is part of the 1.4-million hectare Verde Island Passage (VIP), a body of water between Batangas and Mindoro that has the highest concentration of coastal fishes, corals, crustaceans, mollusks, seagrasses and mangroves. Its rich marine biodiversity is home to over 300 coral species, underwater rock

canyons, reef formations and 60 percent of known shore fish species in the world.

Satellite mapping

The Philippine Space Agency (PhilSA) has mapped out the possible extent of the oil spill by using satellite maps from the International Charter Space and Major Disasters and the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

In their updated maps of the extent of the oil spill, PhilSA said the oil slicks were approximately 16.02 nautical miles in length and about 0.35 nautical miles at the widest, placing the total coverage of the oil spill at approximately 9.87 square kilometers.

"These maps are still subject to field validation. These two maps from NOAA exhibit the possible, yet unconfirmed, oil off the coast of Pola, Mindoro Island as seen from RCM1 and Sentinel 1A imagery taken on 19 March 2023," PhilSA said.

"In the RCM1 imagery, the oil was segmented and extended a total of 13 nautical miles towards the southwest of the vessel point source, and is 1 nautical mile at its widest point closer to the shore of Mindoro near Lake Naujan; it covers approximately 11.62 square kilometers," PhilSA said.

"In the Sentinel 1A imagery, the oil was separated into three different areas south and southwest of the sunken tanker location. The slicks are approximately 16.02 nautical miles in total length and about 0.35 nautical miles at the widest; it covers a total of approximately 9.87 square kilometers," PhilSA said.

The NOAA is a US federal agency focused on the condition of the oceans and the atmosphere.

Oil slick

Meanwhile, environmental group Greenpeace Philippines said the oil slick from the sunken *MT Princess Empress* has affected at least 984,238 hectares of municipal waters covering 10 coastal towns of Oriental Mindoro, two in Palawan and one in Antique.

At a press conference, Greenpeace Philippines campaigner Jefferson Chua cited the data gathered by Oceana's Karagatan Patrol which showed that the oil spill reached Bansud, Bongabong, Bulalacao, Calapan, Gloria, Mansalay, Naujan, Pinamalayan, Pola and Roxas in Oriental Mindoro; Caluya in Antique and Agutaya and Taytay in Palawan.

— With Bella Cariaso, Rainier Allan Ronda, Arnell Ozaeta, Sheila Crisostomo



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OIL SPILL REACHES VERDE ISLAND PASSAGE REGIONS / A5

Marina sets release of P33M for cleanup / A4



SPILL PROTECTION In Calapan City, Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) personnel, policemen, members of the local disaster response unit and residents lay an oil spill boom in Barangay Navotas to contain the slick from a sunken tanker in this photo taken on March 17. —PCG PHOTO



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Oil spill reaches Verde Island Passage

Private, gov't groups pool resources to protect important body of water between Batangas, Mindoro recognized as 'center of global shorefish biodiversity'

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.,
Madonna T. Virolo
and Frances Mangosing
@Team_Inquirer

Traces of oil spill from the sunken MT Princess Empress had reached Verde Island, a six-village islet in Batangas City, which is at the heart of the Verde Island Passage (VIP) where the world's most critical marine biodiversity center is found, authorities said on Monday.

In an advisory, Fr. Edwin Gariguez, lead convenor of the environmentalist group Protect the Verde Island Passage, said they were ready to assist in containing the spill in VIP after residents reported seeing oil sheen and clumps in waters off four villages of Verde Island.

Gariguez said the thin layers of floating oil were found on the shores of the villages of Sampalucan, San Antonio, San Agapito and San Andres.

According to Gariguez, 80 pieces of coco coir logs would be transported from Batangas to Mindoro to help contain the oil spill.

He said 20 of the coco coir logs would be sent to Verde Island and another 20 to Lobo town, also in Batangas.

Coco coir logs, made of interwoven coconut fibers that are bound together with biodegradable netting, "can absorb a fair amount of crude oil," said Gariguez, adding that "studies also indicate that a simple squeezing was sufficient to remove most of the oil absorbed by the fibers so that the sorbents can be reused several times for oil spill cleanup."

Capt. Victorino Acosta, Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) station commander in Batangas

province, on Monday confirmed the report that the oil slick had reached the island, which has a population of about 5,000 and home to a resort frequented by diving enthusiasts eager to explore its pristine waters and coral reefs.

As of 8 a.m. on Monday, oil sheen and thin patches of segmented oil were found in the villages of San Agapito and San Agustin, the PCG said.

"As such, swimming, diving and any forms of leisure activities are prohibited along the coastal waters of Verde Island to avoid health issues," the PCG-Batangas said in an advisory.

Other coastal areas in Batangas, including those in the towns of San Juan, Tingloy, Lobo and Calatagan were also placed under the oil spill watch, added Acosta.

Aerial inspection

Verde Island, located off the coast of Batangas City, sits right in the middle of the VIP, a body of water between Mindoro Island and Batangas that has been recognized as the "center of global shorefish biodiversity" due to the high densities of marine resources in the area.

The strait has the highest concentration of coastal fishes, corals, crustaceans, mollusks, seagrass and mangroves. Also found in the VIP are endangered and threatened species, such as the critically endangered hawksbill sea turtle, whale sharks, manta rays, dugongs, humphead wrasses, giant groupers and giant clams.

PCG commandant Adm. Artemio Abu told reporters on Monday that they have dispatched a helicopter to conduct an aerial inspection to see how

far the oil had spread.

The remotely operated vehicle from Japan that would be used in oil spill cleanup efforts in Oriental Mindoro arrived on Monday morning, Abu said.

The oil spill from MT Princess Empress, which carried 800,000 liters of industrial-grade oil into the sea when it sank off Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28, affected at least 10 towns of Oriental Mindoro before spreading to Caluya Island in Antique and the waters of Palawan.

On Thursday, it reached the shores of the provincial capital Calapan City and had been predicted to reach the VIP due to changing wind directions caused by the weakening north-east monsoon.

On March 16, Batangas Gov. Hermilando Mandanas declared that the provincial government was ready to address the effects of the oil spill should it reach their territorial waters, noting that they had comprehensive plans in place to face possible oil spill from sea vessels transporting industrial oil and fuel that regularly sail on Batangas waters.

Gariguez, meanwhile, said the assistance and relief intervention of the private sector for the victims of the oil spill should no longer be in the form of food packs as they were already receiving these from the government.

"The needed intervention is cash assistance (if possible, cash for work or for livelihood), particularly for those [poor] families with children going to school, especially for college. And this is an intervention that is not immediate but long-term," he said.

Environmental groups on

Monday appealed to the national government for "urgent action, transparency and accountability" related to the oil spill.

Call for action

In a joint statement, Greenpeace Philippines, Oceana and Center for Energy, Ecology and Development (Ceed) decried what they described as the "disruption" caused by the oil spill to the lives and livelihood of coastal communities and the health of critical marine biodiversity.

According to Oceana, the oil spill had already reached almost a million (984,238) hectares of municipal waters covering the 10 coastal towns of Oriental Mindoro, two in Palawan and one in Antique.

Oriental Mindoro Rep. Arnan Panaligan said in a separate interview on Sunday that lawmakers from affected provinces have filed parallel resolutions to investigate MT Princess Empress to find out its possible violations of maritime safety laws and marine environmental laws.

In an online forum on Monday, lawyer Avril de Torres, director of Ceed, said nearly 90 lawyers in the country, including those from the oil-spill affected provinces, would help document and gather evidence to pursue compensation or criminal, administrative, or civil action against the tanker's operator.

The municipal government of Pola, the hardest-hit town in Oriental Mindoro, was also preparing to take legal action against RDC Reield Marine Services, the owner of MT Princess Empress. —WITH A REPORT FROM



UNSAFE Oil sheen and thin patches of industrial oil coming from the sunken MT Princess Empress have reached the shores of Verde Island on Monday. The island is at the heart of the Verde Island Passage, the strait connecting Batangas province and Mindoro Island, and is known to be a critical global center of marine biodiversity. —GEORGINA MONTESMAYOR/CONTRIBUTOR

Oil slick reaches Batangas waters: PCG

BY VICTOR REYES

THE oil slick caused by the sinking of the MT Princess Empress off Oriental Mindoro has reached the waters of Batangas City as of yesterday, a Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) official said.

Capt. Victorino Acosta, PCG Batangas station commander, said "people on the ground" reported the oil slick yesterday morning, specifically at Verde Island.

"Upon verification of the information, it's positive. There are sightings of oil spill in two barangays," Acosta said.

Acosta said the PCG, in coordi-

nation with local government officials, is prepared for the oil slick, adding that oil spill booms have been installed in the area about a week ago.

Asked how large was the area affected by the oil slick in Batangas City, Acosta said: "We are still assessing the affected shorelines in terms of kilometers. As of now, we are waiting for feedback from our team there."

Acosta said they are anticipating the oil slick to affect Verde Island in Batangas City and several other coastal towns.

PCG spokesman Rear Adm. Armand Balilo said traces of oil

have been reported in three coastal barangays in Verde Island – Barangays San Antonio, San Agustin, and San Agapito.

"They collected approximately 230 liters of oil during the shoreline clean-up operations today," said Balilo, referring to authorities at Verde Island.

PCG commandant Adm. Artemio Abu said the oil slick reached Verde Island due to a change in the wind and water current direction.

The vessel, transporting 900,000 liters of industrial fuel oil, sank off Naujan in Oriental Mindoro last February 28. The vessel was later located at the nearby Pola town,

the worst-affected area.

Meanwhile, the Japanese dynamic positioning vessel Shin Nichi Maru arrived in Negros Oriental yesterday morning to help address the oil spill problem. The vessel was hired by RDC Reield Marine Services Inc, the owner of MT Princess Empress.

On board the vessel is a remotely-operated vehicle (ROV), said Balilo.

"Hopefully, it will fast-track the operations. The ROV is capable of locating the source of the oil spill, assess the condition of the

See OIL SLICK > Page B2

OIL SLICK

vessel and how to go about with the siphoning (of the remaining oil on the sunken vessel)," he said.

Also yesterday, Abu met with Japanese Disaster Relief Expert Team and US Coast Guard Pacific Strike Team personnel and discussed measures to address the problem.

Balilo said the Japanese "briefed the PCG about their comprehensive assessment of the oil spill incident in the vicinity waters off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro."

Balilo said the US Coast Guard Pacific Strike Team "joined the discussion to gather relevant information and determine the best courses of action to execute before going to the Oil Spill Command

Post in Oriental Mindoro."

The PCG said its offshore spill response has resulted in the recovery of 6,803 liters of oily water mixture and 65 sacks of oil-contaminated materials from March 1 up to yesterday.

For shoreline response, a total of 2,353 sacks and 22 drums of waste have been collected in the towns of Naujan, Bulalacao, and Pola, Oriental Mindoro during the same period.

Oriental Mindoro Gov. Humerto Dolor said the oil spill has affected 20,932 families in the province.

Dolor appealed for alternative livelihood for his constituents.

He said the Department of Social Welfare and Development

and the provincial government is currently implementing a cash for work program for 45 days. He said the Department of Labor and Employment has promised to extend the program by another 15 days.

"So that will be for (a total of) 60 days but eventually, if the oil slick will not be contained in the next 60 days, then we have to provide for the alternative livelihood. Alternative livelihood is very important," said Dolor.

CFW EXTENDED

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is extending until May this year its cash-for-work (CFW) program in provinces affected by the oil spill.

DSWD Assistant Bureau Director Miramela Laxa, during a public briefing, said the clean-up of areas affected by the oil slick will take at least three to four months and will affect the livelihood of communities in affected areas, especially fishermen.

The CFW program was initially intended for around three weeks this month.

Laxa said to ensure more families will be provided with cash assistance through the CFW, they are limiting the program to one family member per household.

Each beneficiary will still be paid the equivalent of the minimum wage per day and shall be paid every five days. The minimum wage per day in Western Visayas (Region

VI) as of June 2022 is between P410-450 and between P329 to P355 in Mimaropa (Region IV-B).

Work will be from Monday to Friday and usually involve cleanup of debris from the oil spill-affected shores, collection of locally available materials for the creation of improvised oil spill sorbent materials and oil spill boom which can be used in containing the oil slick, and creating and maintaining a backyard or barangay garden of fruits and vegetables.

Since the implementation of the CFW program in Oriental Mindoro, Palawan and Antique, the government has already distributed P116 million that benefitted 18,336 persons.

A report by the DSWD-Disaster

Response Operations Monitoring and Information Center (DSWD-DROMIC) released yesterday showed that a total of 32,661 families or 151,463 persons from 131 barangays in Regions IV-B (Mimaropa) and VI- (Western Visayas) have been affected by the oil spill.

A total of P42.67 million worth of assistance has been provided to affected families, including P35.89 million from the DSWD, P444,039 from the local government units (LGUs), P464,940 from non-government organizations (NGOs), and P5.87 million from other private partners.

Last March 19, DSWD distributed an additional 21,047 family food packs in Mimaropa. - *With Jocelyn Montemayor*



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Verde Island negative for oil spill – PCG

By MARTIN SADONGDONG

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) on Monday, March 20, denied that oil spill from sunken motor tanker (MT) Princess Empress in Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, has already reached Verde Island in Batangas City.

“Negative sa oil spill ang Verde

Island (Verde Island is negative for oil spill),” PCG spokesman Rear Admiral Armando Balilo told reporters at around 5 p.m.

Earlier in the day, Captain Victorino Acosta, station commander of Coast Guard Station Batangas, said oil sheens or the shiny and rain-bow-colored particles which ▶ **6**

Verde Island ‘negative’ for oil spill – PCG ◀

appear at the surface of the water due to an oil spill were monitored on the coastal waters of Verde Island.

The PCG Marine Environmental Protection Command (MEPC) headed by Vice Admiral Robert Patrimonio conducted an aerial survey over Verde Island on the same day to assess the situation in the area.

Pressed for further information, the PCG said that during the aerial inspection conducted from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., “the Verde Island and its vicinity waters no longer have traces of an oil spill.”

Balilo has yet to elaborate on the statement, which implies that oil spill was previously present.

The Verde Island Passage (VIP)—which covers the Verde Island, Calapan in Oriental Mindoro, and parts of Batangas province—has the “highest concentration of coastal fishes, corals, crustaceans, molluscs, seagrasses and mangroves,” according to experts from the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI).

It is also “home to endangered and threatened species such as hawksbill turtle, whale sharks, manta rays, dugongs, humphead wrasses, giant groupers, and giant clams,” the group added.

No amended CPC

As this developed, the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) reiterated on Monday that it has not yet issued an amended Certificate of Public Convenience (CPC) to the owner of MT Princess Empress, the RDC Reield Marine Services, Inc., casting doubt on the vessel’s authority to sail at sea and operate.

“As confirmed by our administrator [lawyer Hernani Fabia] in the Senate inquiry, the company has a valid CPC. It’s a company CPC but there is no CPC amendment as of yet,” lawyer Sharon Aledo, MARINA spokesperson and director of the agency’s Legal Service, said in a livestreamed press conference at the MARINA Building in Port Area, Manila.

A CPC is an authorization issued by the MARINA to a vessel “for a domestic water transportation service for commercial/public use for which no franchise,



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either municipal or legislative is required by law.”

In a Senate inquiry on March 14, Administrator Fabia said MARINA has yet to issue an amended CPC to RDC Reield Marine Services, Inc. after the recent addition of MT Princess Empress to its fleet.

On that same day, Balilo showed a copy of the supposed



amended CPC of RDC Reield Marine Services, Inc. to media, and held a press conference the following day to present the document publicly. The document included a supposed MARINA decision dated Nov. 16, 2022 which amended the CPC of RDC Reield Marine Services, Inc. and allowed the sunken tanker “to effect the permanent addition of the ship/tanker, M/TKR Princess Empress, to the company’s fleet.”

But Aledo bared that the MARINA “has not yet issued any decision,” emphasizing that RDC Reield Marine Services, Inc.’s application for a CPC amendment “is ongoing.”

Aledo said the Department of Transportation (DOTr) is already investigating the supposed amended CPC that was presented to the public by the PCG.

During that same Senate hearing, RDC vice president Fritzie Tee said their company started submitting all the necessary requirements in November 2022.

Oil spill response fund

Aledo also revealed that the PCG has requested over ₱33 million from the MARINA’s Oil Pollution Management Fund (OPMF) so they could perform cleanup operations and prevent the oil slick from further spreading.

US, Japan experts arrive

Meanwhile, PCG Commandant Admiral Artemio Abu welcomed officials from the US Coast Guard



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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1898
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Pacific Strike Team led by commanding officer Stacey Crecy and Japan Disaster Response Expert Team headed by Daisuke Nihei at the PCG headquarters.

Japanese dynamic positioning vessel (DPV) Shin Nichi Maru, which was hired by the owner of the sunken MT Princess Empress, RDC Reield Marine Services, Inc., also arrived in Oriental Mindoro on Monday, bringing with them a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) or an underwater robot to locate the tanker and contain the leakage, Abu said.

The PCG chief said the experts from the US and Japan will assist the PCG in the massive oil spill cleanup operations.

"Their arrival is very timely, it is on-the-dot. They said they will arrive at 8 a.m. on Monday, and they did. They were in the vicinity," Abu said.

Experts from South Korea have also expressed readiness to extend help to the PCG, Balilo said.

As of March 18, the PCG has collected 6,803 liters of oily water mixture and 65 sacks of oil-contaminated materials in its offshore

response; and 22 drums and 1,898 sacks of oil-contaminated materials in its shoreline operations.

MT Princess Empress was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil when it capsized off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28.

At least 151,463 individuals (32,661 families) have already been affected by the oil spill in 131 barangays in Oriental Mindoro, Palawan, and Antique as of March 20, data from the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council showed.



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OIL POLLUTION MANAGEMENT FUND

**MARINA SETS RELEASE OF P33M
FOR OIL SPILL CLEANUP**

By Tyrone Jasper C. Piad
@TyronePiad

The Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) plans to release P33 million from its oil pollution management fund (OPMF) this week to finance the oil spill cleanup in Oriental Mindoro after an oil tanker capsized in the area.

Sharon Aledo, legal services director of Marina, told reporters on Monday they were just awaiting signatures of the OPMF committee members for the disbursement.

The fund was requested by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), which is leading the cleanup, via a letter request to Marina on March 10.

The money will be spent on equipment and other supplies, such as personal protective equipment, needed for

the operation, Aledo shared.

As of end-February, the OPMF stood at P70 million, Aledo said.

The OPMF is a revolving fund established by the Oil Pollution Compensation Act of 2007. The fund is comprised of "contributions of owners and operators of tankers and barges hauling oil and for petroleum products in Philippine waterways and coast wise shipping routes."

The MT Princess Empress was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial oil when it sank off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro, on Feb. 28.

The PCG recently reported that it had recovered 6,804 liters of oily water mixture and 65 sacks of oil-contaminated materials during its offshore operations from March 1 to March 17. INQ



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Accountability in disaster

Scientists say the Verde Island Passage in Batangas is home to 36 marine protected areas with an estimated 1,700 fish species and 300 coral species. About two million people depend on the passage for their livelihoods, mostly fishermen and workers in the tourism industry.

Tragically, the industrial oil spilling from the sunken motor tanker *Princess Empress* has reached several coastal barangays on Verde Island. This was reported yesterday by the Philippine Coast Guard, which is part of the teams tracking the movement of the oil spill and struggling to contain it. Later in the afternoon, the PCG said an aerial inspection showed that the oil sheen spotted in the waters near the island had dissipated.

While teams from different agencies assisted by civilian groups as well as Japan and now the US scramble to contain the oil spill, probes must speed up the determination of accountability in one of the country's worst environmental disasters. Reports last week said the vessel was originally an LPG tanker named *Dorothy* that was about 50 years old but was refurbished and made to appear new.

Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla described the vessel as "a rebuilt scrap... it was not built to be a tanker from the very beginning." He also said the ship ignored a gale warning when it set sail on Feb. 28. The ship owners have declined to comment.

The oil spill has so far affected

over 151,000 people in 131 barangays in Oriental Mindoro, Palawan and Antique, according to the Department of Social Welfare and Development, which is providing various forms of immediate relief to the residents.

Scientists have warned that the oil spill could cause long-term damage to the marine ecosystem in the affected areas. This could mean prolonged disruption of fisheries in several provinces. The pollution is also destroying beaches this summer, the peak travel season when the affected communities had hoped to bounce back from three years of pandemic disruptions.

Japan has provided a remotely operated underwater vehicle to pinpoint the exact location of the sunken tanker and determine if its cargo of 800,000 liters of bunker oil is leaking along with its fuel. Initial probes indicate that the tanker has settled at a depth of about 400 meters.

Why the ship was cleared to sail remains unclear. An official of the Maritime Industry Authority said a document bearing his signature and presented by ship owner RDC Reield Marine Service is fake. Congress is still investigating the role of the MARINA and Coast Guard in the disaster.

Remulla has said criminal and civil cases are being studied against the ship owners and anyone else who may be found culpable for the disaster. Accountability is crucial in preventing a repeat of this environmental crisis.



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Daily Tribune

WITHOUT FEAR & WITHOUT FAVOR

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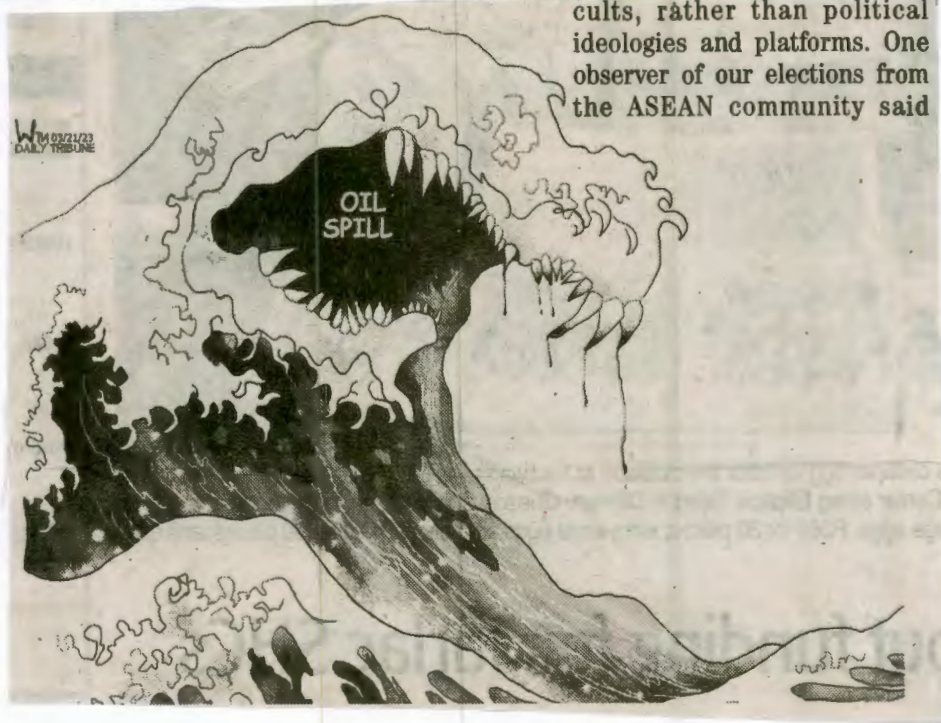
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Wherefore solidarity

“*SMC, if only for the sake of its corporate vow of not forsaking ordinary Filipinos, must extend its hand to assist the communities affected by the spill.*”

Toxic content from the ill-fated *MT Princess Empress* continues to leak and has started to seep into the natural treasure Verde Island Passage, the latest report of the University of the Philippines' Marine Science Institute showed.

The report cited the latest satellite image on 15 March showing the oil still leaking out of the sunken vessel.

Oil spill trajectories showed a northward shift placing it on the path to Calapan, Oriental Mindoro which is expected to bear the brunt of the oil flow from 20 to 22 March.

Westward currents along the coast of northern Mindoro will be more pronounced pointing to the pollutant making its way towards the Verde Island Passage or VIP, which is an ecological wonder situated between Batangas and Oriental Mindoro that is considered the center of marine life and has the distinction of being called the “Amazon of the Ocean.”

The Amazon is the central American rainforest which is considered to have the biggest concentration of wildlife on Earth.

VIP is now threatened by the accumulation of sludge from the tanker if efforts to halt its flow are unsuccessful.

The fuel seeping out of the tanker is extremely toxic. San Miguel Corp.'s unit, SL Harbor Bulk Terminal Corporation, reportedly chartered the tanker to carry 900,000 liters of bunker oil.

Environment groups have been adamant about their demand for full accountability from companies that had a hand in the disaster.

Given that bunker fuel is used by thermal power plants, the tragedy completes the circle of betrayal.

An industry veteran said the vessel carried Intermediate Fuel Oil or IFO.

“Only Petron, SMC's oil refiner can supply IFO in the Philippines,” the source explained,

Petron denied it had anything to do with the cargo of the *MT Princess Empress*. The SMC unit added that it had stopped producing fuel oil in 2016.

It stressed that it did not own “the fuel oil cargo the tanker was carrying at the time of the incident.”



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The question that follows, however, is where SMC obtained the fuel.

This gives rise to the suspicion of smuggling. Presidential Chief Legal Counsel Juan Ponce Enrile said investigations should determine the possibility of smuggling.

“
Given that bunker fuel is used by thermal power plants, the tragedy completes the circle of betrayal.

“To receive smuggled oil, there has to be a loading facility either from a bigger tanker or from a land facility with storage tanks,” the source said.

SMC needs industrial oil for its Ilijan Power Plant, which is a natural gas plant, but due to a series of unfortunate events lost a supply contract with the Malampaya consortium.

Ilijan was banking on the entry of liquefied natural gas to continue producing electricity at a preferential cost but the building of its terminal has been delayed due to the protest of Batangas residents.

Since it has canceled its power supply agreement with Meralco, it is now selling electricity to the Wholesale Electricity Spot Market, which is partly the reason for the current high monthly bills.

SMC walked back from its contract with Meralco after it claimed to be running huge losses from the PSA which has a fixed price provision.

As a result of the accident that has spread the toxic liquid, SMC may end up paying through the nose since it owns the spilled oil.

Although it is freed from liability for one reason or another, SMC, if only for the sake of its corporate vow of not forsaking ordinary Filipinos, must extend its hand to assist the communities affected by the spill.

Its favorite word in its statements during the Covid-19 pandemic was solidarity.

It's the least the company can do to give back after the billions of pesos in profit it generated last year as the nation recovered from the two-year pandemic.



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Marina head should resign or go on leave

Two readers from the shipping industry sent some interesting feedback about the accidental sinking of the *MT Princess Empress*, which are featured in today's column. Both have requested anonymity.

The first reader introduces himself as having been involved with the maritime industry for almost five decades, with experience in ship design and building, and in managing ship operations. Some of his observations and comments follow.

BIZLINKS



REY GAMBOA

"A vessel may be registered, but without a Certificate of Public Convenience (CPC). It should not be allowed to sail loaded with oil products for delivery. Similarly, a car may be registered, but the vehicle cannot be used as a taxi for public use without the appropriate permit and license.

"A tanker loaded with oil is like a 'floating time bomb,' and should be subjected to strict requirements by MARINA [Maritime Industry Authority] and by the Coast Guard before being allowed to sail. Did MARINA and the Coast Guard follow the strict protocol of requiring a valid CPC in all the previous sailings of *MT Princess Empress*?"

"If *MT Princess Empress* sailed without a valid CPC, it is doubtful that the insurance coverage, as announced by MARINA, is enforceable since the voyage is considered as illegal. Claims for damages caused by the accident become problematic.

Stricter regulation needed

"A rule that MARINA should consider implementing strictly is requiring all tankers trading in domestic waters (excluding bays and rivers) to be classed by international classification societies (IACS) and not by just local groups.

"A responsible oil company will always vet the vessel and its management before it loads the cargo. This is standard practice worldwide. Did San Miguel Shipping and Lighterage Corp. which chartered RDC Reield



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Marine Services to ship the fuel oil from Limay, Bataan to Iloilo, observe this critical practice?

"Government regulating agencies must be strict in implementing rules. They should not be moved by the lobby of politicians or by small tanker owners to relax rules, something that has already happened in the past. Succumb to these pressures and we all pay the high price of destruction of the environment, properties, loss of livelihood, and in some cases loss of lives."

Aligning standards to international class

Our second shipping man writes: "I just needed to share with you some thoughts arising from your article on the *MT Princess Empress* sinking, which no one has looked into.

"The tanker was built just last year and sunk after nine voyages, in less than six months from the time it was built. I understand the *MT Princess Empress* was built in RDC Marine's own shipyard, and supervised by a local class ORS [Operations Research Service].

"Considering that oil tankers transport fuels that are very hazardous to the environment, they are required by MARINA to be double hulled and with a double bottom, plus must have a P&L [property and liability] insurance cover worth \$1 billion.

"But what's missing is that they are not required to be IACS classed and maintained. Are we not curious how a brand new built vessel delivered only last September 2022 suffered engine failure leading to the sinking? I understand that they installed surplus Caterpillar engines.

"What was the type of steel used in the construction of the tanker? Were the compartments truly water tight? Deviations in upheld standards during construction would not have been allowed if the vessel was under the supervision of an international classification society.

"Likewise, was the tanker at the time of the accident fully manned with a licensed master onboard, and not just a third mate or major patron, as is usually wrongly practiced by smaller ships?

'Cleared to sail'

"Nowhere in the world does a ship need a coast guard or port control clearance to depart, even in bad weather. It is the responsibility of the ship owners should any sea accident occurs.

"However, here in the Philippines, whenever a ship sinks, the ship owners can easily seek legal cover by



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stating that they were cleared to sail by the Philippine Coast Guard. This behavior of the ship owner will surely change if the law will allow them to make the decision to sail, but will be held liable for any and all ship accidents.

Reporting requirements

"MARINA is required by the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) regulation I/21 and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), Articles 8 and 12, to conduct an investigation into any casualty involving ships under its flag.

"MARINA is also obliged to provide the International Maritime Organization (IMO) with pertinent information regarding the findings of such investigations. An examination of casualties is also required in Article 23 of the Load Lines Convention.

"The state and the other states should cooperate in any investigation conducted by another state into any maritime casualty or navigational mishap as per the IMO. Thus, the value of the Marine Casualty Investigation (MCI) reports is of utmost importance in preventing future accidents from happening."

Preventing any whitewashing

Like our two readers, the ongoing investigations by our lawmakers on why *MT Princess Empress* capsized and sunk strongly points to the culpability of MARINA as a regulator in ensuring the seaworthiness of the tanker to carry petroleum products in Philippine seas.

To be able for MARINA to conduct an impartial, independent, and a truly comprehensive investigation on the incident, all involved officials must resign or at least go on leave to prevent any incident of whitewashing.

Only then can we expect the results to be of real value in preventing future accidents to happen.

Facebook and Twitter

We are actively using two social networking websites to reach out more often and even interact with and engage our readers, friends and colleagues in the various areas of interest that I tackle in my column. Please like us on www.facebook.com/ReyGamboa and follow us on www.twitter.com/ReyGamboa.

Should you wish to share any insights, write me at Link Edge, 25th Floor, 139 Corporate Center, Valero Street, Salcedo Village, 1227 Makati City. Or e-mail me at reydgamboa@yahoo.com. For a compilation of previous articles, visit www.BizlinksPhilippines.net.



Lawmaker wants oil spill probed

BY IRE JOE V.C. LAURENTE

CALAPAN CITY: A resolution has been filed at the House of Representatives calling for an investigation in aid of legislation of the possible violations of marine safety laws and marine environmental laws in relation to the sinking of an oil tanker in Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28, 2023.

The oil spill from the sunken vessel has affected four provinces that straddle the Verde Island Passage, known for its rich marine biodiversity.

In a post on his social media page, First District Rep. Arnan Panaligan said that he filed House Resolution 854 on March 13, 2023.

The lawmaker said he called for the inquiry because the oil spill is threatening the lives and livelihood not only of the people

of Oriental Mindoro but also the provinces of Palawan and Batangas and some parts of Visayas.

"The oil spill has reached the waters near Taytay, Cuyo and Coron Islands in the northern part of Palawan and some areas of Panay, every day that the oil spills from the sunken tanker means that wider areas of our fragile marine ecosystem will be devastated if left uncontrolled or unmanaged, the famous

white sand beaches in Boracay in the Western Visayas may also be in danger depending on the changes in the flow of the current," Panaligan said in his resolution.

According to the projection of the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute (UPMSI), the oil spill could advance to the Verde Island Passage and some coastal areas in the province of Batangas with the weakening of the northeast monsoon (amihan) and the northward track of the sea current.

Panaligan said that the oil spill is no longer a local concern but of national interest considering its adverse impact on food security. The Philippine Statistics Authority citing that Oriental Mindoro and Palawan contributes 59,895.53 metric tons to regional fish production.

"The owner of MT Princess Empress, RDC Reield Marine Services (RDC) has the primary obligation and liability in this environmental disaster, therefore, RDC should be compelled to carry out the immediate cleanup and rehabilitation of the waters and coastal areas ravaged by the pollution," Panaligan said.

In a text message to *The Manila Times* on Monday, March 20, Panaligan said that the resolution was filed before the House Committee on Rules and the committee is already looking for resource persons for the inquiry.

PSM daily loss

Meanwhile, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) chief information officer Nazario Briguera said in a press briefing on Monday that fisherfolk in Oriental

Mindoro and nearby islands lose an estimated amount of P5 million per day due to the oil spill.

Based on the bureau's registry, there are 19,000 affected fisherfolk whose livelihood was put on hold because of the oil slick.

"We estimate that P5 million is lost everyday as fisherfolk lose their livelihood while fishing farms are closed," Briguera said.

Fishing has been banned in areas affected by the oil spill.

According to Briguera, the BFAR gave P1.5 million in aid to the communities affected by the oil spill and also provided technical intervention in the monitoring and assessment of the incident.

Briguera, however, said that the bureau sees no shortage of fish on a national scale despite the oil leak.

"The limited supply of fish is really possible in the localities of

the affected areas because of the fishing ban implemented by the local government unit," he said.

Briguera also assured the public that the supply and price of fish in Metro Manila remain stable.

According to the Department of Social Welfare and Development, around 150,000 individuals from nine municipalities, including Naujan, Pola, Pinamalayan, Basud, Gloria, Roxas, Mansalay, Bongabong, Bulalacao in Oriental Mindoro, have been heavily affected by the oil spill.

The oil spill has also reached Liwagao Island in Antique, Agutaya in Palawan, and the Verde Island Passage which is regarded by experts as the "center of the center of marine shore fish biodiversity" in the world.

WITH REPORTS FROM
JANINA ALEXIS MIGUEL



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THE EXPONENT OF SINCE 1980 PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
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OIL SPILL ASSISTANCE — Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Commander Admiral Artemio Abu (first row, fifth from right) leads Philippine officials in welcoming US Coast Guard (USCG) Pacific Strike Team Commanding Officer Stacey Crecy (first row, third from right) and her crew, as well as the Japan Disaster Response Expert Team, led by Daisuke Nihei (first row, sixth from right), at the PCG Headquarters in Manila on Monday, March 20, 2023. The USCG and Japanese team will help contain the oil spill that has spread from Oriental Mindoro to nearby provinces. (Ali Vicoy)



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NEDA issues guidelines of amended Public Service Act



BALISACAN

THE National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) has released the official implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of the amended Public Service Act (RA11659).

Arsenio Balisacan, NEDA secretary, said with the IRR in place, this landmark reform will further improve the country's position as an ideal investment hub, which will help enhance employment opportunities and allow more Filipinos to benefit from more improved goods and services.

NEDA said allowing full foreign ownership of businesses in select industries such as airports,

railways, expressways, and telecommunications under RA11659 takes effect on April 4, 2023, bypassing constitutional constraint of 40 percent foreign ownership.

Public service utilities such as electricity transmission and distribution, water and wastewater pipeline distribution system including sewerage, petroleum and petroleum products pipeline transmission systems, seaports, and public utility vehicles remain subject to the 60-40 percent foreign equity limitation, Balisacan said.

NEDA said the amendments also provide safeguard provisions to protect the country against na-

tional security concerns that may arise through any proposed merger or acquisition, or any investment in a public service.

"Together with complementary policies and measures such as the amendments to the Foreign Investments Act, the Retail Trade Liberalization Act, the passage of the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises Act, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership ratification, amendments to the IRR of the Build-Operate-Transfer Law, approval of the NEDA Joint Venture

See NEDA ► Page A2

NEDA

Guidelines, as well as the Marcos administration's continuous efforts to raise investor interest in the country, we are confident that the Philippines will be able to attract much-needed

capital and technology, sustain its high-growth trajectory, and generate high-quality jobs enabling rapid poverty reduction in the next six years," Balisacan said.



editorial

Jail CEOs of firms involved in oil spills

THE 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill was the largest oil spill in United States by the time it happened. While it was a disastrous incident, killing thousands of birds, fish and intertidal invertebrates, along with many dolphins, elephant seals and sea lions, the legacy of the Santa Barbara oil spill is lasting and impressive and includes the creation of the National Environmental Policy Act, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and National Marine Sanctuaries system, which until today is seriously protecting important marine ecosystems around the United States.

The 2006 oil spill in Panay Gulf was considered to be the worst oil spill in the Philippines. The oil leak adversely affected marine sanctuaries and mangrove reserves in four municipalities in Guimaras, and threatened 27 communities in Iloilo province and 17 others in Negros Occidental. Because the oil spill nightmare in 2006 seriously threatened the country's marine ecosystems, the government was so inspired to prepare and respond to future oil spills by doing...nothing of significance.

Now we are paying a high price for this inaction. The massive oil spill caused by the sinking of oil tanker MT *Princess Empress* off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on February 28 is threatening to affect the Verde Island Passage (VIP), a region described by scientists as the center of marine biodiversity in the world. According to Conservation International, the VIP is "one of the most productive ecosystems in the world." (Read, "**VIP Under Siege, BUSINESSMIRROR, March 18, 2023**")

From fishing to shipping, the VIP provides food, livelihoods and other benefits to over two million people. It is also home to "charismatic species such as whale sharks, sea turtles, nudibranchs, and an impressive array of corals." More importantly, Conservation International declared that the strait is "the backbone of the local economy, thriving upon coastal tourism, fisheries, and as a shipping route to the international ports of Batangas, Manila and Subic Bay."

In a recent Senate inquiry on the disastrous Mindoro oil spill, Dr. Cesar L. Villanoy of the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute said it is imperative to stop the seepage from the sunken vessel to prevent further damage to marine and coastal environments. He said this should be done before the *amihan* season ends, which also signifies the onset of the summer season, which, he estimated, will start to happen before the Holy Week.

Citing trajectory models used by the United States' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the ocean's current and strong wind brought about by *amihan* are pushing the oil seeping from the sunken vessel to the shores of Naujan and Pola, Oriental Mindoro. However, he warned that without the wind, the trajectory model indicates it will move to the direction of the VIP in the next few weeks.



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BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

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So far, he said, the oil spill is going south, mostly to Semirara and Caluya Island and eventually to Cuyo. However, in the next few days, it will reach the Taytay area in Palawan. "The currents are starting to move to the west—towards the Verde Passage. Sometime next week, it will start to affect the Verde Island Passage," said Villanoy.

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

Sen. Loren Legarda stressed the need for concerted action to mitigate the damage caused by the oil leakage. "Who among the government agencies present here is in charge? There should be one commander. There should be one head. We cannot have different agencies without a head. I call on the President to designate an overall in charge among the agencies," she said.

We hope the massive oil spill in Oriental Mindoro would prompt authorities to do something significant this time to contain and control oil spills in the future. Oil companies must be held responsible for cleanup costs and economic and environmental damages. Imposing fines equal to the harm caused by the spill is a good start, but tougher penalties are needed for negligent oil companies and their officers to teach them a lesson. How about jailing their CEOs?



PH fisheries sector losing ₱5 M daily due to oil spill

By JEL SANTOS

The country's fisheries sector is losing ₱5 million a day as the impact of the Oriental Mindoro oil spill continues to take its toll.

This was revealed by Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) spokesperson Nazario Briguera during a "Laging Handa" briefing on Monday, March 20.

He said about 19,000 fishermen, among others, continue to suffer from the fishing ban that is currently imposed in oil spill-affected areas.

"We are looking at an estimate of ₱5 million being lost every day as we continue to restrict fisherman from fishing in affected areas, which had been their source of livelihood," the bureau official said in Filipino.

On Feb. 28, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) reported an oil spill from the motor tanker Princess Empress, which had capsized earlier that day off the coast of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro and was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil as cargo.

Since then, fishing in oil spill-affected areas has been banned due to possible water toxification. Because of this, more or less half of the residents in affected towns, who rely on fishing

as their only source of income, have been drastically affected, Oriental Mindoro Governor Humerlito Dolor said.

It was recalled that Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Assistance Bureau Director Miramel Laxa recently disclosed that the government's cash-for-work program was able to provide ₱116 million worth of cash assistance and continue to aid at least 151,000 individuals (32,000 families) reportedly affected by the oil spill.

Beneficiaries are paid to help make improvised oil spill booms and absorbents and establish backyard gardens and community clean-up drives.

₱4.2-M aid for 19,000

The 19,000 fishermen affected by the oil spill in Oriental Mindoro are set to receive food assistance and undergo livelihood training to help them move forward from the impact of the incident, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) revealed.

Briguera, in a television interview, disclosed that on top of providing food assistance for the affected fishermen, a ₱4.2-million budget will be allotted to help them find a "temporary livelihood."

"We will start launching proj-

ects using this fund. First, a livelihood skill training for fishermen, where we will teach them fish processing using, of course, the fish harvested from unaffected areas," he said in Filipino.

"Our critical marine habitats were hit, including our mangroves and coral reefs, and this is fatal to our fish larvae and fish eggs," Briguera said, adding they are providing smokehouses for fish processing.

The BFAR will also launch the Kadiwa Oplan Isda in a bid to help fisherfolk cooperatives deliver fish to nearby markets.



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PCG

MARINE experts estimate that as many as 20,000 hectares of coral reefs, 9,900 hectares of mangroves, and 6,000 hectares of seagrass could have been affected by the oil spill.

Philippines losing P5M daily on oil spill fish ban

THE PHILIPPINES is losing P5 million daily as fisherfolk remained barred from sailing in some areas affected by the oil spill from a sunken tanker south of the capital, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) said on Monday.

About 19,000 fishermen in nine Oriental Mindoro municipalities have been affected by the spill from *MT Princess Empress*, BFAR spokesman Nazario C. Briguera told a televised news briefing.

"We estimate that P5 million is lost every day as fishermen lose their livelihood due to the fishing ban," he said in Filipino.

MT Princess Empress was carrying 800,000 liters of industrial fuel oil on Feb. 28 when it sank off the waters of Naujan, Oriental Mindoro.

Marine experts estimate that as many as 20,000 hectares of coral reefs, 9,900 hectares of mangroves and 6,000 hectares of seagrass could have been affected by the spill.

Senators and congressmen have called for separate investigations of the incident, which prompted the province to place nearly 80 coastal villages in nine towns under a state of calamity.

The spill prompted the government to ban fishing and swimming in some areas in the province, affecting the livelihood of residents who rely on fishing and tourism for their survival.

More than 151,000 people from about 33,000 families in 130 villages in Oriental Mindoro, Palawan and Antique provinces have been affected by the oil spill, according to the Social Welfare department.

The agency had allotted about P116 million for its "cash-for-work" program for fishermen, Miramel G. Laxa, a Social Welfare assistant director, told the briefing. The program will be extended until May.

Authorities have doubled their efforts to contain the spill, which experts said has long-term impacts on fish supply and other marine resources.

The Philippine Coast Guard on Monday said that the spill had reached the

shores of Verde Island Passage, one of the world's most diverse marine habitats.

Coast Guard Batangas station Commander Victorino R. Acosta IV told DZBB radio the oil spill was expected to reach coastal areas along Batangas Bay and Balayan Bay.

The Verde Island Passage, which provides food and livelihood to more than 2 million people, is surrounded by Oriental Mindoro, Occidental Mindoro, Batangas, Romblon and Marinduque.

It is considered as the center of global shore-fish biodiversity, serving as a home to "charismatic species" such as whale sharks, sea turtles, nudibranchs and various corals, according to Conservation International Philippines.

The University of the Philippines (UP) Marine Science Institute in a March 18 bulletin said the oil spill was moving northward, with Calapan, Mindoro possibly receiving most of the oil from March 20-22.

"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 northward," it said. The oil spill's direction is affected by the weakening north-east monsoon, locally called *amihan*.

Mr. Acosta said their team had prepared improvised spill booms and other equipment even before the UP report.

The Coast Guard was monitoring the shores in the towns of San Juan, Lobo, Batangas Bay, Tingloy and Calatagan for oil slick.

Meanwhile, the Maritime Industry Authority had approved a P33-million budget for the Coast Guard's cleanup drive in Mindoro, spokeswoman Sharon L. De Chavez-Aledo told a separate news briefing.

"It will cover the equipment and materials they will be needing for the immediate containment and oil spill operations," she said. — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza, Sheldeen Joy Talavera and Justine Irish D. Tabile**



National Women's Month

Lolas, mothers, sisters for the environment: Women help conserve biodiversity in Antique

By GREGG YAN

SIBALOM, Panay – “We have planted over 10,000 seedlings in those mountains,” gestures Villa Abagon, a 70-year-old forest warden from Barangay Cabladan in the highlands of Antique.

Heavily-denuded after the Second World War, the Sibalom Natural Park slowly regained its forest cover with the help of a few determined mothers, sisters and lolas.

Though most of the country's Bantay Gubat and Bantay Dagat (forest and coastal wardens) are men, Lola Villa has been patrolling the woods and planting native trees as a female forest warden for over 40 years.

The mothers of conservation, many women have become icons for the environment – Dr. Jane Goodall, Dr. Sylvia Earle, even young climate campaigner Greta Thunberg. The Greek personification of Planet Earth, Gaia, is a woman. Philippine tribes once revered the Babaylan, typically an elder woman who was part healer and part intermediary into the realm of spirits.

In many countries however, women's voices are still marginalized and unheeded. They may be ignored or under-dermined, which is why the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and United Nations Development Program's Biodiversity Finance Initiative (DENR-UNDP-BIOFIN) is working to mainstream gender equality in all aspects of governance and decision-making across 41 countries, including the Philippines.

To celebrate Women's Month this March, let's meet the women protecting and sustainably managing their home forests in Antique. “They showcase how women can make conservation more effective despite being busy with household chores, farming and other income generating work, plus their never-ending tasks as duty bearers,” says Anabelle Plantilla, National Project Manager for DENR-UNDP-BIOFIN. “These women put great value, time and effort into protecting our forests. This is their avowed commitment.”

From offices to field sites

“It's been 35 years since I started working at the DENR,” muses Cynthia Blanca, provincial environment and natural resources officer for Antique. “In my experience, women make great mediators as they are nonthreatening and open to quiet discussions, able to



GRIZZLED GRANDMA – One of Sibalom's tough lolas takes a break from her farming duties – and her thick, smoking tobacco. (Gregg Yan/DENR-UNDP-BIOFIN)

listen to and draw out people's ideas. Almost all of our line managers and section heads are women here.”

Cynthia says she never experienced discrimination as the DENR is fair, progressive and gender-neutral. “Food preparation is usually led by women. For fieldwork, we regularly hire both men and women as rangers and park wardens. Men and women have complementary skill sets. Though not as physically strong or tough as men, women are often more thorough and have a flair for style and beauty.”

‘I'm near the end of my days and know that I won't see many of the trees we plant grow tall. I won't see them, but my 15 grandchildren will. What we plant today connects our generation to theirs. Like our kids, these new forests are our legacy.’

Across Philippine offices and field sites, women are doing their part for conservation. The women rangers of the Sibalom Natural Park are no exception, keeping loggers at bay, planting both upland crops and native trees, even extinguishing the occasional deadly brush fire.

“My scariest moment as a Bantay Gubat was when we had to put out a raging fire. Even today, I can feel the searing heat, hear the crackling of dry leaves, the sizzle of timber. That was a long time ago – but I can still see flames eating up part of a mountain,” recalls Forest Ranger Lumen Tiongco.

Working alongside men, Lumen and

other women rangers regularly clear brush to create fire lines, making the Sibalom Natural Park safer for visitors.

Next generation of women leaders

“The woods provide us with an endless array of non-timber products. We can harvest vines and leaves like bakan, balud, bulo, pandan, rattan and tapuyay to fashion hats, bags, baskets, hammocks, twine and anything else we can sell to augment our families' incomes,” says People's Organization president Fe Geraldine Lomasco while showing off various locally-made handicrafts.

In return, People's Organizations actively work to protect forests, sending out teams of volunteer wardens. “We don't just protect these mountains. We help keep useful forest products flowing.”

“We had a brilliant biology teacher in school and I wanted to be just like her. I was eventually accepted at the DENR and I couldn't be happier,” shares Sibalom Protected Area Management Office staff Elizabeth Ann Daquipil. “Today, we study and protect breathtaking areas like the Sibalom Natural Park, home to giant Rafflesia flowers and endangered birds like Walden's and Tropic Hornbills. It's just as I always dreamed. Biology!”

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal Five (SDG-5) focuses on pursuing real and sustained gender equality. UNDP recognizes that truly sustainable human development can never be achieved unless women are able to contribute on an equal basis with men in their respective societies. “Promoting gender equality in all projects is just one aspect of DENR-UNDP-BIOFIN's work to develop and implement inclusive funding mechanisms to sustain biodiversity conservation,” adds UNDP Resident Representative Dr. Selva Ramachandran. “Enhancing the capacity of women can help community members – both men and women – escape poverty.”

As they have for decades, the lolas, mothers and sisters of the Sibalom Park in Antique continue to serve as stewards of nature, helping make forests safer and more productive for all.

“I'm near the end of my days and know that I won't see many of the trees we plant grow tall,” muses Lola Villa. “I won't see them, but my 15 grandchildren will. What we plant today connects our generation to theirs. Like our kids, these new forests are our legacy.”

(Gregg Yan is an environmentalist who works with the United Nations Development Program's Biodiversity Finance Initiative.)



Water board

prepares for El Niño

BY FRANCIS EARL CUETO AND ARLIE O. CALALO

THE National Water Resources Board (NWRB) on Monday is preparing for the possible effects of the El Niño phenomenon that may be felt in the second half of the year, NWRB Executive Director Sevillano David Jr. said on Monday.

"For now, we have an ample supply of water, but the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Adminis-

tration (Pagasa) has predicted the coming of the El Niño phenomenon, which will result in fewer rains. So, we need to prepare for this so that it will not affect our water supply," David said at the Laging Handa briefing.

The weather bureau predicted that El Niño, the warming of the Pacific Ocean, will most likely prevail in July.

When it sets in, the number of tropical cyclones that will hit the

country may decrease.

The weather bureau earlier announced the end of La Niña, which led to a number of tropical cyclones in the past year.

"Most of the climate models predict that ENSO-neutral is favored from March through June this year, with an increased likelihood of a transition to El Niño thereafter," Pagasa Administrator Vicente Malano said, referring to El Niño-Southern Oscillation-neutral.

Even if El Niño takes effect, Malano said the lingering effect of La Niña will likely persist, which may result in above-normal rainfall conditions during the third and last quarters of 2023.

Based on historical records, El Niño starts during the April-May-June period.

El Niño is the warm phase in the El Niño Southern Oscillation, which increases the likelihood of below-normal conditions that can

cause dry spells and droughts in some areas in the country.

The weather agency said it expects a gradual shift of the wind system as the northeast monsoon weakens and the easterlies become predominant this month.

High and low pressure areas, localized thunderstorms, and intertropical convergence zones can still occur as well as one tropical cyclone that will affect the country this month, Pagasa said.



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Agencies ready dry season plan

BY KATHRYN JOSE

At least 30 government agencies are now coordinating measures for continuous water supply to households and farms, as the dry season and World Water Day approaches.

"So far, we still have enough water supply. However, the weather bureau cautions El Niño or the dry season is coming which can affect residents in Metro Manila," Seville David Jr., Executive Director of the National Water Resources Board, said Monday.

The Water Resource Management Office, created last month and headed by the

Department of Environment and Natural Resources, will be organizing efforts from other government agencies.

"President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. already ordered multiple agencies to create and implement water programs through the Water Resource Management Office," David said.

He added their efforts will support discussions for World Water Day on 22 March with the theme Accelerating Change, which will focus on water access and safety.

Water supply measures

Department of Agriculture spokesperson Rex Estoperez said last Friday that water supply measures for irrigating farms are carried out regularly.

"We already have guidelines on how to

mitigate the big impacts of lack of rain or those related to changes in calendar or seasons."

He added the National Irrigation Administration is also monitoring irrigation systems.

"Just like what we do for our potable water, we must ensure there is no leakage of water in farms."

Estoperez said agriculture officials are also waiting for updates from the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration on whether to implement other measures.

"We are waiting for the advisory of PAGASA. Last consideration is cloud seeding which is very expensive."

Cloud seeding alters weather to induce rain by shooting silver iodide particles into the sky using large cannons or dropping them by planes.



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'11m families have no clean water supply'

SOME 11 million families nationwide still don't have access to potable water.

National Water Resource Board (NWRB) executive director Dr. Sevilla David Jr. said these families are forced to rely on "unprotected" deep wells, springs, rivers, lakes and rainwater for their household needs.

"Sa ngayon po 'no, halos mga 11 million pamilya pa ho briefing.

Government statistics showed that the Philippines has some 26.3 million families.

Lack of sanitation has also forced some families to defecate in the open, risking water contamination and diseases, David said.

Water supply also often becomes an issue during the dry season, he noted.

"We have enough water supply for now. But the PAGASA says El Niño is looming," David said.

El Niño is characterized by below-normal rainfall conditions, which according to the state weather forecast:

"We need to prepare for this as it could affect our water supply, particularly in our farms," David said.

Asked what the government is doing to solve water issues, David cited President Ferdinand Marcos' order to create a water resource management office.

"This office will be in charge of coordinating various government agencies which have water programs and activities. More than 13 agencies have a role or have a program on water and our President wants to have coordination to provide security and relief to the needs of our countrymen," he said.



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Timely help for our fishermen



Manny B. Villar

THE ENTREPRENEUR

THE concern shown by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for our fishermen last week made me emotional and nostalgic about my early childhood. His plan to put up nearly a dozen cold storage facilities in several parts of the nation to reduce the high spoilage in the catch of Filipino fishermen is very timely. It is a shot in the arm that our fishermen need in this high inflationary regime.

I can empathize with our hard-working fishermen. They sweat out and take risks in the open sea to provide their family with a decent meal and eke out a living amid the punishing weather. I was once in the middle of the food chain of fish production and marketing. At the age of six, I helped my mother in selling shrimp and fish at the Divisoria Public Market to earn money and support my siblings and myself to school.

My job at a tender age is not easy—I worked hard at the fish market in between classes. But my job paled in comparison with the plight of our fishermen, who work at the

mercy of the seas and nature—and with no guaranteed profits.

But for our Filipino fishermen, the storm is about to ease off. President Marcos' plan to build 11 more cold storage facilities on top of those already being constructed at ports in the cities of General Santos and Cagayan de Oro will go a long way in improving the fishermen's meager income. Per the report of Malacañang, the facilities will be operational by the end of the year.

Our chief executive and agriculture secretary is taking a hands-on approach in providing solutions to the problems of the agriculture



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sector. He presided over a sectoral meeting attended by officials of the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Laguna Lake Development Authority, Department of the Interior and Local Government and the Cooperative Development Authority. He noted the high rate of fish spoilage from the fishing boats up to the ports and the markets.

Mr. Marcos is a fast learner. He called last week's meeting to discuss the Philippine Fisheries Program, specifically on how to address the declining fishery production and reduce post-harvest losses.

"The solution we formulated," says Mr. Marcos, "is to create cold storage facilities there at the fish ports so that we can preserve the fish and so that it will not just be thrown out due to spoilage."

The lack of post-harvest facilities in the Philippines results in the wastage of some fish harvests, as well as in crops like rice and vegetables. With a shortage of post-harvest equipment such as blast freezers, ice-making machines, cold storage warehouses and fish landing sites, estimated fish spoilage in the Philippines is between 25 percent and

40 percent. Per official estimates, the Philippines may no longer have to import fish if the nation can reduce fish spoilage by 8 percent to 10 percent.

The need to modernize the country's fishponds to boost aquaculture production also did not escape the eyes of our chief executive. The lack of bank credits to fishpond operators for modern equipment appears to be stalling the development of this sector.

Last week's sectoral meeting also highlighted the need to bolster the nation's food security and fish output through marine farming, or mariculture. This refers to a specialized branch of aquaculture involving the cultivation or culture of marine life, such as prawns, oysters and mullets in enclosed sections of the open ocean.

The Philippines, perhaps, can take a look at the Thailand aquaculture model. The Thai fishing industry exports over \$6 billion worth of products yearly and employs more than 800,000 people. It is the world's third-largest seafood exporter and the world's leading exporter of shrimp.

Vietnam is another emerging powerhouse in aquaculture pro-
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duction. Its aquaculture output in 2022 reached 5.1 million tons, or up 6.3 percent over 2021. Vietnam's seafood exports of pangasius, black tiger shrimp and whiteleg shrimp jumped to a record \$11 billion in 2022.

The Philippines surely can surpass the fish production of our two

Southeast Asian neighbors. We are an archipelago of 7,641 islands, and have a marine water area and coastlines that are much bigger than those of Thailand and Vietnam. It is not too late to catch up and make the Philippine economic growth more inclusive and relevant to our fishermen.

For comments, send e-mail to mbv_secretariat@vistaland.com.ph or visit www.mannyvillar.com.ph



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CCC urges delivery of global climate action commitments

By ARGYLL CYRUS GEDUCOS

The Climate Change Commission (CCC) called for the urgent delivery of global commitments to climate action, particularly the funding for climate-related loss and damage, citing the role of governments to act on its mandates.

CCC Vice Chair and Executive Director Robert Borje said this during the 18th Meeting of the Warsaw International Mechanism Executive Committee (WIM EXCOM-18) in Manila over the weekend, following the 27th Meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP-27) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

During the meeting, Borje recognized the efforts of the WIM but 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," he said.

"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," he added.

According to Borje, it is important that the WIM EXCOM must provide input to the work of the Transitional Committee to ensure the mainstreaming of action of support strategies under the second five-year rolling work plan adopted by the parties at COP27.

In a statement, the CCC said the WIM EXCOM convened 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 work plan.

The Santiago Network aims to

connect vulnerable developing countries with providers of technical assistance, knowledge, and resources they need to address climate risks comprehensively.

Among the Philippines' observations during the meeting were 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 the 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.

The CCC stressed that using state-of-the-art methodologies for comprehensive risk assessments is crucial as these assessments 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.

It is one of the countries pushing for dedicated space to discuss funding arrangements for loss and damage – now the COP27 breakthrough agreement.

In the lead-up to COP28, the CCC, in coordination with other relevant government agencies and stakeholders, is working on formulating and updating national positions on critical issues, including loss and damage.

The COP28 will take place from Nov. 30 to Dec. 12 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.



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ONCE IN A GENERATION OPPORTUNITY TO ACT

UN HOLDS RARE CONFERENCE ON WORLD WATER CRISIS

UNITED NATIONS—With water scarce in some places, in excess elsewhere, polluted or otherwise problematic, the United Nations (UN) addresses this week a global crisis that has been long overlooked even as the welfare of billions of people is at stake.

"It's the first time in 46 years that the world comes together on the issue of water," said Henk Ovink, water issues special envoy for the Netherlands, which is co-organizing the UN Water Summit from Wednesday to Fri-

day along with Tajikistan.

"It's now or never, as we say, a once in a generation opportunity," he told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

The last conference at this high level on the issue, which lacks a global treaty or a dedicated UN agency, was held in 1997 in Mar del Plata, Argentina.

And the situation is dire.

"We wrecked the hydrological cycle," said Ovink, adding that he has never been more worried.

"We take too much water

from our ground. We pollute the water that is left and there is now so much water in the air that it is impacting our environment, our economies, our communities, through climate change," he added.

This means there is drought in some places and flooding in others, in a cycle that is worsening around the world because of global warming triggered by human activity.

The UN says 2.3 billion people today live in countries

with water stress.

In 2020, 2 billion people did not have access to drinking water, 3.6 billion had no toilets at home and 2.3 billion had no way to wash their hands at home—poor sanitary conditions that lead to disease.

These circumstances are a far cry from the sustainable development goals set by the UN in 2015; one was to "ensure access to water and sanitation for all by 2030."

"We need to develop a new

economics of water that will help us reduce water waste, improve water efficiency and provide opportunities for greater water equity," said Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, director general of the World Trade Organization and coauthor of a recent report that decried a "systemic crisis that results from decades-long human mismanagement of water."

At the UN conference this week, governments and actors in the public and private sectors are

invited to present proposals for a so-called water action agenda.

"The Water Summit must result in a bold Water Action Agenda that gives our world's lifeblood the commitment it deserves," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said.

Some 6,500 people are expected to attend the conference. They include 20 heads of state or government, dozens of ministers and hundreds of representatives of civil society and the business world. —AFP



Nations approve key UN science report on climate change

BERLIN (AP) – Governments gave their blessing on Sunday to a major new United Nations report on climate change, after approval was held up by a battle between rich and developing countries over emissions targets and financial aid to vulnerable nations.

The report by hundreds of the world's top scientists was supposed to be approved by government delegations on Friday at the end of a week-long meeting in the Swiss town of Interlaken.

The closing gavel was repeatedly pushed back as officials from big nations such

as China, Brazil, Saudi Arabia and the US as well as the European Union haggled through the weekend over the wording of key phrases in the text.

The report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change caps a series that digests vast amounts of research on global warming compiled since the Paris climate accord was agreed in 2015.

A summary of the report was approved early Sunday, but agreement on the main text dragged on for several more hours, with some observers fearing it might need to be postponed.

The unusual process of

having countries sign off on a scientific report is intended to ensure that governments

accept its findings as authoritative advice on which to base their actions.



A coal-fired power plant is seen in Gelsenkirchen, Germany on March 6 as the United Nations prepares to release a climate change report that will include emissions targets and financial aid to vulnerable nations.

AP



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UN to deliver diagnosis and prescription on climate crisis

THE United Nations was poised to release a capstone report Monday distilling nearly a decade of published science on the impacts and trajectory of global warming, and the tools available to prevent climate catastrophe. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 30-odd page "summary for policymakers" — compressing 10,500 pages authored by more than 1,000 scientists — is as dense as a black hole and will deliver a stark warning.

"We are nearing a point of no return," UN chief Antonio Guterres said last week as diplomats from 195 nations gathered in Interlaken, Switzerland, to hammer out the final wording, finalized on Sunday night by exhausted and sleep-deprived delegates two days behind schedule.

"For decades, the IPCC has put forward evidence on how people and planet are being rocked by climate destruction."

Since the last IPCC synthesis report in 2014, science has determined that devastating impacts are happening more quickly and at lower levels of warming than previously understood.

With Earth's average surface temperature 1.2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels so far, the planet has seen a steady crescendo extreme weather, including tropical storms made worse by rising seas.

On current trends, the world is on track to warm by an additional 1.6 degrees.

In 2022, climate change quantifiably amplified deadly heatwaves in South America and South Asia, massive flooding in Nigeria and Pakistan, and record-breaking drought in Western Europe and the United States, according the World Weather Attribution consortium, which includes many IPCC authors. **AFP**



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UN science report to provide stark climate warning

BY FRANK JORDANS &
SETH BORENSTEIN
The Associated Press

BERLIN—A major new United Nations report being released Monday is expected to provide a sobering reminder that time is running out if humanity wants to avoid passing a dangerous global warming threshold.

The report by hundreds of the world's top scientists is the capstone on a series that summarizes the research on global warming compiled since the Paris climate accord was agreed in 2015.

It was approved by countries at the end of a week-long meeting of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report in the Swiss town of Interlaken, meaning governments have accepted its findings as authoritative advice on which to base their actions.

At the start of the meeting UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned delegates that the planet is "nearing the point of no return" and they risk missing the internationally agreed limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) of global warming since pre-industrial times.

That's because global emissions of

carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases keep increasing—mainly due to the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation and intensive agriculture—when in fact they need to decline quickly.

Governments agreed in Paris almost eight years ago to try to limit temperature rise to 1.5 C or at least keep it well below 2 C (3.6 F). Since then scientists have increasingly argued that any warming beyond the lower threshold would put humanity at dire risk.

Average global temperatures have already increased by 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit) since the

19th century, but Guterres insisted last week that the 1.5 C target limit remains possible "with rapid and deep emissions reductions across all sectors of the global economy."

Monday's report comes after the IPCC made clear two years ago that climate change is clearly caused by human activity and refined its predictions for a range of possible scenarios depending on how much greenhouse gas continues to be released.

The following year it published a report concluding that the impacts of global warming are already being felt and nearly half the world's

population are "highly vulnerable to climate change." Two months later it laid out what needs to be done to reduce the harm from warming that's already inevitable and prevent a further dangerous rise in temperatures; the sharp drop in cost of solar and wind power would make that easier, it noted.

Three further special reports by the IPCC focused on the oceans, land and 1.5-degree target. The next round of reports won't be published until the second half of this decade, by when experts say it could be too late to take further measures allowing that ambitious goal to still be met.

Governments agreed at last year's climate summit in Egypt to create a fund to help pay for the damage that a warming planet is inflicting on vulnerable countries, but failed to commit to new measures for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The new synthesis report published Monday will play a pivotal role when governments gather in Dubai in December for this year's U.N. climate talks. The meeting will be the first to take stock of global efforts to cut emissions since the Paris deal, and hear calls from poorer nations seeking more aid. *Borenstein reported from Kensington, Maryland.*



UN to deliver prescription for climate crisis

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UN to deliver prescription for climate crisis

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"For decades, the IPCC has put forward evidence on how people and planet are being rocked by climate destruction." Since the last IPCC synthesis report in 2014, science has determined that devastating impacts are happening more quickly and at lower levels of warming than previously understood.

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In 2022, climate change quantifiably amplified deadly heat waves in South America and South Asia, massive flooding in Nigeria and Pakistan, and record-breaking drought in Western Europe and the United States, according to the World Weather Attribution consortium, which includes many IPCC authors.

Science in the last decade has also elevated the danger posed by so-called tipping points in Earth's climate system that could — beyond certain temperature thresholds — see tropical forests in the Amazon morph into savannah, and ice sheets in Greenland and West Antarctica shed enough water to lift oceans by meters.

Global stocktake

But most of the wrangling at the week-long IPCC meeting centered on potential solutions, especially on how to decarbonize the global

economy quickly enough to avoid crippling impacts, according to participants.

Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, nations vowed to collectively cap warming at "well below" 2 C, and at 1.5 C if possible.

A 2018 IPCC special report made it alarmingly clear that the more ambitious aspirational goal — since adopted by governments and business as a hard target — was a better guarantee for a climate-safe world.

Some countries emphasize the need to rapidly phase out fossil fuel use, and reduce consumer demand, and others the potential of technological solutions.

"Over time, IPCC meetings became more politicized, as government representatives — mainly, but not exclusively, from oil-producing states — interfered in the scientists' discussions," the journal *Nature* said in a recent editorial.

In Interlaken, negotiators

from Saudi Arabia, for example, fought hard to remove or dilute passages that emphasized the central role of fossil fuels in driving global warming.

They also insisted on balancing any mention of renewable solar and wind energy with technologies that reduce the carbon emissions from burning gas or coal, such as carbon capture and storage.

"Other countries were hitting behind them, but the Saudis were most vocal," said one participant at the closed-door deliberations.

The IPCC synthesis report will also feed into the next high-level round of UN climate talks this December in Dubai, which will see the first "global stocktake" of progress toward achieving the Paris treaty goals.

To be unveiled ahead of COP28 in Dubai, the stocktake will confront countries with the deep inadequacy of their Paris pledges to cut emissions.

AFP



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Displaced Baybay landslide victims now relocated

Of the 579 families hard hit by the 10 April 2022 landslide during the onslaught of tropical depression 'Agaton,' 40 are now in permanent houses, 466 in temporary shelters, and 73 managed to build their own houses outside the danger zones

TACLOBAN CITY — The local government on Monday disclosed that the 79 families displaced by a killer landslide in Baybay City last year have already moved from evacuation centers to their new relocation sites.

According to Baybay City Mayor Jose Carlos Cari, the city council had immediately allocated funds to acquire a land to build houses for the victims.

Temporary shelters, however, have been provided through the funding of the Office of Civil Defense, International Organization for Migration, United States Agency for International Development.

The OCD and non-government organizations rushed the construction of shelters after the Mines and Geosciences Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources declared that some of the communities affected by the landslide were no longer fit for habitation and declared the area as "danger zone."

Of the 579 families hard hit by the 10 April 2022 landslide during the onslaught of tropical depression "Agaton," 40 are now in permanent houses, 466 in temporary shelters, and 73 managed to build their own houses outside the danger zones.

"We urge landslide survivors to go on with their lives and be thankful with what they have, learn to live harmoniously with each other, and work together towards the improvement of their new community," Cari said.

The first 40 permanent houses constructed by the Baybay City local government in Higulo-an village are for the displaced families of Mail-hi village.

Temporary shelters, meanwhile, were built in the villages of Maganhan, Kambonggan, Kantagnos, Bunga, Maypatag, and Villa Mag-aso.

Families in temporary shelters will move to permanent relocation sites as soon as houses are completed.

PNA

"The city government is committed to support these families by improving the amenities in their communities, provide better accessibility, and ensure water and electricity supply," said Cari.

The landslides in Baybay have killed at least 128 people with over a hundred still missing.

Among the factors that triggered landslide occurrences in Leyte province during the onslaught of Tropical Depression Agaton include geology, topography, soil type, climate, and excessive rainfall.