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TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

Verde Island Passage faces new oil spill threat

Fishing vessel carrying 70K liters of fuel listing off Calatagan, Batangas; PCG asks coastal folk to stay alert for spillage

By **Madonna T. Virola**
and **Delfin T. Mallari Jr.**
@InquirerLuzon

CITY OF CALAPAN—A fishing vessel carrying 70,000 liters of diesel nearly sank off the coast of Calatagan, Batangas, on Sunday, sparking fears of another oil spill in the fragile biodiversity of Verde Island Passage (VIP), an advocacy group said on Monday.

In a statement on Monday, Protect VIP said the vessel, Anita DJ II, partly sank after encountering strong rains while traveling from Navotas City in Metro Manila to Palawan province, with its 13 crew members all rescued.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) reported that the fishing vessel was found partly submerged around seven nautical miles (around 13 kilometers) from the shoreline of Cape Santiago in Calatagan's Barangay Bagong Silang on Aug. 26.

"Six months after the MT Princess Empress [sank in Oriental Mindoro], we are threat-

ened [by] another oil spill that may poison the vulnerable ecosystem of VIP, even as issues from the previous spill remain unresolved," said Fr. Edwin Gariguez, Protect VIP convenor.

Last Sunday's incident took place six months after the oil tanker MT Princess Empress spilled 800,000 liters of industrial oil in the waters off Oriental Mindoro that destroyed mangroves and other coastal resources in the province, with oil sludge spreading as far as Palawan and Antique provinces and slick reaching parts of Batangas.

Sealed

MT Princess Empress sank off Naujan town of Oriental Mindoro province, which is within the VIP corridor, a resource-rich strait between mainland Luzon and Mindoro Island but which is also a vital shipping route for oil tankers, cargo ships and commercial vessels crisscrossing the ports in Luzon and the Visayas.

But the Batangas Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO) said the fuel cargo of Anita DJ II had been sealed, which could prevent an oil spill.

On the other hand, the PCG said in a report on Monday it had coordinated with the Calatagan municipal DRRMO to prepare for an oil spill response.

The PCG also urged local tourism officials to inform resort owners and coastal village officials "to be vigilant for a possible oil spill."

Gariguez acknowledged that the fuel carried by Anita DJ II was much smaller than that of MT Princess Empress and that the oil cargo had been sealed.

Still, he said, "the government must still act fast to ensure that these seals hold and do not cause another ecological disaster."

Fishermen in Batangas also expressed concern about the possibility of an oil spill affecting their source of livelihood.

noting that their families rely heavily on their catch to survive, according to Protect VIP.

"The likelihood of another oil spill is very alarming, especially since we're still recovering from the impact of a fish ban due to the oil spill from MT Princess Empress," said Rodrigo de Jesus, president of fisherfolk group Bukluran ng Mangingisda ng Batangas, in the Protect VIP statement.

De Jesus said the government must start enforcing a "concrete plan" to avoid an oil spill in the future, apart from taking immediate action to prevent Anita DJ II's cargo of industrial oil from leaking into the water.

The identity of Anita DJ II and whether the vessel had complete papers when it sailed were not immediately known.

"Until vessels carrying crude oil and industrial oil continue to pass through the VIP, the possibility that an oil spill tragedy similar to what MT

Princess Empress caused will happen again is still high," said De Jesus.

Call for ban

Brent Ivan Andres, program head of the Oceans, Coastal Communities and Climate of the Center for Energy, Ecology and Development, reiterated his call for the government to ban the movement of ships carrying toxic substances in VIP in light of the accident.

"We are a country vulnerable to climate change, where the weather is changing quickly, and this is on top of the 20 typhoons a year we normally get," said Andres in a statement on Monday.

He said, where there are ships with toxic cargo and sudden gusts of bad weather, accidents would take place even with all precautions taken.

"What more can happen once the giant gas projects are put up and huge LNG (liquefied natural gas) tankers start trav-

eling more often in the area? It will be a recipe for a disaster greater than [MT] Princess Empress," Andres warned.

Known as the "center of global shorefish biodiversity" due to the high densities of marine resources, the VIP is a 1.14-million hectare marine ecosystem located off the coastlines of Batangas, Romblon, Marinduque, Occidental Mindoro and Oriental Mindoro provinces.

But the Protect VIP also described the marine corridor as the "epicenter" of fossil gas and LNG developments in the country, as eight of the 27 proposed new plants and seven of the nine planned LNG terminals in the country are located in Batangas.

The group warned that by allowing fossil gas facilities to be built and operated in Batangas, it exposes the VIP to the frequent entry of LNG barges, inadvertent oil spills, or the disposal of shipboard liquid waste and bilge water. INQ



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND
INITIATIVES
SERVICE

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER

A8
PAGE

UPPER
 LOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

BANNER
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

08-29-23

TITLE:

Verde Island ...

PAGE

18

DATE

A8

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REGIONS

Editor
Maria Edralyn L. Benedicto



IMMINENT DANGER Fishing vessel Anita DJ II is seen listing in the waters off Calatagan, Batangas, on Aug. 26 after encountering rough seas due to the inclement weather. The distressed ship, which is carrying 70,000 liters of oil, poses a risk to the 1.14-million hectare marine ecosystem surrounding Batangas, Romblon, Marinduque, Occidental Mindoro and Oriental Mindoro provinces which were already hit by a massive oil spill in February this year, according to the environmental group Protect VIP. —PHOTO COURTESY OF PHILIPPINE COAST GUARD-SOUTHERN TAGALOG DISTRICT



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND
INITIATIVES
SERVICE

Manila Standard

PAGE

UPPER
 LOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

BANNER
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

08 29 13

TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

Fishing vessel with 70,000 liters of oil sinks off Calatagan coast

A FISHING Boat with 70,000 liters of diesel sank off the coast of Calatagan, Batangas on Sunday,

At least 13 crew members of the Anita DJ II fishing boat were rescued, the Philippine Coast Guard said on Monday.

The Anita DJ II sank around seven nautical miles off Cape Santiago,

Barangay Bagong Silang on Sunday morning.

The PCG said the multi-role vessel BRP Bacagay was dispatched to respond to the distressed vessel that sank at around 3:17 p.m. on Sunday.

According to the Batangas Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO), the vessel bound for Palawan was sealed, which may prevent an oil spill.

"Six months after MT Princess Empress, we are threatened with another oil spill that may poison the vulnerable ecosystem of Verde Island Passage (VIP) even as issues from the

previous spill remain unresolved," said Fr. Edwin Gariguez, Protect VIP Convenor.

"The cargo carried by Anita DJ II is much smaller than that of MT Princess Empress and there seem to be seals that would prevent a spill, but the government must still act fast to ensure that these seals hold and do not cause another ecological disaster," he added.



Waste workers' health, welfare bill filed

A MEASURE that seeks to establish a program for the health and welfare of waste workers has been filed in the House of Representatives.

BHW party-list Rep. Angelica Natasha co-filed a bill that seeks to create the Waste Workers' Health and Welfare Program. House Bill 8658 was filed on July 31, 2023.

"Waste workers play an indispensable role in our society as they diligently contribute to maintaining the cleanliness and orderliness of our communities," the bill's explanatory note states.

"This comprehensive program aims to provide holistic support to waste workers, ensuring their health, safety, and overall well-being," the explanatory note in-

dicates, referring to the proposed program.

The bill defines a waste worker as a person engaged in collecting, transporting, processing and disposing of solid waste.

Under the bill, the program shall include these components: health coverage and benefits; occupational safety training; mandatory provision of "suitable" and "adequate" personal protective equipment to them free of charge by their employers or agencies; educational assistance; and financial assistance.

The bill mandates the Department of Labor and Employment to establish and administer the program. **REINA C. TOLENTINO**



Why reclamation is unacceptable to many

When President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. suspended reclamation projects in Manila Bay early this month, the reason he gave mirrored what many people have been worried about.

"Kung matuloy lahat 'yan, maraming ilog mababara eh. Wala na pupuntahan talaga 'yong tubig. (Because if they all push through, many rivers will be clogged. The water will really have nowhere to go)," the President said during a briefing with Bulacan local officials on the severe flooding caused by Typhoon Egay.

He also shared the lament of many Filipinos affected by the disappearing view of the world-renowned sunset that used to be seen years ago on vast stretches of the main road running along Manila Bay. "Kung Roxas Boulevard, wala na yung dagat eh (At Roxas Boulevard, the sea is gone)."

The President's decision to suspend reclamation has been met with jubilation among various groups and individuals concerned about its adverse impact on the environment, marine life, coastal protection, fisherfolks' livelihood, food security, and many others.

The most vocal among those opposing

reclamation is Sen. Cynthia Villar, chair of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, and the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Food, who was guest of honor in last Tuesday's Kapihan sa Manila Hotel which I hosted together with Manila Bulletin publisher and former Press Secretary Sonny Coloma.



FINDING ANSWERS
ATTY. JOEY D. LINA
FORMER SENATOR

Why she's against reclamation has a lot to do with the Las Piñas Parañaque Wetland Park, one of the most important wetlands in the world which became a "legislative protected area" through her efforts, and is included in the 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.

"If I allow reclamation," Sen. Villar explained, "the mangrove forests in our Las Piñas Parañaque Wetland Park will be destroyed, and it's the biggest spawning ground of fishes for Manila Bay which is giving livelihood to 300,000 fisherfolks."

She told the Kapihan forum of her work for 12 years which led to the following: Four rivers (Las Piñas River, Parañaque River, Zapote River, and Molino River) leading to Manila Bay were cleaned, informal settlers on the easement were relocated, and an expensive 4.0-kilometer drive was built along the rivers "so people can see the rivers."

"Kaya nang malaman ko na irereclaim yung dadanan ng rivers namin (That's why when I learned of the reclamation of our rivers) towards Manila Bay, I was shocked because all my efforts will be in vain," Sen. Villar said. "I cannot really agree to a reclamation of Manila Bay especially in our area in Las Piñas, Parañaque and Bacoor because that will destroy everything that we have worked for the last 12 years."

She also warned that flooding, as a result of reclamation, leads to market values of land going down. "Nobody wants to buy from a flooded area... Even investors will not come, and it's a complete deterioration of the place."

Sen. Villar said that from the end of September to early November, her committee will be conducting hearings on the measure filed by Sen. Risa Hontiveros to review the Manila Bay reclamation.

She said the hearing will also tackle the concept of the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA), formerly known as the Public Estates Authority before it was renamed.

"I thought that Public Estates Authority is better, because you are developing public estate but you are not necessarily reclaiming," Sen. Villar told the Kapihan. "Kasi pag sinabi mong (because if you say)

Philippine Reclamation Authority, parang binibigyan mo sila ng (it's like giving them) power to reclaim... You created an agency that's only doing reclamation, and I don't believe in that. That's why we have to review."

She also decried the issuance without consultation of the Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) by the Environmental Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Reclamation projects need to have the ECC before approval by the PRA.

"Unfortunately, those ECCs were issued without consultation. That's the problem," Sen. Villar said. "Maybe we can make it harder for them to issue the ECC."

And speaking of the PRA granting the permit for reclamation after an ECC is issued, I think approval should lie with a bigger body like the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) so that there will be a multi-disciplinary approach to public estate development which includes reclamation. NEDA is indeed a bigger body; it's practically the entire Cabinet.

At the Kapihan, Sen. Villar also asked Filipinos who are against unjustified reclamation to speak out. "I cannot do it alone so I'm appealing to the people that if you support this cause, maybe you should be heard so that our people from government will realize that this is a very popular cause, that we should preserve our environment... If we want to protect our children and the future generation of Filipinos, we should work together." (finding.lina@yahoo.com)



TITLE: _____

PAGE _____

DATE _____

RESIDENTS EVACUATED

LANDSLIDE-HIT AREAS IN ZAMBOANGA, COTABATO DECLARED DANGER ZONES

By Julie Alipala
and Williamor Magbanua
@InqNational

ZAMBOANGA CITY—A settlement of more than 12 households in a village here and a remote subvillage in the town of President Roxas in Cotabato province have been declared as danger zones by their respective local governments due to the risks posed by landslides and soil erosion to these communities.

In Zamboanga City, Purok 5 of Sitio Corote of Barangay Upper Malagutay was found unsafe for people to live in after an Aug. 15 landslide that buried at least two houses in the area following days of heavy rains that triggered a massive soil erosion.

"We have blocked the area to prevent people from returning. Based on the ocular inspection we made, the soil in the area is categorized as high [risk] for soil erosion," said Elmeir Apolinario, the city disaster risk reduction and management officer.

Allan de Guzman, barangay chair of Upper Malagutay, told the Inquirer it was their first time to experience a landslide that covered almost three hectares of property, with several cracks and scarps as deep as 20 meters below ground. Sitio Corote is about 1.5 kilometers from the barangay hall.

He said that aside from the



ERODED ROAD A large section of the bypass road at Sitio Corote in Barangay Upper Malagutay, Zamboanga City, crumbles when the ground underneath it was loosened by heavy rains that caused a landslide on Aug. 15. —JULIE ALIPALA

five families who owned the landslide-hit properties, more than a dozen farming families living nearby were also affected.

About 40 m from the houses of the five families, the landslide also severely damaged a 160-m stretch of a 1-km bypass road that connected Upper Malagutay to Barangay San Roque, he added.

On Aug. 15, residents of Upper Malagutay were shaken when they heard continuous explosions from Purok 5, which turned out to be an avalanche of soil and huge stones that partly covered and created a 10-m scarp along the bypass road.

De Guzman confirmed that the bypass road was built over part of a creek.

He said villagers also detected soil movement and frequent falling of huge boulders from the mountain that had prompted village officials to close the bypass road constructed by the Department of Public Works and Highways.

Relocation under way

In Cotabato's President Roxas town, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau 12 also declared Sitio Upper Ipuan of Barangay Poblacion as a "red zone" for landslides and flash floods especially during moderate to heavy downpour, said Mayor Jonathan Mahimpit.

Mahimpit said they were now fast-tracking the relocation of at least 30 families who fled their homes following the Aug. 19 landslide in the area after days of heavy rains dumped by the easterlies and Intertropical Convergence Zone.

"We bought the land and we will give it to the affected residents for free," Mahimpit said, adding that all 35 households living at Sitio Upper Ipuan already agreed to be relocated to a half a hectare of land less than a kilometer away.

On July 5 this year, two villagers were swept away by a flash flood in the area. Their remains were found at least a few meters away from the town's public market a day later. INO

"We witnessed how the 12-inch thick cemented road cracked into pieces, [as if] an unseen giant hand broke the 160-m concrete road into pieces," said De Guzman.

Engr. Allan Rommel Labayog, the regional field officer of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology, said there was no earthquake recorded in the area but "the magnitude of devastation was really alarming."

Labayog said they learned that the damaged bypass road used to be a creek and the water brought by the continuous heavy rain "accumulated in the spot and weakened the soil" and caused a landslide.



TITLE: _____

PAGE _____

DATE _____

WATER ENOUGH TO SERVE 1M CUSTOMERS

MAYNILAD'S P11-B NEW MUNTINLUPA TREATMENT FACILITY READY BY DEC

By Meg J. Adonis
@MegINQ

Maynilad Water Services Inc.'s third water treatment plant that sources raw water from Laguna Lake will begin partial operations by year-end, after the company announced that it had started testing and gradual commissioning of the facility to ensure adequate water supply within its concession area.

In a statement over the weekend, Maynilad said the P11-billion Poblacion Water Treatment Plant was 80 percent complete and slated to produce an initial 50 million liters per day (MLD) of potable water by December for customers in the cities of Parañaque, Las Piñas and Muntinlupa, as well as Cavite province.

At full capacity, the facility located in Muntinlupa is designed to produce 150 MLD —equivalent to water is enough to fill around 60 Olympic-sized swimming pools and enough to serve about 1 million customers.

"This facility will help enhance service reliability, as it will provide additional supply for customers in the south so their water service will not be affected despite raw water

quality shifts in Laguna Lake, which have been occurring with more frequency owing to climate change effects," Maynilad said.

Construction of the plant began in 2022 with the aim of increasing available supply for distribution in southern Metro Manila.

The Poblacion facility will source raw water from Laguna Lake, similar to two other plants located in Barangay Putatan, Muntinlupa, that produce a combined 300 MLD of water supply for around 1.7 million customers.

Maynilad earlier said it would rely on the Poblacion plant to provide buffer capacity and ensure uninterrupted service even as maintenance activities cut supply.

Las Piñas and some areas in Cavite province are expected to experience 13-hour service interruptions until Nov. 2 as Maynilad upgrades the Putatan Water Treatment Plant in preparation for the rainy season, when the turbidity level of raw water in Laguna Lake typically increases.

The company operates two other treatment plants at the La Mesa Compound in Quezon City that gets raw water from Angat Dam. INQ



EDITORIAL

Season of climate extremes

RECENT weeks have dazzlingly defined a season of climate extremes: countries in Europe, North America, Africa, Asia have all been exposed to forest fires and devastating floods.

Russia, Canada, Brazil, Angola, and Congo top countries facing the highest risk of forest fire, while China ranks 11th in the world.

China set a new national daily temperature record in July, and was hit by record-breaking rainfall at the start of this month.

And then the start of August also saw a winter heatwave in parts of South America, while at home the Philippines cringed from destruction caused by Egay Falcon and Goring, flooding the rice-rich central Luzon Plains north of the capital and towns in Cagayan and Ilocos Norte.

Dangerous weather -- intense heat and ruinous rainfall -- has impacted large parts of the Northern hemisphere in what weather specialists described as this summer of extremes, causing major damage to the people's health and the environment.

Marine heatwaves are also affecting large areas of the ocean, with last July carding the hottest ever month on record.

This year, Canada is experiencing its worst wildfire season on record with tens of

Scientists have warned that storms are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer due to climate change

thousands of people being driven out of their homes and the federal government forced to deploy the military to several regions over the past months.

In Spain, firefighters are struggling to contain a wildfire that broke out in a mountainous national park on the island of Tenerife amid hot and dry weather, that has extended for 41 km and prompted authorities to evacuate more than 3,000 people in one day last week alone.

In Greece, blazes have destroyed tens of thousands of hectares of land in the northeast alone, in what the European Union-backed Copernicus Climate Change Service said was the largest recorded wildfire on European soil in years.

There have also been hurricanes in the US mainland and a storm-induced wildfire in Maui's Lahaina town, where many Filipinos live.

Earlier this month, a reservoir in Beijing's Changping district logged 29.3 inches of precipitation, the most in the city in over 140 years.

At the same time, heavy downpours continued to soak South and North Korea as tropical storm Khanun swept over the peninsula after pounding Japan, putting Pyongyang on high alert for flood damage.

In some parts of South Korea, cumulative rainfall has topped 15.8 inches with maximum wind speeds last week of of 126 km per hour, flooding villages, schools and roads.

All this points to climate change -- including increased heat, extended drought, and a thirsty atmosphere -- as a key driver in increasing the risk and extent of wildfires in the western United States during the last two decades.

Scientists have warned that storms are becoming more powerful as the world gets warmer due to climate change.



Goring weakens; potential typhoon to enter Phl

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Goring has weakened into a typhoon and is expected to exit the Philippine area of responsibility on Thursday while an approaching severe tropical storm is expected to enter PAR on Wednesday evening or Thursday morning,

the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said yesterday.

At a press briefing, PAGASA weather specialist Veronica Torres said the eye of Typhoon Goring was located at

Turn to Page 2

Goring From Page 1

245 kilometers east northeast of Casiguran, Aurora with maximum sustained winds of 155 km per hour near the center and gustiness of up to 190 kph as it is moving north northeastward at 15 kph.

"Generally for today (Monday) and tomorrow (Tuesday), it will move towards northeastward or northward, then after, generally northwest, moving near the Batanes area with the possibility of a landfall scenario since Batanes area is within the area of probability of Goring," Torres said.

Torres added that 50 to 100 millimeters of rain is expected in Batanes, Babuyan Island, northern portion of mainland Cagayan, Apayao and Ilocos Norte.

Goring will also enhance the

southwest monsoon and will bring 100 to 200 millimeters of rain in Occidental Mindoro; 50 to 100 millimeters in Zambales, Bataan, Cavite, Batangas, northern portion of Palawan, including Calamian and Cuyo Islands, Antique, southwestern portion of Iloilo and northwestern portion of Aklan.

"On Wednesday, 100 to 200 millimeters of rain are expected in Zambales, Bataan and Occidental Mindoro while 50 to 100 millimeters of rain in Metro Manila, Rizal, Bulacan, Cavite and Batangas," she added.

Meanwhile, the state weather bureau continues to monitor the severe tropical storm outside PAR, which is expected to intensify into a typhoon category but is less likely to have direct effect in any part of the country.

It is expected to enter PAR on Wednesday evening or Thursday morning and will enhance the south-

west monsoon, especially in the western section of the country.

Affected families

Some 2,302 families or a total of 7,919 persons have been affected by Goring, the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC) said.

As of yesterday, at least 538 families or 1,948 persons remain in 53 different evacuation centers in affected provinces mostly in Northern Luzon.

The NDRRMC said affected areas include the Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, Calabarzon, MIMAROPA, Western Visayas and the Cordillera Administrative Region.

In Region 2 alone, reports said estimated cost of damage to infrastructure is now at P40 million while damage to agriculture is yet to be released.

In the Ilocos Region and CAR,

the NDRRMC said affected families and/or individuals have so far received P25,910 worth of hygiene kits and family food packs.

In Ilocos Norte, heavy rains brought by Goring caused landslides blocking main roads in Barangay Liliputan in Pinili town; Barangay Pancian in Pagudpud town and Barangay Adams in the municipality of Adams, police director Col. Julius Suriben reported yesterday.

Suriben said that 15 families were rescued in Adams during height of Goring, and that Gov. Matthew Marcos Manotoc has given all the needs of the affected families.

In Negros Occidental, heavy rains caused widespread flooding in eight towns, forcing the evacuation of thousands yesterday.

Provincial Administrator Rayf-rando Diaz disclosed that about 3,838 Negrenses were affected by flooding

that started Sunday night, in the municipalities of Pontevedra, Don Salvador Bernadicto, San Enrique, Pulpandan, Valladolid and Murcia and Bago City.

In Bacolod City, heavy rains forced the evacuation of more than 10,000 residents from 13 barangays that are now staying in public schools for temporary shelter.

Classes and work in government offices are suspended today Bacolod City and La Carlota City, and the municipalities of EB Magalona and Moises Padilla. Isabela Mayor Irene Montilla and Pulpandan Mayor Miguel Peña also ordered suspension of classes in their respective towns.

The admission of patients to the Bago City Hospital was also temporarily suspended due to flooding on its ground floor. - With Jun Elias, Michael Punongbayan, Gilbert Bayoran, Rudy Santos