

29 September 2023 Friday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**



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SENIOR AGUILA IN HOT SEAT Jey Rence Quilario, 22, head of Socorro Bayanihan Services Inc. based in Surigao del Norte (left inset), faces a Senate inquiry on Thursday where former members recount the abuses and hardships that made them flee the group. Images flashed onscreen during the hearing show his musical side and sartorial tastes. —RHO JESUS ORBETA

# 'Cult' escapees recall ordeal; Senate detains leader, 3 others

By Melvin Gascon and Ryan Rosaura @Team\_Inquirer

Senators on Thursday ordered the detention of four officers and members of the Surigao del Norte-based group Socorro Bayanihan Services Inc. (SBSI) for supposedly lying under oath during an emotional, eight-hour public hearing, where they denied allegations of human rights abuses and outright criminal activities cloaked in cultish practices.

Cited for contempt on a motion by Sen. Risa Hontiveros were SBSI Jey Rence Quilario, the group's 82-year-old vice president Mamerto Galanida, and members Janeth Ajoc and Karren Sanico.

Known in the organization as "Senior Aguila," Quilario, 22, has styled himself as a messianic "Son of God," according to former members who testified at the hearing.

Two Senate panels—the committee on public order and dangerous drugs; and on

women, family relations and gender equality—launched an inquiry into the allegations made against SBSI, on paper a self-help organization based at Sitio Kapihan, a mountain settlement in the island town of Socorro, Surigao del Norte.

Appearing nervous during the hearing, Quilario dismissed the allegations as "false and malicious," sometimes pointing a finger at the former members present, their faces covered for their security.

"The truth is, I did not choose to be the leader of this group as I was only thrust into [this position] after being handpicked by our former president, Rosalina Taruc. I would have wanted to get an education as I have only finished second year in high school."

### Hontiveros exposé

Peeved by Quilario and the other officers' denials, Sen. Ronald dela Rosa warned them: "Please don't make a mockery of this hearing by not telling the truth. If you will keep on

lying before this committee I will jail all of you."

The group, called a "cult" by Hontiveros in a privilege speech delivered on Sept. 18, is accused of maintaining a private army, forcing marriages that condoned the rape of women, and taking the government cash aid meant for its impoverished members.

"The cult is the vehicle they use to perpetrate the multiple abuses on the children of SBSI. The cult is the cover to avoid scrutiny, the cult is what they use to provide impunity to its leaders," Hontiveros, chair of the Senate committee on women, reiterated at Thursday's hearing.

Testifying against the SBSI leaders were three teenagers who were allegedly forced into marriage or subjected to forced labor and had suffered "inhumane" punishments. They were described as among the estimated 300 youths in Socorro who have dropped out of school after settling at Kapihan to join SBSI.



## WITNESSES BARE ORDEALS IN SBSI

### FROM A3

Fifteen year-old "Jane" (not her real name) was among the youths—mainly girls age 12 years and older, and males who were at least 18 years old—who were summoned to the village last year by Quilario.

Speaking in a Visayan dialect with her lawyer serving as interpreter, Jane said that at age 14 she was forced to "marry" an 18-year-old man whom she met only for the first time.

Their "pairing" was upon the recommendation of Quilario, whom members revered for supposedly being the reincarnation of the Sto. Niño, or the Child Jesus.

At another public ceremony, Jane said, Quilario told the men that they had "all the rights to have sex" with their paired mates "because we are married couples already."

### 'Paddle,' 'roulette'

Jane said they had been conditioned to believe that following the group's rules would earn them a place in heaven since they were fulfilling the will of "God."

"We were told not to disobey (Quilario) for he is 'God' himself," Jane said.

Quilario, Jane said, presented himself to the recruits as a "savior." Those who disobeyed faced a range of punishments which she described as "paddle, roulette or restricted to the foxhole."

Paddle means the erring members "are hit with the butt of a wooden rifle."

"With roulette, a member spins [a disc] indicating various forms of punishment," she said.

Jane said her mother was also forced to marry another man on Quilario's orders, supposedly because members without partners within the group "cannot enter Noah's ark."

Witnesses also confirmed reports that SBSI had been maintaining a private army, with a group of 13 dismissed and resigned police officers forming its core.

In another testimony, 12-year-old "Renz" said he was forced to do hard work in the Kapihan "barracks" at the private army's training site.

He recalled seeing armed men get into formation as early as 2 a.m. In the last election season, he said, he saw a truckload of firearms driving past their quarters.

"We were made to put up sandbags for our barracks and forced to do *masi-masi*," Renz said, using a local slang which he said meant "punishment en masse."

He began sobbing when asked why he decided to escape from the group.

"I wanted so bad to go to school; I am already 12 and I still do not know how to write," he said.

Another male escapee, "Koko" also broke down as he recalled being forced to undergo military-like training to become one of SBSI's "Soldiers of God." Failure to obey commands meant severe punishment, he added.

### On their knees

Another female witness recounted how her younger sister, then age 12, was forced to marry an SBSI member. When the young girl refused to have sex with the man, she was punished by Quilario himself, the witness told the senators.

"Senior 'Aguila' ordered all married teenagers to step out of the gate of our house, and those who were reported to have refused to have sex with their husbands were ordered to walk on their knees along the dirt road leading to their leader's house," she said in Filipino.

"My sister was wailing in pain because the road was rocky, so she told Senior Aguila that 'we will do whatever you want,'" she said.

Against her will, the young girl got pregnant twice, with the second pregnancy ending in a miscarriage that almost killed her, the witness added.

According to Police Col. Laudemer Laude, Surigao del Norte police director, Quilario

and 12 other SBSI officers and members have been charged with qualified human trafficking, kidnapping, serious illegal detention, adultery, violence against women and their children, and child labor.

### SEC-registered

Registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in 1980, SBSI had operated as a self-help organization prior to becoming a cult around 2017, said Edelito Sarigco, spokesperson for the Socorro Task Force Kapihan which was organized by the local government to handle the cases.

Jeng Plaza, another witness, said Taruc, the former SBSI president, was still formally in charge but that some of the senior leaders formed a faction under Quilario in 2018.

The new group called themselves "Soldiers of God" and is composed of seven clusters, with the highest level called the Aguila Squad for being directly under Quilario's command.

Richard Dano, a legal consultant for the task force, noted that the "pattern of exploitation of the children" worsened after Typhoon "Odette" struck the province in December 2021.

### Agreement with DENR

Citing accounts gathered from the escapees, Dano said children were made to perform "rituals" and exercises as early as 2 a.m. and later sent to do farm labor or stand guard around the 353-hectare area under SBSI's control.

The land is covered by a resource management agreement, which governs protected areas, between SBSI and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

SBSI's 25-year tenure over the area expires in 2029, according to DENR Regional Director Nonito Tamayo.

But even though DENR personnel are authorized to check on the area, Tamayo said, they have difficulty entering Kapihan village itself due to the restrictions imposed by SBSI. **INQ**

  
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## Massive misinformation on Scarborough, SCS issues

WITH  
our  
disputes  
over the  
South  
China



**RIGOBERTO  
D. TIGLAO**

Sea territorial and maritime disputes again hogging the front pages, I am again astonished at the massive misinformation on the issue, a testament indeed to the tremendous power of the US and its propaganda apparatus.

What gives these lies so much power is first, deep-seated anti-Chinese racism, which early in our history as a people led to massacres of the Spanish-era Chinese settlements, called the parian. Second, it is another instance of that deeply ingrained mentality that psychologists and anthropologists call the "us vs. them" syndrome: that is, evil is the other tribe, the other clan, the other fraternity, the other basketball team, and the other country with territorial disputes with us.

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TIGLAO FROM A I

# Massive misinformation on Scarborough, SCS issues

It is understandable for the man on the street, senators playing the gallery, and Philippine Coast Guard officials like spokesman Jay Tarruela basking in the media limelight and swallowing hook, line and sinker the American deception. Such brainwashing is easier because the SCS dispute involves complex concepts as abstract as, say, physics' black holes or quantum entanglement: territorial sea, exclusive economic zone, and even the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos).

It is disappointing, though that a few columnists, otherwise intelligent and scholarly as well as known for diligent research, have easily fallen for the US propaganda line.

One example is a statement from a veteran columnist in his Philippine Star piece yesterday: "Under the terms of the Unclos, Bajo de Masinloc sits well within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. The arbitral tribunal in 2016 rejected the validity of China's sovereignty claims over Bajo de Masinloc and the contested reefs further south."

## Unthinking

The columnist repeats that statement used by unthinking reporters as a stock phrase every time they write about our disputes with China: "Ayungin Shoal, Bajo de Masinloc, etc., etc., is well within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone."

My esteemed colleague Fr. Ranzilio Aquino has been writing the same error, as in his recent column: "China has taken over features and zones rightfully ours, from which we have been unable to eject it. But that we have gone to court and have obtained a judgment declaring what is ours remains one major obstacle to China's ambition to widen even more its already absurd, exaggerated claims over the West Philippine Sea."

I have stated the following in so many of my columns and in my book, "The Aquino Regime's Scarborough Fiasco and the South China Sea Arbitration Deception":

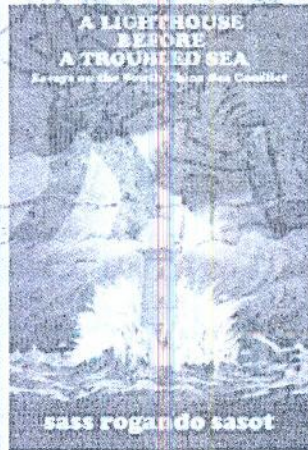
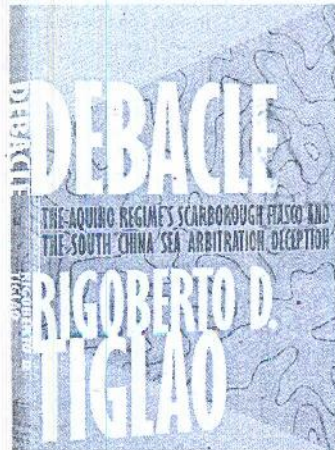
Our ignorant officials and their media mouthpieces claim that Scarborough Shoal, Bajo de Masinloc, Iroquois Reef, Sabina Shoal and others, which have been areas of open contestation between us and China in recent years, "are well within our exclusive economic zone." However, China claims that these are well within their *sovereign territory*, which is now part of Sansha, a prefecture-level city of Hainan province.

The EEZ is the marine area measured roughly 200 nautical miles from a country's coasts, invented, i.e., agreed upon under the treaty called the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos) by 157 countries and taking effect in 1994. The country from which that zone is "attached" has exclusive authority to exploit the area's natural resources. It is not part of its sovereign territory, however.

## Sovereign

In contrast, China claims these areas — especially the Spratlys — as theirs because it is part of its sovereign territory, as exercised, declared and recognized by most countries before World War 2. President Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. invaded a huge part of the Spratlys and declared it part of our territory only in 1978, while Vietnam occupied theirs mostly from 1973 to 1988. China managed to occupy only seven reefs in 1988.

The sovereign territory of one country is considered "more legitimate" than an EEZ of another, and no nation has contested



Two books debunking the US propaganda on and revealing the truth of our SCS disputes with China: 'Debacle' is available in [rigobertotigla.com/debacle](http://rigobertotigla.com/debacle), [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and Fully Booked, and 'Lighthouse' in [FLIPHITMLS](http://FLIPHITMLS), Lazada and Shopee.

otherwise. One example is Taiwan, whose land and territorial sea overlap with our EEZ.

The colossal deception disseminated by the US is that the ruling by an arbitral panel (convened under Unclos provisions) invalidated China's claims in the Spratlys.

This is a total, indisputable lie and is merely a clever propaganda scheme. What the ruling (which China rejected as it wasn't part of the arbitration procedure) invalidated is the so-called nine-dash line first drawn in 1947 by a minor bureaucrat around the South China Sea to mark the archipelagos, such as the Spratlys that China calls Nansha, that China claims are part of their territory.

## Dashed-line

But China's claims over the Spratlys and the other three archipelagos aren't based on the 1947 dashed-line, but on the international-law practice basis for declaring sovereignty, among them, effective occupation, conquest and general recognition by other states, which was China's bases before Vietnam, the Philippines and even Malaysia invaded the features it now occupies. Every map issued by China in the modern era has had Nansha and the other island groups depicted as part of its territory.

Unclos or any other body cannot decide what nation legally owns a disputed area. While this is an indisputable principle, the arbitral ruling still reported in Paragraph 153 of its Award on Jurisdictions and Admissibility (dated Oct. 20, 2015): "The Philippines has NOT asked the Tribunal to rule on sovereignty and, indeed, has expressly and repeatedly requested that the Tribunal refrain from so doing."

And then in Paragraph 272 of its Award on Merit dated 12 July 2016:

"The Tribunal emphasizes that NOTHING in this Award should be understood to comment in any way on China's historic claim to the islands of the South China Sea."

In plain language, the award did not rule on whether China or the Philippines has a legitimate sovereign claim in the Spratlys and on Scarborough Shoal. Yet our officials and even Fr. Aquino claim so.

## Aquino

The good father wrote, "We have gone to court and have obtained a judgment declaring what is ours." That's totally wrong.

It wasn't even a court but a mere five-man arbitration panel. There was no judgment

declaring that the Spratlys and Scarborough "is ours." It was all smoke and mirrors that the ruling on the nine-dash line junked China's sovereign claims in the South China Sea.

As bad as proof of ignorance on the SCS issues was the Philippine Star columnist's claim that Bajo de Masinloc is ours since it "sits well within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone."

If not for the seriousness of the issue, that claim is hilarious as it denigrates the Philippine claim over Bajo de Masinloc, which the writer thought he was defending. In its April 2012 official statement, the foreign affairs department explained that the reason why Bajo de Masinloc is our sovereign territory is not because it is within our EEZ but because the Philippines has exercised both effective occupation and effective jurisdiction over Bajo de Masinloc since its independence.

## DFA

Among the proofs of effective occupation and jurisdiction, the DFA cited were as follows: that it was used as an impact range by Philippine and US Naval Forces stationed in Subic Bay in Zambales; that its Department of Environment and Natural Resources has been conducting scientific, topographic, and marine studies in the shoal; and that Filipino fishermen have always considered it as their fishing grounds, owing to their proximity to southwestern Luzon. Also, in 2009, when the Philippines passed an amended Archipelagic Baselines Law that is fully consistent with the Law of the Sea, Bajo de Masinloc was classified under the "Regime of Islands" consistent with the Law of the Sea.

While the arbitral panel did not rule on the issue of sovereignty over Scarborough Shoal, interestingly, it described at length China's sovereignty claims: Scarborough Shoal, in China, is known as 'Huangyan Dao' and is treated as part of the Zhongsha Islands. In China's 1958 Declaration of the Government of the People's Republic of China on China's Territorial Sea, China declared a twelve-mile nautical sea from "all territories ... including the Zhongsha Islands." China's 1992 Law on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone also included the Zhongsha Islands in China's territorial land, which generated a 12-nautical mile territorial sea.

China's major rebuttal against the Philippine claim is that Scarborough Shoal is outside the Philippine territory as defined in the 1898 Treaty of Paris, by which Spain turned over its colony to the US.

## Dominant

While the US-manufactured narrative is dominant here, adopted by our top leaders in both the executive and legislative branches, many more man-hours have been expended by academics and writers who have presented a more balanced view of our SCS disputes than those who claim China as an Evil Empire grabbing our territories.

I've written over a hundred columns in this paper, in the Philippine Daily Inquirer, and in the Far Eastern Economic Review when China first occupied Mischief Reef in 1994. I took a special interest in the issue because it was President Benigno Aquino 3rd, whom I was no fan of, who put us in the path of conflict with China, reversing President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's huge accomplishments in drawing us closer to the superpower in our region. I wrote the book "Debacle" which in detail debunked the US-crafted propaganda narratives on the SCS disputes. None of the assertions in these writings have ever been questioned, except through ad hominem arguments as those by the PCG spokesman Tarruela and Sen. Jinggoy Estrada, who branded me a traitor because I didn't support the US propaganda line Philippine officials have embraced.

The bottom line is China has its claims and we have our claims. No court has ruled nor can any court rule on which sovereignty claim is legitimate. We cannot act like spoiled brats and be angry and shout, "What is ours is ours." We cannot resolve the dispute through a thousand diplomatic protests or stupid games like our vessels playing cat and mouse with Chinese ships. The only option is to negotiate with China. But our leaders don't seem to like that path. China has its national interests to pursue and we have ours.

## Qualified

I am glad there are others as qualified or even more knowledgeable than me in boldly debunking the US narratives, which are intended to drive a wedge between us and China that is challenging its hegemony in Asia.

Among these are veteran journalist Herman Laurel; former Manila Times columnist Sass Rogando Sasot who has an MA in international relations from Leiden University College in the Netherlands and who has also written a book "A Lighthouse Before A Troubled Sea: Essays on the South China Sea Conflict"; Anna Malindog-Uy, who has an MA in Advanced European Studies and International Studies and is now writing her PhD dissertation in economics; Melissa Loja (a PhD in public international law); and Romel Bagares (an instructor in public international law in three universities) who have exposed the fraud that is the Murillo Velarde map, even hinting that it may have been a scam.

The 19th-century existentialist philosopher Soren Kierkegaard hit the nail right on its head when he wrote: "Truth always rests with the minority ... because the minority is generally formed by those who really have an opinion, while the strength of a majority is illusory, formed by the gangs who have no opinion."

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## A review of policy issues in Philippine mining



Perpevina C. Tio

### EAGLE WATCH

#### Conclusion

**M**INING has gotten back on track with the relatively vigorous promotion of corporate social responsibility at all levels to increase acceptability of mining with help from the home state of a company through lobbying and development assistance to host countries.

Meanwhile, various countries have been coalescing as a network to promote transparency and accountability as a standard of good governance in the extractive industry. The people behind this transparency network are stakeholders in mining activities. The stakeholders are representatives of the public sectors (various levels of government), the extractive sector (the mining industry), and the CSOs or the civil society organizations. This network called the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) started in 2002 through former Prime Minister Tony Blair and is aimed to increase the transparency of payments made by companies in extractive industries to the host government. The CSOs, whose advocacies counter against extractive industries, are natural allies of communities who say no to mining. The transparency component of the network promotes the contribution of the mining industry to the economy.

“private sector in order to enhance national growth in a way that effectively safeguards the environment and protect the rights of the affected communities.” Therefore, it is in line with the national government’s policy that mining operations will not be derailed on the ground to sustain mining contractors’ interest to invest in the country.

The efforts of the national government to push mining as another revenue source has never stopped and it has continuously searched for ways on how to increase the sector’s payments. However, there might be a need to caution policymakers against increasing taxes on mining, especially mining companies that are already paying above industry standard.

Nevertheless, there might also be a need to scrutinize the flaw in the current schedule of taxes imposed over the mining sector. Inasmuch as these taxes become the government’s revenue, the government stands to gain more if the taxes imposed on the mining industry will intentionally be differentiated from other industries that are also subjected to the same tax schedule. The ownership of mineral resources belongs to the state; therefore, those involved in mining activities should pay for having extracted these minerals by way of royalty, aside from the taxes that are existing under the law.



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While transparency in the amount that mining actually pays the government is important, the value of good governance helps break distrust between communities and the mining company. Good governance manifests through efficient utilization of revenues from mining to achieve development results. The same paper points out corruption as the weakness of governments that rely heavily on natural resources, and this becomes a chokepoint in advancing economic development. Thus, adoption of good governance as a framework will create strong institutions that utilize revenues from mining to economic activities that benefit the general population, minimize hazards from mining, create safeguards.

Mining contributes to government revenues for poverty alleviation, but it has also been recognized by some government officials that there is a need to regulate the industry to curb the damages and potential danger of the operation to the environment. Studies also state that there should be sound mining policy with corresponding appropriate standards, mechanisms, and capacities before any mining project should be allowed to operate. There is a need to properly understand mining because it is such a high-risk activity. Even with the economic benefits it contributes, these would not be enough to forego attendant risks.

The contributions of mining to the economy is very important because the Philippine Mining Act has been created the way it is to attract local or foreign investors. Its guiding policy is partnership with the

Thus far, the national government receives 5 percent royalty (from the market value of the gross output) only from mining operations within areas declared by the government as mineral reservation. The Philippine Mining Development Corp. (PMDC) has sole jurisdiction over two mineral reservation projects: (1) the Diwalwal gold mine in Compostela Valley province, and (2) the Dinagat Chromite-Nickel mining Caraga region, while other declared mineral reservation areas are in Zambales, Surigao del Norte and Surigao del Sur.

Mining is an industry where the effects are irreversible (i.e., ecology in an open-pit mining will forever vanish), and the landscape where the area of extraction can never be remotely restored to its original form. As a hazardous industry not only for its workers but to its immediate environment and contiguous areas, mining poses risks where it operates. Therefore, for the Philippine government to allow this sector to continue its business, there should be serious trade-offs that benefit local economies and the economy as a whole.

*Ms. Perpevina C. Tio is a graduate student at the Department of Economics of Ateneo de Manila University.*



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## DMCI Mining exceeds rehab targets for Berong mine

Berong Nickel Corporation (BNC), a subsidiary of the Consunji family's DMCI Mining Corporation, reported that it has successfully rehabilitated over 30 hectares of the now-depleted Berong nickel mine.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE), the firm said this means it has completed

88 percent of its annual land preparation target within just six months. The full-year target was set at 34 hectares.

"We are fully committed to addressing our impacts on the environment and to our host communities. In our first year, we were able to exceed many of our rehabilitation targets," said BNC president Tulsi Das C. Reyes.

He added that, "the progress we have made in such a short time is a testament to our team's hard work and dedication."

In addition to the land preparation, BNC accelerated its erosion control and soil stabilization efforts by installing 672 coconets, nearly six times its annual target of 116.

The company also laid down 1,721 meters

of geo-textiles, significantly enhancing the ecological stability of the areas under rehabilitation.

Land preparation, a critical component of the mine rehabilitation process, includes slope benching and soil matting to avoid landslides, promote vegetation growth and create a more hospitable environment for returning wildlife.

In line with its goal to fast track the final mine rehabilitation of Berong, BNC topped its seedling production and transplantation targets for 2023.

The company produced 214,052 seedlings, 152 percent higher than its 85,000 target. From this, it was able to plant 81,709 during the first semester, which is already 96 percent of its annual target of 85,000 seedlings.

The Berong mine opened in October 2006 and was fully depleted by December 2021. Aside from generating 1,634 direct and indirect jobs, the mining operations yielded 10.3 million wet metric tons (WMT) of nickel ore and P2.6 billion-worth of mining duties, royalties and taxes.

To be conducted over a six-year period starting June 2022, the Berong final rehabilitation program covers 109 hectares of surface mine, 209 hectares of silt control structures and 25 hectares of stockpile area.

After rehabilitation, the disturbed areas could be used for eco-tourism, agro-forestry and inland fish farming by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), local government units (LGUs) and host communities. (James A. Loyola)





## DMCI surpasses rehab target for Berong mine

By DANESSA RIVERA

Consunji-led DMCI Mining Corp. will exercise prudence in completing the rehabilitation of its Berong nickel mine in Palawan even as it has exceeded its annual mine rehabilitation targets in the first year.

The Berong mine rehabilitation will be conducted over a six-year period starting June 2022, covering 109 hectares of surface mine, 209 hectares of silt control structures and 25 hectares of stockpile area.

"We are fully committed to addressing our impacts on the environment and to our host communities. In our first year, we were able to exceed many of our rehabilitation targets," DMCI Mining president Tulsi Das Reyes said in a statement disclosed to the Philippine Stock Exchange yesterday.

"The progress we have made in such a short time is a testament to our team's hard work and dedication," he said.

In the disclosure, DMCI Mining said its subsidiary Berong Nickel Corp. (BNC) completed 88 percent of its annual land preparation target within just six months.

This means successfully rehabilitating over 30 hectares of the Berong mine out of the full-year target of 34 hectares.

BNC also accelerated its erosion control and soil stabilization efforts by installing 672 coconets – nearly six times its annual target of 116.

The company also laid down 1,721 meters of geo-textiles, significantly enhancing the ecological stability of the areas under rehabilitation.

Land preparation, a critical component of the mine rehabilitation process, includes slope benching and soil matting to avoid landslides, promote vegetation growth and create a more hospitable environment for returning wildlife.

BNC also topped its seedling production and transplantation targets for this year as it produced 214,052 seedlings, 152 percent higher than its 85,000 target.

Then it was able to plant 81,709 during the first semester, which is already 96 percent of its annual target of 85,000 seedlings.

Even as it exceeded targets, BNC will conduct the mine rehabilitation over the specified period to ensure the site will be restored "beyond compliance," Reyes said in an interview with reporters.

"So, although it was advanced, our plan is not to really finish it faster but I think we're really organized and prepared to deliver and communicate with the local government units (LGUs) that we feel this is the right way to go, if you guys agree with us," he said.

After rehabilitation, the disturbed areas could be used for eco-tourism, agro-forestry and inland fish farming by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), local government units (LGUs) and host communities.

"So, we really had a long discussion with what's needed and that was really well, thorough-planned and we wanted to showcase something in the Philippines that is not just compliant, but something that goes beyond compliance because that's for the community," Reyes said.



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# DMCI: Rehab of Berong mine inches closer to completion

By VG CABUAG  
@villygc

**B**ERONG Nickel Corp., a unit of publicly listed DMCI Holdings Inc., on Thursday said it is inching closer towards the completion of the rehabilitation of the Berong mine in Palawan.

The company said it has successfully rehabilitated over 30 hectares of the mine, out of its target of 34 hectares.

"We are fully committed to addressing our impacts on the environment and to our host communities. In our first year, we were able to exceed many of our rehabilitation targets," Berong Nickel President Tulsi Das C. Reyes said.

In addition, the mine has accelerated its erosion control and soil stabiliza-

tion efforts by installing 672 coconets, nearly six times its annual target of 116. The company also laid down 1,721 meters of geo-textiles, significantly enhancing the ecological stability of the areas under rehabilitation.

Land preparation, a critical component of the mine rehabilitation process, includes slope benching and soil matting to avoid landslides, promote vegetation growth and create a more hospitable environment for returning wildlife.

In line with its goal to fast-track the final mine rehabilitation of Berong, the company has topped its seedling production and transplantation targets for 2023.

The company produced 214,052 seedlings, more than double its target of 85,000. From this, it was able to plant 81,709 during the first semester.

The Berong mine in Palawan opened in October 2006 and was fully depleted by December 2021. Aside from generating 1,634 direct and indirect jobs, the mining operations yielded 10.3 million wet metric tons of nickel ore and P2.6 billion-worth

of mining duties, royalties and taxes.

To be conducted over a 6-year period starting June 2022, the Berong final rehabilitation program covers 109 hectares of surface mine, 209 hectares of silt control structures and 25 hectares of stockpile area.

After rehabilitation, the disturbed areas could be used for ecotourism, agro-forestry and inland fish farming by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, local government units and host communities.

For the first half of 2023, DMCI Mining recorded a net income of P708 million, a 35-percent drop from last year's P1.09 billion owing to lower selling prices and increased costs from higher shipments, fuel consumption, depreciation, amor-

tization and labor expenses.

"To sustain our growth momentum and offset the impact of our Berong mine depletion, we are looking to open new mines in Zambales," said Reyes.

DMCI said it is on track to surpass its 2022 nickel ore production and shipments after recording improvements in the first semester.

From January to June, production nearly doubled to 1.12 million wet metric tons (WMT) from 567,000 WMT. The figure is even better than its 2022 full-year output of 1.03 million WMT.

Meanwhile, shipments in the first half reached 1.06 million WMT, equivalent to 73 percent of the total sales volume of 1.45 million WMT in 2022.



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AGENDA FOR ENVIRONMENT

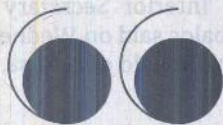
# GROUP REMINDS VILLAGE BETS TO KEEP POLLS CLEAN, 'GREEN'

DAVAO CITY—Aside from supporting “green” candidates, an environmental group urged both the public and aspiring village officials to use eco-friendly materials and be mindful of plastic waste to protect the environment as they prepare for the campaign period for the Oct. 30 barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) elections.

Anticipating the surge of election materials as the campaign kicks off on Oct. 19, Interfacing Development Interventions for Sustainability Inc. (Idis), urged candidates to strive for a zero-waste approach, including the use of social media and multimedia strategies to engage voters.

“Candidates are strongly urged to choose environmentally friendly alternatives to minimize the use of paper and plastic,” said Mark Peñalver, Idis executive director, in a statement.

Idis cited a study by Ecow-



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**Mark Peñalver**

Executive director  
Interfacing Development  
Interventions  
for Sustainability Inc.

aste Coalition, which found tarpaulins made of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) to contain high

levels of carcinogenic substances harmful to human health.

The group is also pushing for the integration of local environmental issues into the campaign planning and policy agendas of village and youth council candidates.

Idis also reminded candidates to avoid nailing their posters on trees, a violation of Republic Act No. 3571, which prohibits the cutting, destroying or injuring of planted or growing trees, flowering plants and shrubs or plants of scenic value along public roads, in plazas, parks, school premises or any other public ground.

**Commitment**

“Idis remains steadfast in its commitment to safeguarding our natural environment throughout the entirety of the campaign period,” it said.

The group also urged the public to support candidates with strong environmental

awareness and dedication to sustainability, stressing that voters must scrutinize the aspirants’ performance, actions and proposed policies involving environmental issues.

“Voters are strongly urged to exercise educated and careful decision-making while choosing their barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan officials,” Idis said.

The group reminded candidates and voters to avoid leaving trash after the election.

“Candidates are strongly urged to conduct thorough cleanup activities and ensure the proper collection and disposal of their campaign materials, including flyers and posters,” said the group, as it urged incoming barangay and SK officials to prioritize local environmental protection in their agenda to ensure that local communities would remain green and healthy for future generations. —GERMELINA

LACORTE INQ



## Japanese scientists find microplastics in clouds

WASHINGTON, D.C.: Researchers in Japan have confirmed microplastics are present in clouds, where they are likely affecting the climate in ways that aren't yet

fully understood.

In a study published in Environmental Chemistry Letters, scientists climbed Mount Fuji and Mount Oyama in order to

collect water from the mists that shroud their peaks, then applied advanced imaging techniques to the samples to determine their physical and chemical properties.

The team identified nine different types of polymers and one type of rubber in the airborne microplastics — ranging in size from 7.1 to 94.6 micrometers.

Each liter of cloud water contained between 6.7 and 13.9 pieces of the plastics.

What's more, "hydrophilic" **►MicroplasticsA8**

### ■ MICROPLASTICS FROM A1

## Japanese scientists find microplastics

or water-loving polymers were abundant, suggesting the particles play a significant role in rapid cloud formation and thus climate systems.

"If the issue of 'plastic air pollution' is not addressed proactively, climate change and ecological risks may become a reality, causing irreversible and serious environmental damage in the future," lead author Hiroshi Okochi of Waseda University warned in a statement Wednesday.

When microplastics reach the upper atmosphere and are exposed to ultraviolet radiation from sunlight, they degrade, contributing to greenhouse gasses, added Okochi.

Microplastics — defined as plastic particles under 5 millimeters — come from industrial effluent, textiles, synthetic car

tires, personal care products and much more.

These tiny fragments have been discovered inside fish in the deepest recesses of the ocean peppering Arctic sea ice and blanketing the snows on the Pyrenees mountains between France and Spain.

But the mechanisms of their transport have remained unclear, with research on airborne microplastic transport in particular limited.

"To the best of our knowledge, this is the first report on airborne microplastics in cloud water," the authors wrote in their paper.

Emerging evidence has linked microplastics to a range of impacts on heart and lung health, as well as cancers, in addition to widespread environmental harm.

AFP