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BusinessMirror

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

MINERS QUESTION 'IMPARTIALITY' OF GOVT AUDIT

DENR to padlock 23 large-scale mines

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA [@jonlmayuga](#)
& CAI U. ORDINARIO [@cuo_bm](#)

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on Thursday ordered the closure of 23 large-scale mining operations, a move which could cut GDP by 0.5 percentage point, according to an economist.



**The number of big mines
that passed the audit**

Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez told reporters in a news briefing on Thursday that the DENR's decision is final.

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DENR to padlock 23 large-scale mines

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"They [mining firms] can appeal their case to President Duterte. He has the final say," Lopez said.

She warned mining firms to comply with the closure order of the DENR. "Unless they appealed to the President, they should immediately stop their operation."

"I have reported to the President about what is going to happen. And I know for a fact that he loves the people," Lopez said, adding that the decision to close the mines is anchored on her belief that mining has caused "massive environmental damage."

During the news briefing, the DENR chief presented photos and showed a video of the adverse environmental impact of the mines in Zambales, Homonhon Island in Eastern Samar, Dinagat Island and Surigao del Norte.

The photos and video showed the discoloration of water in heavily silted rivers and seas near the mines.

Ordered closed were the iron ore mine of Ore Asia Mining and Development Corp. in Bulacan; gold and nickel mine of Benguet Corp. in Benguet; and the nickel mine of Benguet Corp. Nickel Mines Inc., Eramen Minerals Inc., Zambales Diversified Metals Corp. and LNL Archipelago Minerals Inc. in Zambales.

On Homonhon Island in Eastern Samar three mining companies were issued closure orders—Mt. Sinal Mining Exploration and Development Corp. and Techiron Mineral Resources, Inc.

On Dinagat Islands an island-province in Mindanao, seven of the nine mines were covered by the closure order. They are AAMPIL Natural Resources Exploration, Kromico Inc., SinoSteel Philippines H.Y. Mining Corp., Oriental Synergy Mining Corp., Wellex Mining Corp., Libjo Mining Corp. and Oriental Vision Mining Philippines Corp.

In Surigao del Norte the DENR ordered the closure of seven operating mines. They are the Adnama Mining Resources Corp., Claver Mineral Development Corp., Platinum Development Corp., CTP Construction and Mining Corp., Carrascal Nickel Corp., Marcventures Mining and Development Corp. and Hinatuan Mining Corp.

The DENR also issued suspension orders against five mining firms—Berong Nickel Corp., Citinickel Mines and Development Corp., Lepanto Consolidated Mining Corp., OceanaGold Phils., and Strong Built Mining Development Corp.

Of the 41 large-scale mines, only 12 passed the mine audit based on Lopez's set of criteria, which is anchored on social justice. The audit criteria included the environmental, biodiversity and social aspects of mining.

'Compromised audit'

THE Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) decried the announcement made by Lopez that she wants to close 23 mines and suspend an additional five operations.

"Mining companies were invited by the government to invest in the Philippines and signed contracts with them as partners in mineral-resource development. By entering into these contracts, the government is bound to observe due process. The DENR secretary cannot just shut down mines without due process," COMP Chairman Artemio F. Disini said in a statement.

The COMP said it stands by its members and questioned the manner by which the DENR mine audit was conducted, particularly the inclusion of antimining activists.

"We are not against a strict implementation of the law. In

fact, we have often called for stricter monitoring of all mining operations in the country. What we question is the bias and partiality of the audit from the very start with Secretary Lopez's early statements that she does not like mining and would like to see mines closed," said Nella C. Halcon, COMP executive vice president.

"With the inclusion of antimining groups in the audit teams, you can see that the audit was compromised. The participation of these antimining activists immediately raises the question of whether the results are impartial," Halcon added.

The COMP also said it laments how the audit review findings were first made known through a press conference.

"If the audit found violations, the law provides for a procedure. She should have filed the appropriate cases or invoked the arbitration clause of the mining agreements. Our members have not received any formal decision but have already been subjected to trial by publicity," Halcon said.

"Unfortunately, it seems that her decision to close these mines was based merely on a quick fly-by over Surigao del Sur last week in a chopper during the height of the rainy season. It may not have been based on the review conducted by the Mines and Geosciences Bureau," she added.

Lopez, however, claimed to have visited all the mines and her decision were based on documentary evidences she and other DENR officials gathered during the audit and evaluation process.

She also said she flew over the mines via helicopter and took aerial footages and photographs herself using her cellular phone during the process.

She said COMP's members, the majority of them now ISO 14001 certified, with several undergoing the accreditation process, have not been "remiss on their duties."

"Even as we faced challenges in 2016, we paid our taxes faithfully, contributed to the betterment of our host communities, and did our part in caring for the environment," Halcon said.

"But the DENR secretary does not seem to see the mining industry as the government's partner in growing the economy. She sees miners as villains, even when mining companies have always been a consistent partner of their host communities," she added.

COMP called on the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC), co-chaired by the Department of Finance, to convene and review the policies and "arbitrary actions" of Lopez.

Economic impact

FORMER Mines and Geosciences Bureau Director Leo Jasareno, who acts as consultant to Lopez said the closure order will affect the country's annual metals output. Nickel production alone, he said, will go down by 50 percent, considering that most of those ordered close are nickel producers.

The Philippines is the world's top nickel producer and China's single major source of raw materials for the production of various steel products, such as stainless steel. Jasareno added that around 20,000 workers stand to lose their jobs because of the closure order.

Lopez said the DENR will pursue area development in the area, instead of ordering the company to implement their final mine rehab and closure plans.

She added that once closed, the DENR will have access to funds intended for the rehabilitation of inactive mines.

"We have funds but the problem is we cannot use this fund unless we close the mines. I don't care about the taxes. About

82 percent of the income from mining goes to mining companies. The people are suffering as they rake in profit," Lopez said.

According to Lopez, majority of the mines that were ordered closed are operating within critical watersheds. She has earlier declared watersheds as "off-limits" to destructive development projects and wants mining out of watersheds.

"Water is life. Water is more important than money or gold," Lopez said.

She blamed the government and the DENR for allowing mining to happen within watershed, which she said compromises the integrity of the country's freshwater resources.

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and local economists, however, threw their support behind the DENR's decision to close 23 mines.

NEDA Undersecretary Rosemarie G. Edillon told the BUSINESS-MIRROR that the impact on the economy in general will be "minimal," but could be significant on the regional or community level.

Edillon said the key is to provide safety nets for those that will be affected by the DENR's decision.

"The key is to provide safety nets to those who will be adversely affected. For the industry, it's really about making sure that only responsible firms operate. It's about compliance to the law; no new laws are being enacted," she said.

However, University of Asia and the Pacific School of Economics Dean Cid L. Terosa projected that the country's GDP will be cut due to the possible reduction in household consumption.

Terosa estimated that GDP growth could decline by 0.5 percentage point if household consumption slows due to the job losses in the mining sector.

"Although mining is capital intensive, the direct and indirect jobs that will be lost will reach thousands," Terosa said. "For every peso lost in mining, 0.5 to 0.9 centavos can be lost elsewhere in the economy."

Former Labor Secretary Rene E. Ofreneo said while there could be losses, the creation of safety nets could cushion the impact on the economy.

He said these could include efforts of the DENR to "clean up" areas that were heavily damaged by irresponsible mining practices. By conducting this program, those who lost their jobs in mining could shift to these initiatives.

Ofreneo said clean up initiatives could also include tree planting in affected areas and mangrove planting in mining areas.

He said "irresponsible mining practices" in the country leads to greater losses in terms of the livelihoods affected by mining. "The kind of mining we have here is a job killer. I am 100 percent in support of the closure."

Ofreneo noted that mine tailings could contaminate municipal fishing grounds and affect the livelihood of fishermen.

He said what is needed is for mining companies to have value-adding activities. Ofreneo said these can be similar to what is being done in Indonesia, where mining companies are forbidden from shipping out raw ore.

Ofreneo added that mining firms in Indonesia process whatever they mine in the country before selling to the international market.

Based on the October 2016 Labor Force Survey, there are 41.66 million employed persons nationwide working in various sectors and industries. Of this figure, around 7.17 million, or 17.2 percent, are working in the industry sector. The PSA said 222,152 are working in the mining and quarrying sector.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

DENR shuts down 23 mining areas

By **Ronnel W. Domingo,**
Jaymee T. Gamil
and **Leila B. Salaverria**
@Team_Inquirer

Environment Secretary Gina Lopez on Thursday announced an order for the closure of 23 mines, mainly for ruining watershed areas and "indiscriminate mining."

"It is time for social justice. You cannot run your business and affect our farmers and fishermen. This is not acceptable under the Duterte administration and not acceptable under the DENR (Department of Environment and Natural Resources)," Lopez said.

She also suspended five mining firms.

Following the mining industry's disruption that involved some firms related to several publicly listed companies, the mining and oil index fell by 1.65 percent on Thursday. Shares of Benguet Corp. and Oriental Peninsula Resources Group Inc. slid by 10.38 percent.

Appeal to the President

Lopez said the mine operators could appeal the closure or suspension order to the President.

In a speech on Thursday, Mr. Duterte said he had told Lopez to be fair and legal.

Four of the Zambales mines set to be closed are extracting nickel in a functional watershed, Lopez said.

Three mines in Homonhon in Eastern Samar province, she said, caused the "siltation of coastal waters (and) destruction of the watershed" on the island.

Lopez also ordered the clo-

sure of seven mines on Dinagat Islands.

Social injustice

"What happened in Dinagat is social injustice, the mountain was denuded," she said. "Did you know that there is a natural bonsai forest in Dinagat? We can put an eco-lodge there. I want Dinagat to rest and maximize the bonsai forest for ecotourism."

She also wanted shuttered seven mines in Surigao del Norte province.

The mines are operating mostly in a watershed and have caused siltation of nearby waters, she said.

"Water is life. To have any kind of mining operations in watersheds—not just proclaimed watersheds, even functional watersheds—is unacceptable. You cannot have any kind of mining operation in a watershed. That's like saying, 'The gold or nickel is more important than the water our people drink.' We will not allow the water of our people to be at risk for any business interest," she said.

"Especially in 2030, our scientists are telling us we're going to have a water shortage. Our water levels are going down, climate change is coming," she added.

She noted that Hinatuan Mining—part of Nickel Asia—caused the "destruction of the island" of the same name.

Half of PH nickel output

Of the mines facing closure, 17 are involved in nickel production. These firms altogether represented about half of the country's annual nickel

output, Lopez said.

The Philippines has been the world's biggest supplier of nickel since 2012, following Indonesia's ban on mineral exports.

In the wake of the mine closures, the environment chief said she was considering an "area development approach" in the affected communities, which largely entails developing ecotourism and natural resource-based industries.

Rehabilitation funds

She said she planned to use the mine rehabilitation funds from the closed mines for that venture.

Lopez reiterated that she was not opposed to mining but was against the suffering of people in communities that hosted mines.

"I don't care about the money. I just care that our people should not suffer," she said.

"Why should they suffer? So that the stock market goes up? What's more important—the stock market or the well-being of our people?" she added.

Marcventures Holdings (MARC) president Isidro Alcantara Jr. said that while his company's operations in Surigao del Sur were purportedly in a watershed, "our MPSA (mineral production sharing agreement) gives us 'prior rights' under the law."

He added that "our operations are responsible and the waters in all rivers within MARC are clean."

Lepanto said it had not violated any environmental laws.

—WITH REPORTS FROM DORIS DUMLAO-ABADILLA AND ALLAN NAWAL INQ



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DENR closes 21 mining firms

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON
and RHODINA VILLANUEVA

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has ordered the closure of 21 mining firms and the suspension of seven other large-scale miners following a six-month industry-wide audit.

In a briefing yesterday, Environment Secretary Gina Lopez said 21 of the country's 41 mining firms would be closed down for breach of environmental standards.

"We have also decided to close down any mining operation in functional watersheds. The DENR has rightfully decided to take on social justice. I am not against mining but I am against suffering," Lopez said.

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"If there are businesses and foreigners that go and utilize the resources of the area for their benefit and the people suffer then that's social injustice," she added.

Among the 21 firms are Benguet Corp. Nickel Mines, Zambales Diversified Metals Corp., LNL Archipelago Minerals, Eramen Minerals Inc., AAM-Phil Natural Resources Exploration and Development Corp., Krominco, Sinosteel Philippines HY Mining Corp., Oriental Synergy Mining, Wellex Mining, Libjo Mining and Oriental Vision Mining Philippines.

"I blame the DENR because it's also their fault. They didn't do anything for ecotourism," Lopez said.

Other firms ordered shut down are located in Surigao del Norte — Adnama Mining Resources, Claver Mineral Development, Platinum Development Corp., CTP Construction and Mining, Carrascal Nickel Mining, Marcventures Mining and Development Corp., and Hinatuan Mining.

Also covered by the closure order are

Mt. Sinai Exploration Mining and Development, EMIR Mineral Resources, and TechIron Mineral Resources, all three are located in Samar.

The 21 firms have 15 days to appeal their case before the DENR and should their plea get rejected, they could elevate their case to President Duterte.

"They can accept the closure and just help DENR with eco-tourism. Or they can appeal but that appeal goes to the President. The closure becomes final when the President says so," Lopez said.

In Davao City yesterday, President Duterte said he supported the actions of Lopez against the erring mining companies.

The DENR, meanwhile, ordered

the suspension of Berong Nickel Corp., Oceana Gold Philippines, Lepanto Consolidated Mining, Citinickel Mines and Development, Ore Asia Mining, Strong Built Mining Development Corp., and Hinatuan Mining Corp.'s Manicani mine.

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"There are also unresolved agricultural issues, leakage of mine tailings, environmental violation and siltations. They need to fix their system and address the complaints of residents," Lopez said.

Only 12 passed the au-

dit. These mining firms include Philex Mining Corp., Nickel Asia Corp.'s Rio Tuba Nickel Corp., Cagdianao Mining, Taganito Mining, Carmen Copper Corp., Greenstone Resources, Philsaga Mining, Apex

Mining, Pacific Nickel Philippines, Agata Mining Ventures, Century Peak Metals Holdings and SR Metals.

The audit focused on safety and health, mine environmental management, social development, mining tenement, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, hazardous waste and solid waste.

The audit team comprised of the DENR central and regional offices, the Mines Geosciences Bureau, Environmental Management Bureau, Biodiversity Management Bureau, Ecosystems Research and Development Bureau, the Department of Health, the Department of Agriculture and various civil society organizations.

Non-government organization Alyansa Tigil Mina lauded the audit findings and called it a "logical conclusion."

On the other hand, the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) decried the mine audit results as seven of its members were among the firms that were ordered closed.

"Mining companies were invited by government to invest in the Philippines and signed contracts with them as partners in mineral resource development. By entering into these contracts, the government is bound to observe due process. Sec. Lopez cannot just shut down mines without due process," COMP chairman Artemio Disini said.

The Chamber also questioned the way the audit was conducted, noting the inclusion of anti-mining activists that tainted the process.

"What we question is the bias and partiality of the audit from the very start with Secretary Lopez's early statements that she does not like mining and would like to see mines closed," COMP executive vice president Nelia Halcon said.

"With the inclusion of anti-mining groups in the audit teams, you can see that the audit was compromised. The participation of these anti-mining activists immediately raises the question of whether or not the results are impartial," she added.

When she assumed the post, Lopez ordered an industry-wide audit to look into the adequacy and efficiency of environmental protection measures taken by the mining companies, determine gaps in those measures and identify the appropriate penalties for violations of mining and environmental laws.

Lopez emphasized that 26 of the 41 large-scale mining companies are in Caraga region and the communities do not really benefit from the industry.

"The political setup there has supported mining. It's been like that for many years and the people of Mindanao are not benefiting," Lopez said.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Gov't closes 21 mine firms and suspends 7 more

MANILA, FEB. 3

The mining sector was left crippled after the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) decided to close down more than half of all the mine operations in the country and suspends seven more as the result of the nationwide audit it launched last year.

In a bid to make a "statement" as environment secretary, former anti-mining advocate Gina Lopez already proceeded to shut down 21 mining companies and suspend seven more.

Of the total 41 metallic miners, only 12 has passed while the decision for one company was left hanging as of now.

"My issue is not about mining. My issue is about social justice. If businesses go to certain areas and they benefit from the resources of these areas, and the people who live there suffer, there's social injustice," DENR Secretary Gina Lopez said yesterday.

"Water is life. We will not risk the water in the interest of businesses. In that line, we have decided to close down any mining operation near functional water. No law proclaims watershed is functional. There can't and must not have any kind of industrial (activity) near watersheds.

Climate change is coming, water levels are coming down. It's not acceptable," she added.

Companies that were suspended are Oceana Gold Philippines, Inc., Lepanto Consolidated Mining, Citinickel Mines and Development Corp., Berong Nickel Corp., Ore Asia Mining Corp., and Strong Built Mining Development Corp.

Mining firms that were closed down, on the other hand, were Benguet Corp. Nickel Mines, Inc., Eramen Minerals, Inc., Zambales Diversified Metals Corp., LNL Archipelago Minerals, Inc., Mt. Sinai Mining Exploration and Development Corp., Emir Minerals Corp., TechIron Mineral Resources, Inc., AAMPHIL Natural Resources Exploration, Kromico, Inc., SinoSteel Philippines H.Y Mining Corp., Oriental Synergy Mining Corp., Wellex Mining Corp., Libjo Mining Corp., Oriental Vision Mining Philippines, Corp., ADNAMA

Mining Resources Corp., Claver Mineral Development Corp., Platinum Development Corp., CTP Construction and Mining Corp., Carrascal Nickel Corp., Marcventures Mining and Development Corp., and Hinatuan Mining Corp.

Lopez said the nickel mines that we closed accounts for 50 percent of the country's total production but she said she "doesn't care about the money."

"Who cares about GDP (gross domestic product) if people are suffering? We should increase GDP but it should come from a decent way," she noted.

According to her companies can make an appeal to President Rodrigo Duterte. But during a national convention that was held in Davao on Thursday, Duterte said he supports DENR's closure order against several big mines.

Those who passed are Philex Mining Corp., Rio Tuba Nickel Mining Corp., Carmen Copper Corp., Cagdianao Mining Corp., Taganito Mining Corp., Greenstone Resources Corp., Philsaga Mining Corp., Apex Mining Company, Inc., Pacific Nickel Philippines Inc., Agata Mining Ventures, Inc., Century Peak Metals Holdings Corp., SR Metals, Inc.

Asked if the DENR can provide the recommendation reports of Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB), which has been part of the mining audit team, Lopez declined to provide them, saying the report of MGB is in contrast with the decision of DENR.

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"GOVT TO CLOSE HALF OF MINES"

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ENVIRONMENTAL CLAMPDOWN

Govt to close half of mines

BY JED MACAPAGAL

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) yesterday said it has ordered the closure of 21 mines in the campaign to fight environmental degradation by the industry.

The 21 mines represent half of the 41 mines audited last year. Of the 21 mines ordered closed, 15 were found to be operating inside functional watersheds. They were said to have polluted water systems and silted up rivers.

The closure order appears to be counter to what the Mines and Geosciences Bureau had earlier recommended but DENR secretary Regina Lopez was adamant about the closure order.

The closed mines represent 50 percent of the country's total nickel production and about 10 percent of world supply.

Lopez said operations of six other mines have been suspended including the country's top gold mine operated by Australia's Oceanagold Corp.

Of the 41 mines, 13 passed while six are for suspension and one was deferred judgment.

Lopez said she is not concerned about the money but that "the people should not suffer. "Why should they suffer, so that stock market goes up? What's more important, stock market or wellbeing of our people?" raged Lopez in a briefing yesterday.

"We will close down any kind of mining in functional watersheds," Lopez said.

"You cannot have any kind of mining operation in a watershed. It's like saying the gold or nickel that foreigners want to get is more important than the water that our people drink... We will not allow the water of our people to be at risk for any business interest," she said.

Four of the companies for closure are in Zambales, namely Benguet Corp. Nickel Mines Inc., Eramen Minerals Inc., Zambales Diversified Metals Corp. and LNL Archipelago Minerals Inc.

Three are located in Homonhon island in Eastern Samar: Mt. Sinai Exploration and Development Corp., Emir Minerals Corp., and Techiron Mineral Resources Inc.

In Dinagat islands, seven companies will be shut down: AAMPFIL Natural Resources Exploration, Krominco Inc., SinoSteel Philippines H.Y. Mining Corp., Oriental Synergy Mining Corp., Wellex Mining Corp., Libjo Mining Corp. and Oriental Vision Mining Philippines Corp.

Completing the list of firms asked to cease operations are those from Surigao del Norte: Adnama Mining Resources Corp., Claver Mineral Development Corp., Platinum Development Corp., CTP Construction and Mining Corp., Carrascal Nickel Corp., Marcventures Mining and Development Corp. and Hinatuan Mining Corp.-Tagana-an.

Lopez said the erring mining firms may file their appeal but the final say will come from President Duterte.

"The closure becomes final when the president says it is because usually they

can appeal. If the president says it really shouldn't be, it really isn't, but it's much more difficult to address a closure than a suspension and my interest in the closure is that if it closes, I can use the rehab funds to heal the lands," Lopez said.

She noted the decision to close the said mining operations are not unified with the recommendation given by the MGB.

"MGB is recommendatory but I visited the people myself, I used my judgment. Whatever they did has no value because I made my decision as Cabinet secretary,"

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GOVT

made my decision as Cabinet secretary," Lopez said.

However, Lopez said she does not want to publicize MGB's recommendations so as not to "rock the boat."

The Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) said the DENR's order did not observe due process.

"Mining companies were invited by government to invest in the Philippines and signed contracts with them as partners in mineral resource development. By entering into these contracts, government is bound to observe due process. Secretary Lopez cannot just shut down mines without due process," Artemio Disini, COMP chairman, said in a statement.

Nelia Halcon, COMP executive vice president, said the group is not against strict implementation of the law but is questioning the bias and partiality of the audit.

"With the inclusion of anti-mining groups in the audit teams, you can see that the audit

was compromised. The participation of these anti-mining activists immediately raises the question of whether or not the results are impartial," Halcon said.

COMP also lamented the audit review findings were first made known through a press conference.

"If the audit found violations, the law provides for a procedure. She should have filed the appropriate cases or invoked the arbitration clause of the mining agreements. Our members have not received any formal decision but have already been subjected to trial by publicity," Halcon explained.

COMP also said Lopez "does not seem to see the mining industry as government's partner in growing the economy," but "sees miners as villains, even when mining companies have always been a consistent partner of their host communities."

"My issue here is not about mining, my issue here is social justice," Lopez, a staunch environmentalist, said at the briefing that showed

footage of damage from mining to an audience including priests and residents of mining communities.

"Why is mining more important than people's lives?"

News of the mine closures sent global nickel prices higher.

The risk of nickel supply disruption from the Philippines should boost global prices of the metal, analysts say, with the initial mine suspensions last year and the threat of more having fueled a rally.

"The Philippine disruption should have a bigger impact on the overall nickel market considering it is the biggest nickel ore producer in the world," said ANZ commodity strategist Daniel Hynes.

"If they are hard and fast orders, then the nickel price should be well supported."

Three-month nickel on the London Metal Exchange rose to a 2-1/2-week high of \$10,375 a ton in limited Asian trading with China still shut for the Lunar New Year break.

Ronald Recidoro from the COMP said companies named on the list would "definitely" take legal action, initially filing a motion for reconsideration with Lopez's agency.

"The audit process was clearly flawed," Recidoro told Reuters, noting the Chamber had opposed the inclusion of anti-mining groups in the audit teams.

Duterte has backed Lopez's mining audit, warning last year that the Philippines could survive without a mining industry. He supported Lopez's latest action on Thursday.

Mines ordered for closure include those run by Hinatuan Mining Corp, a unit of top Philippine nickel ore producer Nickel Asia Corp and Benguet Corp Nickel Mines Inc.

Several companies, including Australia's Oceanagold, said they had not received any official orders.

"There is no legal basis for any proposed suspension," Oceanagold said in a statement. with Reuters

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Army exec vows to intensify war vs illegal logging in Aurora

By MAMER BANEZ

BALER, Aurora -- A top official of Army's 56th Infantry Brigade has vowed to intensify the war against illegal logging in the province and its suburb areas of responsibilities this year.

Lt. Col. Louie DS. Villanueva, Tatag Battalion commander based in Bgy. Calabuanan, recently said that they renewed their commitment to Aurora Gov. Gerardo A. Noveras to boost the anti-illegal logging operations, together with the police, as part of the campaign to save this province's forests against loggers.

"Illegal logging remains one of the top concerns of Gov. Noveras," Villanueva said, explaining that it is the mandate of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to support the plans and programs of the government and to help the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and police to protect the mountains, forests and other natural resources.

He said that through the conduct of anti-illegal logging operations, the Army has apprehended 10 illegal loggers, seized 9,647 board feet of assorted illegally-cut lumber, two chainsaws and one abandoned vehicle which were properly turned over to the authority within the area of operations in the provinces of Aurora, Nueva Vizcaya and Nueva Ecija.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

AQUACULTURE WOES

MASSIVE FISH KILL WIPES OUT LAKE SEBU'S TILAPIA STOCK

By Edwin O. Fernandez
@inqmindanao

LAKE SEBU, SOUTH COTABATO—A massive fish kill has left this lakeside town, Central Mindanao's largest tilapia supplier, gasping for air.

More than P120 million worth of tilapia grown in Lake Sebu was lost in what officials said was the worst fish kill to hit this town in years.

Authorities blamed heavy rain triggered by the tail end of a cold front and a low pressure area last month, spawning floods and turning the water turbid in the 354-hectare lake where the town got its name.

Mayor Antonio Fungan asked the local council to declare the town under a state of calamity to facilitate the release of calamity funds that the local government will use to help pen operators.

"[The fish kill] is unprecedented and unbelievable," he said.

Zaldy Artacho, municipal agriculture officer, said some 1,300 tons of tilapia and milkfish turned belly up since the fish kill started two weeks ago. A kilogram of tilapia sells for P90 to P100 in the local market.

Jose Rudy Muyco, Lake Sebu fish warden, said the local government has yet to com-



LAKE TRAGEDY A fisherman transports dead tilapia he gathered after a massive fish kill in Lake Sebu in South Cotabato province. —AMIEL CAGAYAN / CONTRIBUTOR

plete an audit of losses on the aquaculture industry here.

Unlike previous fish kills, including an incident in October last year, the recent fish kill killed all tilapia here, said Seigfred Flaviano, provincial environment officer, who led an inspection team in the lake on Wednesday.

"We did not see any live fish in the lake during the survey," Flaviano said.

"Lake Sebu is ... gasping," Fungan said.

He asked Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol to help op-

erators of 464 fish cages in the town.

As in the past, local officials cited the depletion of oxygen supply in the lake as the reason for the massive fish kill.

Lake Sebu has been experiencing light to moderate rain in the past two weeks, making the level of dissolved oxygen in the lake to drop fast.

Fungan also blamed pollutants from fish feed and other chemicals that runoff water carried into the lake for triggering the fish kill.

Mila Lorca, chief of the

Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office, said dead fish harvested from the lake should not be eaten.

Lorca said a massive cleanup drive should be undertaken to remove rotting fish in the water since these put the health of people living around the lake at risk.

South Cotabato Gov. Daisy Fuentes, in 2013, had called for a massive rehabilitation of the lake to avoid fish kills.

But Fuentes said residents should consider giving way and fish cage operators should agree to reduce the size of areas they occupy to save the lake.

Fuentes said residents living around the lake should also agree to move back a few meters so trees and bamboo could be planted on its rim.

"If they hold [property] titles, can we prod them to move back a little so we could plant trees and bamboo?" she asked.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

3rd National Integrated Eco-Waste Management Exhibition

Senator Cynthia Villar delivered the keynote speech for the 3RD NATIONAL INTEGRATED, a four-day eco-waste management exhibition with the theme "Engaging Response to the Changing Environment," held recently at the Quezon City Memorial Circle.

The four-day Exhibition spearheaded by Director Eli Eldifonso of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-NCR (DENR) showcased initiatives, best practices, and emerging technologies.

Lectures and presentations by experts on varied subjects of interest were also conducted to help spread awareness and to educate people on how to better handle the environment.

The Environment Summit aims to shed light on environmental and ecological issues that disrupt the processes of Mother Nature, and everyone and everything living in it.

In light of the celebration of the Waste Management Act anniversary and the Zero Waste Month, which takes place every January, the summit seeks to educate the public on the destruction of the environment and what they can do to help alleviate this situation.

Along with raising awareness, the E-Summit worked with government agencies and non-government organizations to urge the public, especially the youth, to participate in effective solid waste management, healthier lifestyle programs, and other initiatives that would help save the environment and promote a healthy way of life.

Officials of the DENR-NCR, Environmental Management Bureau, Climate Change Commission, National Solid Waste Management Commission, Metro-Manila Development Authority and other national agencies and local government units, as well as CEOs and senior managers of private companies participating as exhibitors also attended the opening day of the event.

Some personalities who were known for their leadership and active environmental role were also invited to help draw people to the event.

These personalities were: Senator Loren Legarda, and Senator Cynthia Villar, and Quezon City's Mayor Herbert Bautista and Vice Mayor Joy Belmonte, True Faith, Spongicola, John Arcilla, among others.

EDITORIAL

A member of the
Philippine Press Institute
The National Association of Philippine Newspapers

Change of heart on climate change

IT WAS NOT too long ago when President Rodrigo Duterte disparaged the Paris agreement on climate change, calling it "stupid and absurd."

The President based his criticism of the accord which had been adopted by 194 countries including the Philippines, on what he perceived as lopsided provisions that favor industrialized nations and for its lack of mandated assistance to countries hit by natural disasters.

These countries with advanced economies reached the height of progress and wealth admittedly because they are most guilty in emissions of carbon and other pollutants.

'Proponents of the climate change treaty said this will open the floodgates of international funding for Philippine projects that are directly related to climate change mitigation.'

The Philippines, still highly agricultural, might stymie its march towards industrialization if it adheres to the international climate change agreement, Duterte had said.

The Chief Executive, however, admitted he had a change of heart on the issue after a majority of the members of his Cabinet voted to uphold the treaty.

The international agreement mandates all signatory countries to keep the rise in global temperatures by the year 2010 well below 2 degrees Celsius, if not 1.5 degrees.

This will not completely stop global warming, but at least it will delay the environmental havoc that it invariably brings.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Perfecto Yasay has signed the last of 33 certificates of concurrence needed for the President to approve the Instrument of Accession, which will then be transmitted to the Senate for ratification; the Paris agreement being a treaty that needs the concurrence of senators.

Sen. Loren Legarda, meanwhile, has vowed to push with individual senators the early ratification of the treaty. Senate President Koko Pimentel himself is optimistic that it would pass the chamber by July.

Proponents of the climate change treaty in the Cabinet and outside are happy about these developments. They said this will open the floodgates of international funding for Philippine projects that are directly related to climate change mitigation.

It will also bolster the image of President Duterte and the nation in the international community. This is something that we really need.

The Manila Times

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MSU, LANAO SUR SIGN MOA TO SAVE LAKE LANAO

SHARIFF AGUAK, Maguindanao: A memorandum of agreement (MOA) between officials of Mindanao State University (MSU) in Marawi City and Lanao del Sur was signed recently for mutual environmental protection of Lake Lanao and save the dwindling endemic fish species. MSU president Habib Macaayong and Gov. Bedjoria Soraya Alonto-Adiong sealed the agreement meant to improve the productivity of local fishing communities while ensuring the abundance of fishes in the lake. The downstream flow of waters from the lake drains into the shores of Lanao del Norte that propels the turbines of hydroelectric plants supplying more than half of Mindanao's daily electric supply. The MSU College of Fisheries will study how the governor's office and local officials in municipalities around Lake Lanao can improve the productivity of the local residents engaged in inland fishing without causing the depletion of fishes in the lake.

JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

'Mining order means losses'

Solons, miners warn of massive displacement

By Anna Leah E. Gonzales and Christine F. Herrera

MORE than 19,000 people will lose their jobs once the government closes down 21 mining companies and suspends the operations of six more, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau said yesterday.

The closures would also hurt small businesses in host and neighboring communities that arose due to the presence of mining opera-

tions, the bureau added.

"The role of mining when it comes to employment generation whether direct or indirect in the rural areas cannot be overly emphasized. It is estimated that about four indirect jobs may be generated for every direct employment in the upstream and downstream sectors," the bureau said.

Mining investments for this year alone could drop to \$1.69 billion

from the projected \$ 4.45 billion, the agency warned.

Environment Secretary Regina Lopez announced Thursday that out of the 41 metallic mines in the country, 21 will be closed down, six companies will be suspended and only 12 passed a mining audit.

She drew support from President Rodrigo Duterte, who said he was elated by the decision to close 21 mining companies.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

'Mining...

From A1

"Now, today, I've read in the newspapers that Secretary Gina Lopez canceled about seven of the big mining firms in the country," Duterte said in a speech before water district operators in Davao City.

"You know, I support her. And there was never a time that I called her to slow down a little bit," he said.

Companies which passed the audit were Philex Mining Corp., Rio Tuba Nickel Mining Corp., Carmen Copper Corp., Cagdianao Mining Corp., Taganito Mining Corp., Greenstone Resources Corp., Philsaga Mining Corp., Apex Mining Company Inc., Pacific Nickel Phils. Inc., Agata Mining Ventures Inc., Century Peak Metals Holdings Corp. and SR Metals Inc.

"We decided to close any kind of mining operations in functional watersheds. Water is life and we will not allow the water of our people to be at risk," Lopez said.

Lopez said the mining operations which will be closed include Zambales Diversified Metals Corp., Benguet Corp. Nickel Mines Inc., Eramen Minerals Inc., Zambales Diversified Metals Corp., LNL Archipelago Minerals Inc., Mt. Sinai Mining Exploration and Development Corp., Emir Minerals Corp., TechIron Mineral Resources Inc., AAMPHIL Natural Resources Exploration, Kromico Inc., Sino Steel Philippines H.Y. Mining Corp. and Oriental Synergy Mining Corp.

Other companies that will be closed are Wellex Mining Corp., Libjo Mining Corp., Oriental Vision Mining Philippines Corp., ADNAMA Mining Resources Corp., Claver Mineral Development Corp., Platinum Development Corp., CTP Construction and Mining Corp., Carrascal Nickel Corp., Marcventures Mining and Development Corp. and Hinatuan Mining Corp.-Tagana-an.

Lopez said some of these companies are located within functional watersheds while others caused siltation of coastal waters and farmlands.

Companies which will be suspended are Berong Nickel Corp., Oceanagold Phils., Inc., Lepanto Consolidated Mining Corp., Citinickel Mines and Development Corp., Ore Asia Mining Corp., Strong Built Mining Development

Corp. and Hinatuan Mining Corp.-Manicani mine.

Lopez said the decision on whether or not to allow Filminera Resources Corp. to continue its operations was deferred pending further investigation.

Based on 2016 data, Masbate Gold Project of Filminera Resources Corp., (FRC)/Philippine Gold Processing and Refining Corp. (PGPRC) and Didipio Gold Project of Oceana Gold Phils., Inc. (OGPI) Incorporated were the top gold producers accounting for 28 percent or 6,414 kilograms and 20 percent or 4,576 kilograms of the total gold produced.

In terms of silver production, OGPI took the second spot with 7,901 kilograms and FRC/PGPRC followed at third spot with 7,430 kilograms of the total silver production.

"The absence of these two mining projects to the production stream would certainly create a vacuum since said companies are among the top precious metal producers in the country," the bureau said.

Base metals copper and nickel are also projected to decline by 26 percent and 67 percent, respectively. Most nickel producers did not pass the mining audit.

"It is important to note that the decline in mineral production is tantamount to lower taxes, fees and royalties collected by the government both national and local. Mineral exports are also expected to go down," the bureau said.

Lopez said the affected mining companies have 15 days to file an appeal with the DENR.

The Chamber of Mines of the Philippines decried the announcement noting that the government cannot just shut down mines without due process.

"Mining companies were invited by government to invest in the Philippines and signed contracts with them as partners in mineral resource development. By entering into these contracts, government is bound to observe due process. Secretary Lopez cannot just shut down mines without due process," said chamber chairman Artemio Disini.

The group also questioned the way by which the DENR mine audit was conducted, highlighting the inclusion of anti-mining activists that tainted the process.

"We are not against a strict implementation of the law. In fact, we have often called for stricter moni-

toring of all mining operations in the country. What we question is the bias and partiality of the audit from the very start with Secretary Lopez's early statements that she does not like mining and would like to see mines closed," said the chamber's executive vice president Nelia Halcon.

"With the inclusion of anti-mining groups in the audit teams, you can see that the audit was compromised. The participation of these anti-mining activists immediately raises the question of whether or not the results are impartial," she added.

The chamber also lamented how the audit review findings were first made known through a press conference.

"If the audit found violations, the law provides for a procedure. She should have filed the appropriate cases or invoked the arbitration clause of the mining agreements. Our members have not received any formal decision but have already been subjected to trial by publicity. Unfortunately, it seems that her decision to close these mines was based merely on a quick fly-by over Surigao del Sur last week in a chopper during the height of the rainy season. It may not have been based on the review conducted by the Mines and Geosciences Bureau. Reports reaching us even said MGB personnel were even banned from her press conference," Halcon said.

The chamber called on the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC), co-chaired by the Department of Finance, to convene and review the policies and actions of Lopez.

"Her drastic action of publicly announcing the closure and suspension of 28 mining operations without due process will have detrimental and far-reaching impacts on the economy, the mining industry, and the country," Halcon said.

Lawmakers vowed to press for a congressional investigation of Lopez's closure order.

The lawmakers, led by Surigao del Norte Rep. Prospero Pichay, said they will file a House resolution on Monday questioning Lopez's decision to order the closure of 21 mining operations in several areas of the country.

"Gina Lopez doesn't know what she's doing. She does not know her job," Pichay told the Manila Standard.

"The closure order is illegal and arbitrary," said Pichay.

The congressman explained that Lopez issued the closure order without according all mining firms the "due process" and without regard to thousands of mine workers and their families that would be hurt by her arbitrariness.

Pichay said some 10,000 mine workers were directly employed in his mining firm and some 60,000 families were indirectly benefiting from the business.

This would also deprive the government of billions in revenues, he said.

For this reason, Pichay said Lopez has violated all pertinent laws about mining, including the Mineral Production Sharing Agreement that the mining firms signed with the government.

"We have entered into a contract with the government and without Lopez even conferring with us, she abrogated the contract. Contracts are signed by two parties. Two parties should agree whether to abrogate or honor the contracts. Now, she is using the government against us, misusing her powers and prosecuting us for alleged violations that she all had imagined," he said.

"In the first place, the mining areas in Mindanao are well-within the areas that President Manuel Quezon declared as mineral reservation. Meaning, the areas are intended for mining, not for agriculture or other purposes. There is no watershed in these mining areas," Pichay said.

Pichay also said that once an audit is decided, the government must inform the company about its intention to conduct the audit.

"This is a sad day for the mining industry. Lopez's instruction to suspend the operations of mining companies just added 10,000 unemployed in Surigao provinces alone," Pichay said.

"I am afraid that this would also cause massive poverty in the area and contribute to the insurgency problem. Most of the 10,000 mining workers were former rebels who might lose confidence in the government as a result of this decision and go back to the mountains as rebels," Pichay said.

Pichay said the local government units of Surigao provinces were collecting P1.8 billion a year in taxes and fees from mining companies in the area. **With Rio N. Araja and John Paolo Bencito**

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IMPARTIALITY ISSUE

CHAMBER OF MINES QUESTIONS GOV'T AUDIT

By Ronnel W. Domingo
@ronwdomingoINQ

The Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) on Thursday questioned the fairness of a mine audit done by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), which led to the order for closure of 23 mines and the suspension of five others.

"Mining companies were invited by the government to invest in the Philippines and signed contracts with them as partners in mineral resource development," COMP chair Artemio Disini said in a statement.

"By entering into these contracts, the government is bound to observe due process," Disini said. "Environment Secretary [Gina] Lopez cannot just shut down mines without due process."

The chamber reiterated that the conduct of the audit was questionable as the inclusion of antimining activists in the audit teams "tainted the process."

"We are not against a strict

implementation of the law," COMP executive vice president Nelia Halcon said. "What we question is the bias and partiality of the audit from the very start with Secretary Lopez's early statements that she does not like mining and would like to see mines closed."

Also, the industry group lamented how the latest findings of the audit were again first made known through a press conference.

"If the audit found violations, the law provides for a procedure. She should have filed the appropriate cases or invoked the arbitration clause of the mining agreements," Halcon said.

"Our members have not received any formal decision but have already been subjected to trial by publicity," she added.

Halcon said the decision to close mines seemed to be "based merely" on a quick fly-by over Surigao del Sur last week in a helicopter during the height of the rainy season.

"It may not have been based

on the review conducted by the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB)," she said. "Reports reaching us even said MGB personnel were even banned from her press conference."

"Former MGB Director Leo Jasareno, earlier dismissed by the Office of the President, was present in the Office of the DENR secretary during the press conference," she said. "Further, it has been reported that the review results will not be released by Secretary Lopez saying it was too complicated."

COMP called on the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC), cochaired by the Department of Finance, to convene and review the policies and "arbitrary actions" of Lopez.

"Her drastic action ... will have detrimental and far-reaching impacts on the economy, the mining industry and the country," the group said.

The mining industry contributes less than 1 percent to the Philippines' gross domestic product. INQ



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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Mining woes drag down stocks

By IRIS GONZALES

Mining stocks nosedived yesterday after Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Gina Lopez announced the closure of 21 mining companies, bringing the main composite index to negative territory.

The benchmark Philippine Stock Exchange index retreated 1.54 points, or 0.02 percent, to settle at 7,225.91 and so did the broader All Shares index which shed 0.08 percent to end at 4,365.71.

Total value turnover reached P5.942 billion as decliners outnumbered advancing stocks; 102 to 80 while 44 issues were left unchanged.

Of the 21 firms ordered closed, listed mining companies saw their share prices plunge. These are Benguet Corp Nickel Mines, which declined to P1.90 per share or down 10.38 percent while Nickel Asia Corp. also saw its price go down 0.58 percent to P6.81 per share after its subsidiary Hinatuan Mining was also ordered to shut down. Another listed company,

Marcventures saw an 11.11 percent drop in its share price to P1.84.

Meanwhile, the DENR also ordered the suspension of Lepanto, Citinickel and DMCI Mining Co.'s Berong Nickel. Other companies whose operations are suspended by the DENR are Ore Asia and Oceanagold.

The mining and oil index plunged 200.73 points to

11,951.84.

Luis Limlingan, managing director of Regina Capital said Philippine markets continued to trade flat as the Federal Reserve painted a comparatively positive picture of the US economy which suggests it remains on track to tighten monetary policy this year although it offered no clear signal on the timing of the next rate move.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Legal battle looms as gov't shuts mines

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THE GOVERNMENT is shuttering more than half the country's 41 metal mines and suspending operations of five others on environmental grounds, deepening a crisis miners have faced since the past administration and prompting the industry to gird for legal battle.

Environment Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez told reporters in a briefing yesterday at the headquarters in Quezon City of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) that "15 of these mines are in watersheds."

"We have decided to close down every kind of mining operation in functional watersheds... [you] cannot and must not have any extractive industry in the watershed," Ms. Lopez said.

A list the department released to reporters showed that mines facing closure belonged to: Aam-Phil Natural Resources Exploration and Development Corp.; Adnama Mining Resources, Inc.; Benguet Corp.; BenguetCorp Nickel Mines, Inc.; Carrascal Nickel Corp.; Claver Mineral Development Corp.; CTP Construction

and Mining Corp.; Emir Mineral Resources Corp.; Eramen Minerals, Inc.; Hinatuan Mining Corp.; Kromico, Inc.; Libjo Mining Corp.; LNL Archipelago Minerals, Inc.; Marcventures Mining and Development Corp.; Mt. Sinai Mining Exploration and Development Corp.; Ore Asia Mining and Development Corp.; Oriental Synergy Mining Corp.; Oriental Vision Mining Philippines Corp.; Platinum Development Corp.; Sinosteel Philippines H.Y. Mining Corp.; TechIron Mineral Resources, Inc.; Wellex Mining Corp. and Zambales Diversified Metals Corp.

Ms. Lopez said firms concerned may appeal to President Rodrigo R. Duterte.

"The final decision," she said, "is up to the President," who reiterated his support for DENR's action in a speech later in the day. "You know, I support her and there was never a time that I told her to slow down a little bit... today she's insisting on closure of so many and I support her," Mr. Duterte said.

Mines, SI/7

Facing suspension were Berong Nickel Corp.; Citinickel Mines and Development Corp.; Lepanto Consolidated Mining Co.; OceanaGold Philippines, Inc.; and Strong Built Mining Development Corp.

"I'm giving them three to six months to get their act together," the Environment chief said of the suspended mines.

"My issue here is not about mining; my issue here is social justice," Ms. Lopez, a staunch environmentalist, said at the briefing that showed footage of damage from mining projects.

"Why is mining more important than people's lives?"

Stocks of most listed miners reeled from the news, dragging down the stock market that has already been reeling from uncertainty caused by US President Donald J. Trump's protectionist moves.

Mining and oil was the biggest loser among the six sectoral indices at the Philippine Stock Exchange, widening its loss from 0.34% at noon to 1.65% by the end of trading.

"The mining sector naturally succumbed to panic following the developments on DENR's mining ban," Frank Gerard J. Barboza, trader at AP Securities, Inc., said in a mobile phone message.

"It validates our decision to stay off — or at most, minimize exposure — to the sector, given the combination of market and regulatory risks," Justino B. Calaycay, Jr., head of marketing and research at A&A Securities, Inc., said in a trading post.

THE BATTLE AHEAD

But miners affected by the government's crackdown yesterday signaled that they will not take it sitting down.

In a statement on its Web site, OceanaGold Corp. said it has not received any suspension order

from the Environment department, but argued that the government did not have any legal basis to suspend operations of its Didipio copper-gold project in Nueva Vizcaya in northern Luzon.

"Should we ultimately receive a suspension order — as suggested today — we have very strong legal grounds to have it overturned," the statement quoted OceanaGold President and Chief Executive Officer Mick Wilkes as saying.

'YOU CAN'T JUST CANCEL'

Ronald V. Recidoro, vice-president of the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines' Legal and Policy division, said that affected companies will "definitely" appeal against the decision.

"We are questioning the partiality of how everything was conducted," Mr. Recidoro said in a telephone interview yesterday.

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legal battle looms as
gov't shuts mines

"The businesses entered into a contract. You can't just cancel it," he added.

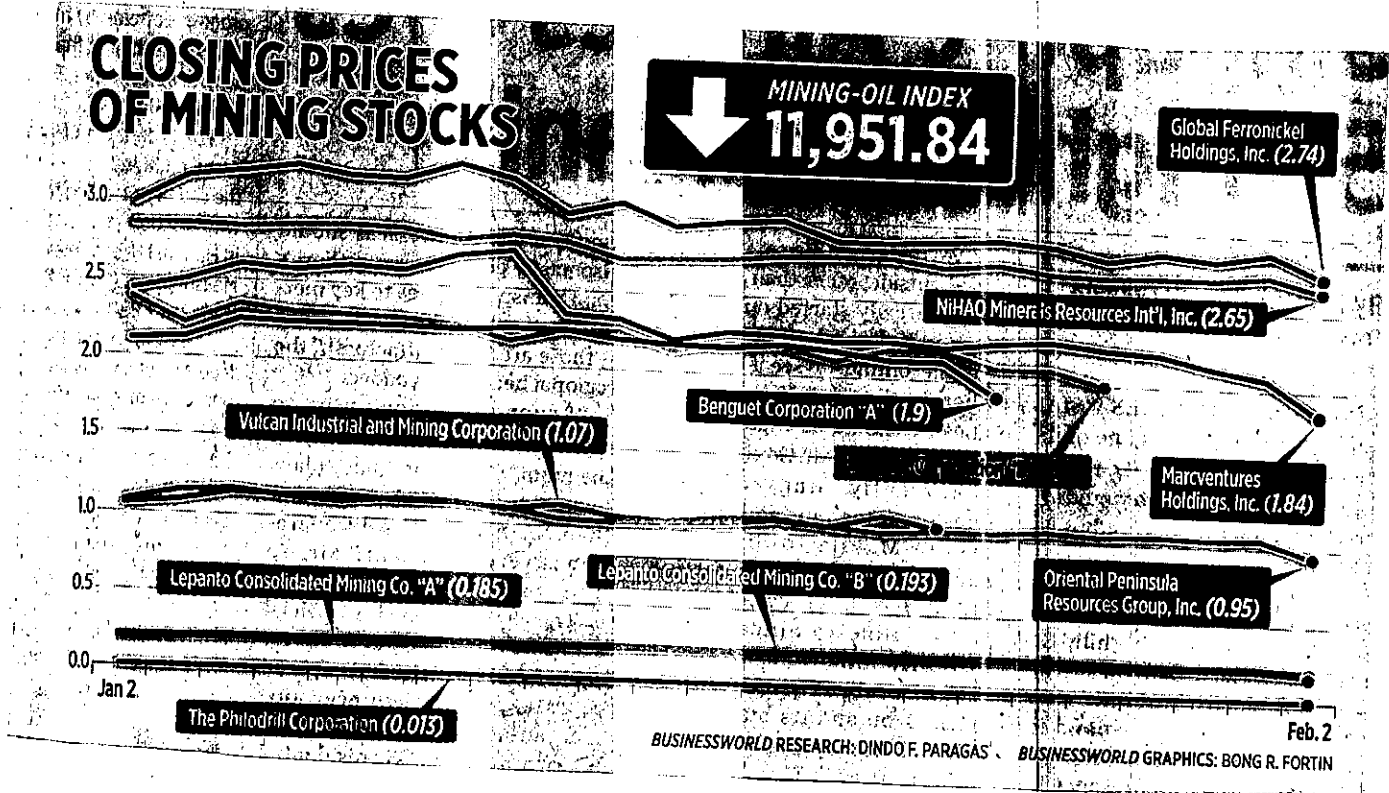
"Due processes must have been observed if you want to cancel. That's what's lacking here. I don't know if she even relied on the audit review."

Ms. Lopez declined to provide details of the recommendations given to her by the Mines and Geosciences Bureau-led technical review committee she formed in November to go over results of the wide-ranging audit that began in July last year.

"[At] the end of the day, I look at the recommendations and I visited the mine sites myself. I visited the people myself," Ms. Lopez said, emphasizing that the findings of the review committee were merely "recommendatory."

"And then I used my judgment on what is the best thing to do."

— Janina C. Lim with Keith Richard D. Mariano and input from Reuters



Mining sector at risk of more losses, suffers 8% shrinkage in 2016

The worst is yet to come for the mining sector because even if it is yet to feel the real impact of the nationwide audit the government has launched against it, the overall output for minerals in 2016 still suffered a shortfall.

Yesterday, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) went on a closure and suspension spree on mining companies as the result of the nationwide audit it did on the sector.

Asked what could be the impact of DENR's closure and suspension orders to the country's metallic production this year, DENR Undersecretary and Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) said yesterday that "it should go down more."

This, after a document provided by MGB showed that the country's metallic mineral production value incurred an 8 percent shortfall in 2016 from ₱109.84 billion in 2015 to ₱100.56 billion, lower by ₱9.28 billion.

"Poor base metal price, string of mine suspension and mine imposed non-operations due to unfavorable weather conditions, low metal price and/or maintenance status catapulted the metallic sector to its lackluster performance," MGB said on

Wednesday.

In terms of percentage contribution to the total production value, gold continued to dominate the production scene in 2016 accounting for 44 percent or ₱44.85 billion of the total metallic minerals production value.

While nickel direct shipping ore together with mixed nickel-cobalt sulfide took the second spot with 37 percent or ₱36.84 billion followed by copper with 18 percent or ₱17.76 billion. The remaining 1 percent or ₱1.11 billion came from the consolidated output of silver, chromite and iron ore.

Nickel direct shipping ore production volume and value alone went down by 23 percent and 41 percent, respectively, from 32.1 million dry metric tons valued at ₱36.60 billion in 2015 to 24.7 million MT dry metric tons valued at ₱21.77 billion in 2016.

"It is important to note that of the 28 nickel mines, seven are currently in suspended status and four temporarily stopped their respective mine operations. The total production of nickel direct shipping ore of this group in 2014 was about 5.2 million dry MT with an estimated value of about ₱8 billion," MGB said.

On metal prices, copper and nickel both recorded declines of 3 percent and 11 percent, respectively.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Stocks decline as miners reel from DENR order

LOCAL STOCKS mostly headed south after the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR) order to close 21 mining operations shocked investors that chose to brave the uncertainties over the policy moves of US President Donald J. Trump rather than stay on the sidelines.

The Philippine Stock Exchange index (PSEi) closed almost unchanged at 7,225.91 on Thursday. The benchmark nevertheless extended its retreat by 1.54 points or 0.02% for the third consecutive session.

The broader all shares index likewise shed 3.80 points or 0.08% to settle at 4,365.71 during another session of thin trading.

"You still see investors staying on the sidelines — that's why the value turnover was below average — because the Chinese New Year just passed," Aniceto K. Pangan, trader at Diversified Securities, Inc., said in a telephone interview.

"Aside from that, we have these uncertainties abroad, specifically the protectionist stance of President Trump that made investors to take on a wait-and-see attitude

for other America first policies he would be pushing through," the trader added.

Investors only traded 2.13 billion issues worth P5.94 billion, up from the P5.11-billion worth traded the previous session but well below the P7-billion daily average.

"Philippine share prices were on a rather somber mood — narrow trading band on thin activity — as leads failed to stoke a strong reaction either way," Justino B. Calaycay, Jr., head of marketing and research at A&A Securities, Inc., noted in a trading post.

The US central bank's Federal Open Market Committee left interest rates unchanged when it concluded its monetary policy review on Wednesday. It, however, remained upbeat about the direction of the world's largest economy.

Decliners outnumbered advancers, 102 to 80, while 44 stocks were unchanged.

Property advanced by 22.84 points or 0.69% to 3,293.46; financials by 6.42 points or 0.36% to 1,751.98; and industrials by 12.49 points or 0.11% to 11,003.05.

On the other hand, mining and oil dropped by 200.73 points or 1.65% to 11,951.84; holding firms by 42.90 points or 0.57% to 7,373.33; and services by 3.89 points or 0.27% to 1,408.97.

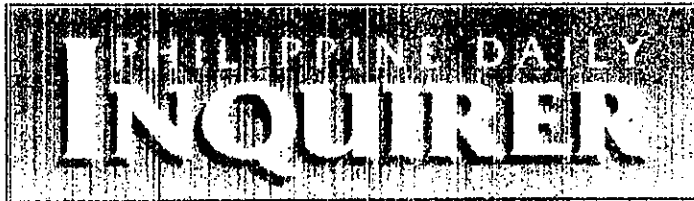
"The mining sector naturally succumbed to panic following the developments on DENR's mining ban," Frank Gerard J. Barboza, trader at AP Securities, Inc. said in a mobile phone message.

The negative sentiment toward mining stocks, however, failed to reverberate across the Philippine market, Mr. Pangan

noted, as many investors opted to stay on the sidelines mostly because of uncertainties over policy changes in the US.

In previous sessions, investors were sidelined by the immigration ban ordered by Mr. Trump against certain countries. "That alone would tell you what kind of policies will he make going forward," Mr. Pangan said, recalling that Mr. Trump also vowed to discourage American companies from outsourcing jobs during his presidential campaign. — **Keith Richard D. Mariano**

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

PSEI SLIPS; MINING COUNTER DOWN ON DENR ANNOUNCEMENT

By Doris Dumlao-Abadilla
@philbizwatcher

The local stock barometer was flat yesterday as the latest US Federal Reserve policy meeting proved to be a "non-event" while the mining counter was weighed down by a shakeout sanctioned by environmental regulators.

The main-share Philippine Stock Exchange index slipped by 1.54 points or 0.02 percent to close at 7,225.91.

The mining/oil underperformed for the day, declining by 1.65 percent after the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) announced it was either suspending or closing a number of mining firms.

The holding firm and services counters ended slightly lower while the financial, industrial and property counters were

slightly up.

Across the region, stock markets traded with mixed sentiment in the aftermath of the US Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting that left key interest rates unchanged.

"The FOMC statement was a non-event, as most investors had anticipated. Perhaps the only new information was the lack of a hawkish signal that would increase the probability of a March rate hike," Citigroup said in a research note. "More important was the fifth consecutive upside surprise in the US ISM (Institute for Supply Management) manufacturing index. Within the details, the 'business prices' sub-index also surprised to the upside (although not by as much as in December) and rose to its highest level since May 2011."

"Meanwhile, PMI (purchasing managers

index) readings from elsewhere were also encouraging, with German, French and Russian PMIs continuing to push up to new cyclical highs. This likely will help re-energize global reflationary expectations, although most investors may wait for Friday's key labor market update before adjusting their portfolios," Citi said.

"Philippine markets continued to trade flat as the FOMC painted a comparatively positive picture of the US economy which suggests it remains on track to tighten monetary policy this year although it offered no firm signal on the timing of its next rate move," said Luis Gerardo Limlingan, managing director at Regina Capital Development.

Value turnover for the day was P5.94 billion. There were 122 decliners that edged out 80 advancers while 44 stocks

B6

FROM B2

were un-
changed. Net
foreign selling

for the day amounted to P240 million.

Metrobank led the PSEI lower, declining by 2.29 percent while GT Capital and Ayala Corp. Both slipped by over 1 percent.

SM Investments, Jollibee and Metro Pacific also contributed to the PSEI's decline.

Outside the PSEI, one notable decliner was Global Ferronickel Holdings (FNI). Its subsidiary Platinum Group Metals—which operates in Surigao del Norte—was on the DENR list of mining firms for closure.

Meanwhile, BDO, URC and BPI all gained. SM Prime, ALI, Security Bank, AP, Megaworld and AEV also firmed up.

Notable gainers outside the PSEI included RRHI (+1.71 percent) and Arthaland (+1.04 percent). INQ

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

Market drops; mining stocks slide

Stocks fell for a third day, pulled down by mining issues after the Environment Department suspended the operations of more than two dozen mines.

The Philippine Stock Exchange index, the 30-company benchmark, lost 1 point to close at 7,225.91 Thursday. This trimmed the market's total gains this year to 5.6 percent.

The heavier index, representing all shares, also dropped 3 points, or 0.1 percent, to settle at 4,365.71, on a value turnover of P5.9 billion. Losers outnumbered gainers, 102 to 80, while 44 issues were unchanged.

Three of the six sectoral indices dropped, led by mining and oil which slid 1.7 percent.

Eleven of the 20 most active issues rose, led by Robinsons Retail Holdings Inc. which climbed 1.7 percent to P80.50 and BDO Unibank Inc. which gained 1.4 percent to P112.

Global Ferronickel Holdings Inc. dropped 5.2 percent to P2.74.

Meanwhile, concerns over Donald Trump's presidency hit Asian equity markets.

After the US Federal Reserve's first meeting of the year, policymakers noted ongoing economic growth, job gains and improving business and con-

sumer confidence, but gave little away about its intentions for monetary policy.

The Fed said it "expects that economic conditions will evolve in a manner that will warrant only gradual increases in the federal funds rate", almost unchanged from its December statement.

The bank said it still expects to raise rates only gradually, though analysts said the timing is a subject of debate.

While it was not expected to make any big announcements—having hiked interest rates last month—the lack of any solid guidance hit the dollar, which was already under pressure on concerns about the controversial start to Trump's term in office.

"Traders seem to be disappointed with the Fed's decision,"

Greg McKenna, chief market strategist at FX and CFD provider AxiTrader, said in a note.

"Janet Yellen's statement was a bit of an anticlimax insofar as it completely straight-batted the current outlook and added little fresh information on the outlook for the US economy."

The greenback dipped against the yen and euro while it also retreated against most higher-yielding currencies including the South Korean won, Australian dollar and Canadian dollar.

The dollar's weakness compares with the rally it enjoyed in the two months after Trump's November election win as traders bet his plans for big spending and tax cuts would fire the US economy, stoke inflation and lead to rate hikes.

With AFP, Bloomberg

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COMP challenges impartiality of DENR mines audit

THE Chamber of Mines of the Philippines decried the announcement made by the DENR Secretary that she wants to close 23 mines and suspend an additional 5 operations.

"Mining companies were invited by government to invest in the Philippines and signed contracts with them as partners in mineral resource development. By entering into these contracts, government is bound to observe due process. Sec. Lopez cannot just shut down mines without due process," Artemio Distini, chairman of the Chamber of Mines, said.

The Chamber stands by its members in the face of the pronouncement of DENR Secretary Gina Lopez suspending the operations of 5 mines and the closure of 21 mining projects. The Chamber also questioned the way by which the DENR mine audit was conducted, highlighting the inclusion of anti-mining activists that tainted the process.

"We are not against a strict implementation of the law. In fact, we have often called for stricter monitoring of all mining operations in the country. What we question is the bias and partiality of the audit from the very start with Secretary Lopez's early statements that she does not like mining and would like to see mines closed," Nelia

Halcon, COMP executive vice president, said.

"With the inclusion of anti-mining groups in the audit teams, you can see that the audit was compromised. The participation of these anti-mining activists immediately raises the question of whether or not the results are impartial," she added.

The Chamber also laments how the audit review findings were first made known through a press conference.

"If the audit found violations, the law provides for a procedure. She should have filed the appropriate cases or invoked the arbitration clause of the mining agreements. Our members have not received any formal decision but have already been subjected to trial by publicity.

"Unfortunately, it seems that her decision to close these mines was based merely on a quick fly-by over Surigao del Sur last week in a chopper during the height of the rainy season. It may not have been based on the review conducted by the Mines and Geo-sciences Bureau. Reports reaching us even said MGB personnel were even banned from her press conference," Halcon said.

Former MGB director Leo Jasareno, earlier dismissed by the Office of the President, was

present in the Office of the DENR secretary during the press conference. Further, it has been reported that the review results will not be released by Secretary Lopez saying it was "too complicated."

Halcon added that despite the snag hit by the minerals sector following the nationwide audit conducted by the DENR last year, mining firms remain committed to delivering on their obligations and are even working beyond the requirement of the laws particularly in the development of human capital and the enhancement of the economic base of provinces hosting mining projects.

"We assure government, stakeholders and the public that our member companies have been working very hard to comply with environmental laws relevant to our industry. Our social development management programs are still in place and so with our environmental enhancement and protection programs," Halcon said.

According to the COMP exec member companies, the majority of them are ISO 14001 certified with several undergoing the accreditation process, have not been remiss in their duties.

"Even as we faced challenges in 2016, we paid our taxes faithfully, contributed to the betterment of our host communities, and did our part in caring for the environment," Halcon said.

But the DENR Secretary does not seem to see the mining industry as government's partner in growing the economy. She sees miners as villains, even when mining companies have always been a consistent partner of their host communities," she added.

COMP cites the proliferation of illegal mining operations which bring suffering.

"They do not pay taxes, they do not help in the development of the communities, and are destructive to the environment. It is these illegal operations that must be stopped. Yet it seems Secretary Lopez has turned a blind eye to these," Halcon ended.

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DENR HIT

SURIGAO del Sur Rep. Prospero "Butch" Pichay yesterday hit the alleged absence of due process in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) order closing 23 big mining companies in the country and suspending five others for supposedly violating environmental laws.

For lack of due process in mining firms' closure, COMP challenges impartiality of audit

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Pichay warned that the decision of Environment Sec. Gina Lopez will result to billions of pesos in lost revenues to the national government yearly, adding that at least 10,000 direct workers and 50,000 indirect workers from his district alone will be displaced.

"My district is hardly hit and we in Surigao del Sur are really disappointed and definitely we are going to contest the illegal decision of Sec. Lopez. Due process has taken a backseat here. We call for fairness and justice and ensure that no one is deprived of due process of law," said Pichay in an interview on the order that will affect mining firms that supply a large part of the world's demand for metals, such as nickel.

"What will happen now to my constituents who will lose their jobs as an offshoot of the unfair decision of Sec. Lopez?" Pichay asked.

After two months, the DENR decided to suspend 10 mining firms, 20 were recommended for suspension, and 11 allowed to correct infractions or face suspension.

Environment Undersecretary Leo Jasareno insisted

ed the companies were being given due process before any suspension orders were rolled out, stressing the affected mining firms must reply within seven days after receipt of the show-cause order and a copy of the audit report.

But Pichay cited the alleged violation of the law after some of the mining firms were not informed of the audit conducted by the DENR and the appointment of the third party was not observed.

"Under the rules, there is no such thing as a surprised audit. Kung mag-audit ka ng mining company, you have to inform the mining companies and then you appoint together with the mining company and the DENR the third party," Pichay complained.

"The DENR did not inform [some] mining firms and there was no appointment of the third party, that is a clear violation and ignorance of the law," Pichay alleged.

Pichay also said that the DENR should first inform the mining firms about the violations to correct the concerns before making an announcement to the media.

"Before they announce the suspension, they (DENR officials) should have informed the violations of the mining firms. Some

firms complained that they were not informed of the violations and they were just ordered closed," Pichay explained.

He also said that the mining firms which are against the ruling should be given opportunity to appeal the decision before an arbitration body within a period of one year.

"Among violation? Basta na lamang isinara. If you do not agree with the result of the audit, you go to the arbitration, so walang arbitration iyan which is one year," said Pichay.

"Ang hinihingi namin fairness and justice. Hindi naman pupuwedeng basta mo na lamang isara. Kung may violation iyan, then you warn them. Ano ba-iyang violation? I-correct natin kung may violation, hindi iyang mag-announce ka ng suspension. Kulang sa due process, it should be observed," said Pichay.

Ordered closed were the Benguet Nickel Mines, Inc.; Eramen Minerals Inc.; Zambales Diversified Metals Corporation and LNL Archipelago Minerals Inc., all in Zambales.

The other mining firms that the DENR ordered to be closed were Mt. Sinai Mining Exploration and Development Corp.; Emir Minerals Corp. and Techiron Mineral Resources

Inc., all in Homonhon Island, Eastern Samar.

Others are AAMPHIL Natural Resources Exploration; Kromico, Inc.; SinoSteel Philippines H.Y. Mining Corp.; Oriental Synergy Mining Corp.; Wellex Mining Corporation; Libjo Mining Corporation and Oriental Vision Mining Philippines Corp., all in Dinagat Islands.

Also ordered closed by the DENR were the ADNA-MA Mining Resources Corp.; Benguet Corporation in Benguet; Claver Mining Development Corp.; Platinum Development Corp.; CTP Construction and Mining Corp.; Carrascal Nickel Corp.; Marcventures Mining and Development Corp. and Hinatuan Mining Corporation, all located in Surigao del Norte.

On the other hand, the DENR suspended the Berong Nickel Corporation; Oceanagold Phils., Inc.; Lepanto Consolidated Mining Corp.; Citinickel Mines and Development Corp.; and Strong Built Mining Development Corp.

Meanwhile, the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) decried the announcement by the DENR secretary closing 23 mines and suspending an additional 5 operations.

"Mining companies were invited by government to invest in the Philippines

and signed contracts with them as partners in mineral resource development. By entering into these contracts, government is bound to observe due process. Sec. Lopez cannot just shut down mines without due process," Artemio Disini, chairman of the Chamber of Mines, said.

The Chamber stands by its members in the face of the DENR secretary's action. The Chamber also questioned the way by which the DENR mine audit was conducted, highlighting the inclusion of anti-mining activists that tainted the process.

"We are not against a strict implementation of the law. In fact, we have often called for stricter monitoring of all mining operations in the country. What we question is the bias and partiality of the audit from the very start with Secretary Lopez's early statements that she does not like mining and would like to see mines closed," Nelia Halcon, COMP executive vice president, said.

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DENR HIT

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"But the DENR secretary does not seem to see the mining industry as government's partner in growing the economy. She sees miners as villains, even when mining companies have always been a consistent partner of their host communities," she added.

COMP is calling on the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC), co-chaired by the Department of Finance, to convene and review the policies and arbitrary actions of Secretary Lopez. Her drastic action of publicly announcing the closure and suspension of 28 mining operations without due process will have detrimental and far-reaching impacts on the economy, the mining industry, and the country. **Ryan Ponce Pacpaco & Cory Martinez**

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

CLOSURE OF MINES HIT

By Ryan Ponce
Pacpaco

SURIGAO del Sur Rep. Prospero "Butch" Pichay yesterday hit the alleged absence of due process on the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) order closing 23 big mining companies in the country and the suspension of five others for the purported violation of environmental laws.

Pichay warned that the decision of Environment Sec. Gina Lopez will result to billions of pesos in lost revenues to the national government yearly, adding that at least 10,000 direct workers and 50,000 indirect workers from his district alone will be displaced.

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But Pichay cited the alleged violation of the law after some of the mining firms were not informed of the audit conducted by the DENR and the appointment of the third party was not observed.

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