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DENR

IN THE NEWS

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

MINING DID NOT END POVERTY' – LOPEZ

LET THEM BREATHE

Environment Secretary Regina Paz 'Gina' Lopez explains why mining is dangerous to watersheds in a roundtable discussion with *The Manila Times* editors and reporters on Friday. Lopez insists due process was followed when she ordered 28 mining firms to account for environmental violations. She has also ordered the cancellation of 75 mining contracts. PHOTO BY ROGER RAÑADA



BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

POVERTY remains a problem after more than a century of mining operations in the country, and it's time to allow communities destroyed by mining to "breathe," Environment Secretary Regina Paz "Gina" Lopez said on Friday.

Speaking to *The Manila Times* editorial team, Lopez vowed to transform mining communities that would be affected by impending closures ordered by her department, promising to generate ecotourism jobs through "area development" projects.

"We've been mining this country for

more than 100 years, what do we show [for it]? All the areas where mining are the poorest," the environmental activist said in a roundtable discussion.

THE MANILA TIMES ROUNDTABLE

The Philippines is the fifth most mineralized country in the world and is the planet's top nickel producer, but firms take 82 percent of the profits, and nearly all of the money "goes out of the local economy," Lopez said.

She dismissed claims that over 1.2 million workers would lose their jobs with the impending closure of mining firms.

"We issued the order, it goes to them, then they appeal. While it's on appeal,

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

'MINING DID NOT END POVERTY' – LOPEZ

they can actually still continue mining. Actually there's no mining going on right now because mining is not every day of the year. They don't mine *talaga*. They want to start mining in March. So nobody lost their jobs because they're not earning anyway," she explained.

Ugong Rock success

Lopez explained how ecotourism could supplant mining in environmentally vulnerable mine areas, citing the example of a project she had initiated at Ugong Rock in Puerto Princesa when she was still in the private sector.

She said the town's earnings increased to P29 million from just P7,000 over the last decade.

"Why not give it (mine communities) a chance to breathe and

create other kinds of jobs? I feel it behooves on government to make the right choice that could create the greatest common good," Lopez said.

"Let them live in the beauty of their place...Their economy will not be dependent on mines or outside influence because that will be their money and resources," she added.

Due process followed

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) this month ordered the cancellation of 75 mineral production sharing agreements close to watersheds all over the country.

It also ordered the closure and suspension of 28 mining companies, following a months-

long mining audit that started in July 2016.

Lopez insisted due process was followed in the mining audit, and that the DENR first issued show-cause orders to the mining firms found to have numerous violations.

"All [received a show-caused order].. As far as I'm concerned I tell them the process. That took seven months. I myself went around and talked to the people and then in the end the decisions were made based on the side of the common good," Lopez said.

She said the miners could appeal her decision to the Office of the President. If President Rodrigo Duterte upholds the closures, they can go to court but they will have to halt their operations in the meantime.

Since the department's an-

nouncements, Duterte has repeatedly expressed his support for Lopez.

On February 2, after the announcement of the closures, the President even said he never told Lopez to "slow down a little bit" in doing her work.

Various sectors were well represented in the mining audit, which involved the different DENR bureaus, other government agencies, social action centers of parishes and civil society organizations, she said. Miners were also represented.

"Then all came up with this [mining audit report]. It says here the Clean Air Act, the Forestry Code, all the violations backed up by laws saying that you shouldn't have violated this way. It's all here," she said, pointing to the mine audit findings.

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Lopez briefing host communities on closure and suspension orders

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLORES**

Environment Secretary Gina Lopez is now briefing communities affected by the mining audit about the potential effects of her closure and suspension orders, basically preparing them for the transition that could take place once her orders are implemented.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said in a statement on Friday that it has embarked on a comprehensive consultation and engagement with communities affected by the mining audit recently conducted by the agency.

In a special order, DENR Secretary

Gina Lopez authorized the conduct of simultaneous community consultation and engagement in the provinces of Dinagat Islands, Surigao del Norte, and Surigao del Sur.

The consultation was first held in the Caraga region, where majority of mining operations ordered closed by the DENR are located.

Lopez said the exercise was meant to assist the communities and households affected by the mining audit, "particularly ensuring that they will be able to transition well from being mining workers or mining communities to an empowered social entrepreneur or a vibrant community enterprise, impelled by the principles

of ecosystems integrity and social justice."

Lopez tasked Forest Management Bureau (FMB) Director Ricardo Calderon to head the DENR team that will conduct the consultation. Calderon will be assisted by DENR Caraga acting regional director Charlie Fabre and Director Nonito Tamayo.

Other members of the consultation team are personnel from the DENR central office, FMB, DENR-Caraga, and consultants.

The team will be supervised by DENR Undersecretary for Field Operations Philip Camara and Assistant Secretary for Field Operations-Mindanao Marcial Amaro Jr.

The output of the community consultation and engagement will be presented during the plenary session with Cabinet officials and representatives of affected communities on February 25 to 26 in Butuan City.

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Petron sets remediation, rehabilitation plans for Limay cove area

By MYRNA M. VELASCO

Following the declaration by the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources that its bottom ash dump facilities within refinery site are no longer in operation, Petron Corporation now moves on to enforcing remediation and rehabilitation plans for its Petron Limay Terminal (PLT) cove area.

The EMB, in its latest report, has noted that "both the temporary ash disposal facilities of PLT Cove and San Miguel Corporation are now covered with soil, compacted and sprinkled with water to prevent ash dispersion and deposition to nearby communities." Frog grass had also been planted within the PLT Cove.

The outcome of the EMB inspection was laid down in a recent meeting in Balanga City by the multipartite monitoring team (MMT), in the presence of provincial officials led by Bataan Governor Albert Garcia.

Taking off from that, Petron indicated that it already firmed up "remediation and rehabilitation plans for the PLT Cove Area," and it now has "mitigation

measures for odor nuisance and relocation of affected families."

The provincial government subsequently gave assurance that "there would be available housing for 250 affected families within the next 3-5 months."

The provincial leader himself noted that "informal settlers within the SMC's buffer zone would be given priority."

Additionally, discussions centered on proposed establishment of Environmental Guarantee Fund (EGF), which will then be used "for epidemiological study or health assessment that will be done in affected communities."

It was emphasized that "the cost of the study would be sourced from the EGF of Petron and SMC, pursuant to existing Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) rules and regulations."

In that same meeting, Petron reported that "around 3,550 metric tons (MT) of ash have been hauled out and 7,950MT have been treated."

For the newly generated ashes from its facilities, the company noted that such "are being washed to reduce corrosivity," and sampling of the "washed bottom ash" is similarly being undertaken.

■ KRITZ FROM A1

Lopez's vision becomes clearer, but questions remain

The obvious goal of the environment chief in talking to us here at the Times was to present the vision driving her comprehensive action with respect to the mining industry. While she did answer many concerns, there are, however, still some nagging questions; not enough, in my opinion, to scuttle her drive to reduce mining to only those operations that meet her stringent economic and social standards, but questions that still need to be satisfactorily addressed if her broader plan is to be successful.

One of the first points Lopez stressed in addressing our group was that she is not entirely against mining; she did, after all, allow 12 operations to continue. It was also clear that, although she does not seem inclined to entertain much dissent to her point of view, she did take the assessments of the Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC) and the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) into consideration, which is probably why five of the 28 mining operations were only suspended rather than being ordered shut down outright.

And as far as plans regarding the mining that will be allowed are concerned, Lopez seems to have a workable model in mind. Using the mining companies' social management and development program (SMDP) funds – which amount to 1 percent of the mines' gross operating revenue – she intends to carry out area development plans in mining communities that would create eco-tourism and recreation enterprises, as well as boost social services such as education and health care.

ROUGH
TRADE

BEN KRITZ

She believes this can be done based on several impressively successful small projects (which she discussed at length) carried out with much smaller amounts of seed money during her time with the ABS-CBN Foundation.

All well and good, but while her obvious passion for the environment – zealotry is probably a better word to describe her attitude – is a positive attribute in many respects, there are practical problems with her vision that she is not going to be able to simply evangelize her way past.

The first is small-scale mining,

which has been a thorn in the country's side for years. This is entirely overlooked in Lopez' current plans, although she did acknowledge that the DENR is working on it. Her department definitely should; small-scale mining is proportionally much more damaging than large-scale mining, much of it is done illegally, and most of its production is smuggled out of the country or otherwise disposed of through unapproved channels.

The other major shortcoming of Lopez's plan involves what is to be done with the abandoned operations and the communities where they are located once the appeal and review process runs its course and her shutdown orders become final. The area development plan funded through SMDP only works where the SMDP is being generated; in the other areas, which the Department of Finance said last week would lose a total of P821 million per year in foregone revenue,

Lopez's vision becomes clearer, but questions remain

BY BEN KRITZ
Columnist

YESTERDAY, Environment Secretary Gina Lopez paid a visit to the offices of *The Manila Times* and made a favorable impression. As I have said before, there is an undeniable logic in appointing a committed environmentalist to that particular post. And even though she has stirred up a great deal of controversy with her decisions to close or suspend 28 mines and cancel 75 mineral service production agreements, I hope the Commission on Appointments sees the wisdom in keeping her in the post to give her a chance to show if she can actually finish the job she has started.

► KritzB2

some alternatives will have to be found, and relatively soon.

In addition, these communities are going to be handicapped by having a large-scale environmental mess to clean up. Although Lopez didn't address the subject at all, others have suggested the mining operations that have been shut down could be made to pay for environmental mitigation. That is probably optimistic; companies that are made to pull up the stakes and leave will have no incentive to pay to clean up their mess, unless they hope to do business in the Philippines again in the future, which they probably will not.

Again, none of these concerns should be considered enough to compel Lopez to keep her hands off the mining industry. But she should be obliged to address them as a condition of keeping her post. I hope it is a challenge she is willing to accept.

ben.kritz@manilatimes.net //

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Show of support Environmental activists and members of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Employees Union stage a joint action at the DENR central office in Quezon City to express their support to Environment Secretary Gina Lopez's crackdown on erring mining firms.

ANALY LABOR

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~~The mining fight goes on~~ DENR legal service Undersecretary Atty. Ipat Luna explains with documents to media the issued show cause order to 22 mining companies for violation of Section 71 of Republic Act 7942 on the implementation of final rehabilitation decommissioning fund that mining companies have recourse to, by filing a motion for reconsideration.

ANALY LABOR

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Environment leaders, NGOs sumuporta kay Sec. Lopez

Ilan sa mga top environment protection advocates at non-government organizations (NGOs) ang nagdeklara ng suporta para kay Environment Secretary Gina Lopez na kasalukuyang dumadaan sa butas ng karayom sa Commission on Appointments.

Pinangunahan nina international environmental law expert Antonio Oposa Jr., at Sonia Mendoza, Mother Earth Foundation chair ang suporta para kay Lopez.

Pinuri rin ni Oposa si Lopez at ang kanyang team sa pag-aksyon sa mga mistulang imposibleng trabaho tulad ng pag-iilinis ng Laguna Lake sa mga illegal fish pens at pagdisiplina sa extractive and inherently-destructive mining industry.

Sa kanilang pagdeklara ng suporta kay Lopez, sinabi ni Oposa na: "We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Secre-

tary Gina in her efforts to right the long-festering injustices committed to our country. All these have been done to satisfy the false gods of money for a few, at the expense and to the irreversible damage of our natural resources and to this beautiful country."

Nagdeklara rin si Sonia Mendoza, chair ng Mother Earth Foundation ng suporta kay Lopez at hiniling na kumpirmahin na ito ng Commission on Appointments.

Kabilang din sa mga nagdeklara ng suporta para kay Lopez ang mga advocates ng Excellent Government, sa pamamagitan ng managing director nito nasa Jose Ma. Mirasol, at si dating Puerto Princepsa City Mayor Edward S. Hagedorn, isang mahigpit na environment advocate, United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) Global 500 awardee.

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DENR to re-file case vs Mt. Apo illegal trekkers

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) 11 will re-file a case against the trekkers who climbed Mt. Apo last year despite the existence of indefinite closure of all its trails for trekking and climbing.

DENR 11 Regional Director Ruth Tawantawan immediately sought the support and assistance of the Prosecutor's Office on the re-filing of the case.

"Since there is nothing in the decision that prohibits the DENR to re-file a case, then we will re-file a case against the perpetrators as soon as the designation of a Special Prosecutor is made," Tawantawan said.

Last year, members of the Protected Area Management Board of Mt. Apo Natural Park (PAMB-MANP) passed Resolution No. 2016-01, stating the indefinite closure of Mt. Apo on all of its trails for trekking and climbing due to the forest fire incident last March 26, 2016.

The fire incident lasted for 28 days damaging a total of 115 hectares of grassland and brushland.

Despite the closure order, some concerned netizens reported to DENR 11 that a certain local guide from Davao brought 11 climbers in Mt. Apo on May 20, 2016.

DENR's Parks Operations Superintendent Eduardo Ragaza immediately checked on the veracity of the report and coordinated with

the concerned local governments.

Having established probable cause in violation of Republic Act 9237 or the Mt. Apo Protected Area Act of 2003, a case was filed by DENR 11 against Edgar Ian Tesaluna and others at the Office of the City Prosecutor of Digos last August 12, 2016.

The case, however, was dismissed without prejudice for the reason that none of its prosecutors is authorized to conduct preliminary investigation and prosecute violations under RA 9237.

As early as September 7, 2016, a letter request for designation of Special Prosecutor from the Office of the City Prosecutor Digos City was already endorsed and personally delivered to the Office of the Prosecutor General Claro Arellano.

The said request was also followed up by a letter from the Regional State Prosecutor Janet Grace Dalisay-Fabrero dated December 27, 2016 addressed to Undersecretary Antonio Kho Jr. of the Department of Justice.

The designation of a special prosecutor is a requisite under Section 15 of RA 9237 which states that "within thirty days from the effectivity of this Act, the Department of Justice shall appoint a special prosecutor to whom all cases of violation of laws, rules and regulations in the protected area shall be assigned."

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MAIL MATTERS

Lopez projects attest to her credibility and adherence to principles

THIS refers to the article "Lopez accused of fund misuse" published on Feb. 21, 2017 in your paper.

Even before President Rodrigo Duterte appointed her to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Secretary Gina Lopez already accomplished several projects that will prove her credibility and adherence to her core principles on integrity, social justice, and the common good. Notable among her projects are the Ugong Rock and the Ihawig River and Firefly River Watching, both in Palawan province, and the La Mesa Eco Park in Quezon City.

Through the ABS-CBN Foundation Inc. (AFI), where she previously served as the managing director, Lopez invested P1 million out of her own pocket in a poor community, which has a great rock formation known as the Ugong Rock in Brgy. Tagabinet in Puerto Princesa City.

Near Palawan's famous Underground River, Ugong Rock is now considered as one of the most visited ecotourism sites in the province. It is dubbed as the country's "last ecological frontier."

The community, with 98 percent women, and only two have graduated from college, is now earning between P9,000 and P18,000 monthly for its members. Its gross income breached the P30-million mark on its seventh year of implementation.

Community members were also able to raise their own poultry farm as another source of livelihood. It is from this farm where Secretary Lopez fondly calls "OPM (Original Pilipino Music) ducks" can be found. These ducks are called as such because they lay eggs whenever they hear songs from the country's best musicians.

Her other project is the Iwahig River and Firefly Watching, also in Puerto Princesa, where the community earns P10,000 a week with just a boat ride for tourists who want to see the beauty of the majestic river. As a result, the project won gold at the Pacific Asia Travel Awards. The community's gross income surged to over P32 million on its sixth year of operation.

Secretary Lopez was able to increase the number of tourists in Palawan because of these projects, making the province as one of the best internationally-recognized ecotourism spots in the world.

The La Mesa Eco Park, which is dubbed as "the pre-nuptial capital of the Philippines," is also one of her centerpiece projects because of her successful reforestation efforts, making it a haven to the endemic animals that were introduced to the sanctuary. The eco-park is a favorite destination for more than 200 schools for educational nature and adventure trips, and serves as a temporary solace for people who

would want to take a breath of fresh air and escape the hustle and bustle of the city.

The reforestation of the eco-park and the entire La Mesa Watershed was hailed by no less than the United Nations as a gold standard in Asia, having been planted with hundreds of thousands of endemic species of trees that were initially sourced from Sierra Madre and then raised within the park's nurseries. This will serve as a model site for the National Greening Program, where barren areas will be transformed into productive ecological and economic zones.

With the project being a success, generating more than P20 million annually, Secretary Lopez assures everyone that the profit shares of the La Mesa Eco Park have been properly distributed to the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) and the local government of Quezon City.

The AFI was able to raise P300 million without asking for anything in return. It also reports to the MWSS and the QC government four times a year to ensure transparency in all its transactions within the eco-park. Secretary Lopez only asked for a share from the profit to run the foundation to pay for administrative costs, and not a return from the money she had invested.

On the issue of the Pasig River and the recycling equipment that

has been rendered junk by the Commission on Audit, Secretary Lopez was not in charge of overseeing the operation of these machines. The local government units (LGUs) have jurisdiction over the property where the machines operate. As head of the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission, her role was limited to procuring the equipment and ensuring that public money is not wasted. Currently, these equipment are under the care and maintenance of the concerned LGUs that are near the Pasig River.

Through ecotourism and taking care of the environment, the communities helped by Secretary Lopez were able to raise money to send the children of their members to college. While Secretary Lopez is taking care of the environment and providing livelihood, she is also "teaching people how to fish" instead of "giving them fish," veering away the communities from mendicancy, and toward productivity.

The public can rest assured that everything Secretary Lopez has done and will continue to do are for the truth, service, integrity and the common good.

MA. SABRINA R. CRUZ
Director
Strategic Communication
and Initiatives Services
Department of Environment
and Natural Resources

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

'ENVIRONMENT BALL' IN DU30'S HANDS

This is in response to the call of the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) and its partners to observe due process, after the Department of Environment and Natural Resources issued an order suspending five mining operations and closing down 23 others ("Chamber of Mines questions gov't audit," News, 2/3/17).

There have been appeals from the mining industry to stop the order on the 28 mining operations which the DENR has deemed destructive after an audit that started last year.

It is understandable that the chamber and members of the business sector in the Cabinet, such as the Department of Finance, move to protect Big Business interest by siding with the extractive industry.

The Philippine Misereor Partnership Inc. (PMPI), a social development network of environment and rights groups, believes that the only way to change the DENR's decision is to force Environment Secretary Gina Lopez to change her lens: to look at all extracted minerals as a means to boost the earnings and profits of mining companies and to supply the mineral needs of other developed nations, instead of looking at the destroyed biodiversity and damaged watersheds.

While the miners call for their version of "due process," we speak but one word: JUSTICE.

- Justice for biodiversity irreparably damaged: the destruction and devastation in many provinces have been so vast, such that a great

number of species of wildlife in these areas have been wiped out forever.

- Justice for all communities who have lost their ancestral domain and their heritage in exchange for money they will never see or, worse, they will never be able to drink or eat.

- Justice for dead indigenous peoples and destroyed communities harassed and violated by armed groups, for protesting and defending their watersheds and homes from the destructive mining industry.

- Justice for our people who will never see mountains or forests again in places where these have been transformed into flatlands and gaping pits, claimed to have been "rehabilitated" by the mining companies.

PMPI lauds Secretary Lopez for taking a stand and for standing on behalf of all the communities made host to mining operations, longing to see a glimpse of justice. We appeal to President Duterte to do the same. He himself has seen the destruction caused by mining operations in his very home. For now, his is the decision whether or not we remain slaves in our own land, pretending to uphold "due process" that does not benefit the poor and vulnerable communities and their home environment.

JEN MOLING, project officer,
Philippine Misereor Partnership Inc.
Barangay South Triangle,
Quezon Avenue, Quezon City

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DENR'S LOPEZ P-3 SNUBBED

Zamora cancels Lopez courtesy call

By Ryan Ponce Pacpaco

THE chairman of the powerful 12-man House contingent to the Commission on Appointments (CA) has cancelled the courtesy call of Environment Secretary Gina Lopez on them following her "sweeping allegation" that congressmen were bribed P50 million each to vote against her confirmation.

San Juan City Rep. Ronaldo Zamora, CA House contingent chairman, said they just decided to see Lopez during the CA hearing on March 1.

"I have cancelled Gina's courtesy call on our contingent on Monday, and will just meet her in open sessions on Wednesday at her confirmation hearings," a disappointed Zamora said.



ZAMORA



LOPEZ

Isabela Rep. Rodolfo "Rodito" Albano III, a CA majority leader, said Lopez should substantiate her allegation, otherwise she is jeopardizing her confirmation.

"Otherwise, she is merely engaging in innuendo and intrigue. I was inclined

to support her until this irresponsible and unfounded statement from her," said Albano.

"She's making things difficult for herself. As it is, there are valid mining-related issues she has to explain. She made the situation worse," said Albano.

bano who earlier dared Lopez to stop acting like a "prima donna" at the expense of lawmakers and prove that she deserves her position.

Albano said the allegation of Lopez against CA members about the P50 million offer to vote against her confirmation is baseless and unfounded.

The Chamber of Mines of the Philippines, has filed an opposition to the confirmation of Lopez, who has ordered the closure of 23 mines, suspension of five and the cancellation of 75 mine production-sharing agreements for allegedly destroying mountains and watersheds and polluting rivers.

Lopez is also under fire at the House of Representatives for ignoring the invitations several times on hearings about mining-related bills.

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE NEWS CLIPPINGS

CA cancels Lopez courtesy call

By RYAN PONCE PACPACO

THE chairman of the powerful 12-man House contingent to the Commission on Appointments (CA) has cancelled the courtesy call being sought by Environment Sec. Gina Lopez with them following her "sweeping allegation" that congressmen were bribed P50 million each to vote against her confirmation. Page 6

CA...

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Lopez retracted Thursday her allegation saying that she was not accusing the CA members and she did not have any proof of the bribes.

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Isabela Rep. Rodolfo "Rodito" Albano III, a CA majority leader, said there are valid mining-related issues Lopez has to explain. Earlier, Albano dared Lopez to stop acting like a "prima donna" at the expense of lawmakers and prove that she deserves her position.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



'NO TO MINE CLOSURE'
- Protesters in Barangay Talavera in Taganaan, Surigao del Norte - with laterite silt on their faces to symbolize support for nickel extraction in Hinatuan Island - staged a rally February 22 to denounce the possible closure of Hinatuan Mining Corporation, which operates in Hinatuan Island and employs hundreds of local residents. (Roel N. Catoto)

DOLE starts intervention measures to help displaced mine workers

By **MIKE U. CRISMUNDO**

BUTUAN CITY – The regional office of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE 13) here started to set into motion, Friday, measures to address the plight of thousands of workers who will be affected by the closure of 14 mining companies by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in the provinces of Surigao del Norte, Surigao del Sur, and Dinagat Islands.

Among the intervention measures the DOLE 13 will be extending to the workers will be the "Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers (Tupad)," which is a component of the DOLE Livelihood and Emergency Employment Program (Dileep).

This was disclosed by DOLE 13 Director Evelyn R. Ramos who said that the agency was among the departments that was participating in a three-day Strategic Planning and Workshop, organized by the Office of the President through the DENR, that started yesterday here.

The workshop, participated in by officials from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Agriculture, Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Agriculture (DA), and National Housing Authority (NHA), will seek remedies and other assistance measures that could be extended to workers when the mining companies finally close shop.

The agencies were tasked by Malacanang to help the DENR in crafting a

positive approach that will integrate all poverty-alleviation programs to lift up and improve the poor conditions of the people in the affected communities of mining operations.

Ramos said there was a need to be prepared for the effect of the closure, and suspension of operations in the mining areas, as it would also have an impact on other businesses and employment in the region.

The workshop was staged even as pro-mining protesters staged a rally in Barangay Talavera in Taganaan, Surigao del Norte to denounce the closure order of Hinatuan Mining Corporation, which operates in Hinatuan Island.

DOLE 13 is already conducting on-site inspection to check on the status of the mining operations and determine the exact number of workers that will be affected.

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Bello extends assistance to affected mine workers

By Mina Diaz

Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III met up with regional officials to map out action plans and prepare assistance packages for thousands of mine workers following the closure and suspension of 23 mining firms by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

"These mining firms employ hundreds and thousands of workers. DoLE will provide assistance to those who will be displaced," Bello said.

In Caraga region, the DoLE technical staff have already been deployed to the 14 mining companies in the area affected by the order to do assessment on the ground. The affected mining firms would submit transition/action plans and proposals to DoLE

provincial offices.

Caraga Regional Director Evelyn Ramos said there is need to be prepared for the effect of the closure and suspension of operations of the mining areas, as it would also impact on other businesses and employment in the region.

The regional office is checking the status of the mining operations and determining the exact number of workers to be affected and their profiles for appropriate DoLE intervention, she said.

She also said the transition plan and other data would still be useful if and when the closure or suspension order does not take effect since the mining sector is faced with the off-season dilemma where workers are forced to go on leave and look for alternative sources of income.

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IN BRIEF

DoLE readies plans for miners

THE Department of Labor and Employment vowed to extend livelihood assistance to thousands of mine workers who will be affected by the closure of 23 mining firms by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

"We have already taken proactive measures to address the potential massive displacement of workers with the closure and suspension of 23 mining firms in the country. First if providing them livelihood assistance," Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III said.

Bello met with regional labor officials to map out action plans and prepare assistance packages for thousands of mine workers expected to be unemployed following the DENR decision.

"These mining firms employ hundreds and thousands of workers. DoLE will provide assistance to those who will be displaced," Bello said.

Bello said he has deployed labor staff to the 14 mining companies in the area affected by the closure to do assessment on the ground. The affected mining firms would submit transition/ and action plans and proposals to DoLE provincial offices.

In Caraga, Labor Regional Director Evelyn Ramos said there is need to be prepared for the effect of the closure and suspension of operations of the mining areas, as it would also impact on other businesses and employment in the region.

She said the regional office is checking the status of the mining operations and determining the exact number of workers to be affected and their profiles for appropriate DoLE intervention.

Ramos said the transition plan and other data would still be useful if and when the closure or suspension order does not take effect since the mining sector is faced with the off-season dilemma where workers are forced to go on leave and look for alternative sources of income. Vito Barcelo