

Thursday, January 17, 2008



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ADB to aid in Meycauayan cleanup

By Roderick T. dela Cruz

The Asian Development Bank plans to extend a P2.4-million technical assistance grant to develop technologies that will reduce the toxicity of the Meycauayan river system, which was listed as one of the world's 30 most polluted areas.

The ADB said an amount of \$49,813 will be used for pilot and demonstration activities that will pilot test the use of locally fabricated cost-effective technologies to reduce mercury and other heavy metals from emissions, and liquid and solid wastes, and disseminate the use of these technologies.

Meycauayan, known as the seat of the Philippine jewelry industry, just 19 kilometers north of Manila, is on the verge of mercury and heavy metal toxicity.

It has about 114 registered jewelers and about 2,000 more small and unregistered manufacturers with very little investments in modern tools and equipment. A large percentage of the population derives their livelihood from this sector.

Earlier, the New York-based Blacksmith Institute described the river system of Meycauayan, Marilao and Obando in Bulacan as among the most polluted in the developing world.

In its 2007 report, the Blacksmith Institute said "industrial waste is haphazardly dumped into the Marilao, Meycauayan and Obando river system which is also a source of drinking and agricultural water supplies for the 250,000 people living in and around the area."

"The river system is extremely polluted due to wastes received from tanneries, gold and precious metals refineries, the largest lead smelter in the Philippines, and numerous municipal dumpsites," the institute said.

The ADB said mercury and heavy metals toxicity endanger lives and livelihoods along the Meycauayan river system. While cleanup has begun, contamination may have reached groundwater sources, the bank said.

"On the upstream of its river system rests industries that use toxic heavy metals. Water flows along 17 kilometers of a main river and about 10 kilometers of tributaries before draining into the Manila Bay," the ADB said.

Artisanal gold and precious metal refiners are the main sources of pollution, the bank said, adding that they do not have waste treatment facilities allowing emissions, solid and liquid wastes from the refining process, to find their way into the atmosphere, river system, and eventually to thousands of hectares of fishponds downstream and urban communities that depend highly on groundwater sources.

The ADB said the technical assistance seeks to collect baseline data to determine the extent of mercury and other heavy metal pollution, including the assessment gold and precious metals refining practices as well as community and occupational health risks and socio-economic factors related to gold refining in Meycauayan.

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