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B-3

DENR delays decision on mine closure and suspension orders

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The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will not be able to release this month its final decision on mining closure and suspension orders imposed by former Environment Secretary Regina Paz Lopez before she was removed from the position.

This was confirmed by Environment Undersecretary for Climate Change Services and Mining Concerns Analiza Teh.

Instead, the DENR will release them next month, together with its decision on the cancellations of 75 Mineral Production Sharing Agreement (MPSA), also imposed by Lopez.

"We are still finalizing some details," Teh said. "We are looking for another month."

DENR Undersecretary Jonas Leones, who is also now the agency's spokesperson, said before that the DENR will only be able to release the decisions on 13 of 26 mine suspension and closure orders.

To recall, of the total number of mining companies Lopez ordered suspended and closed, 13 have appealed to the Office of the President, while the remaining filed their appeal to the Office of the DENR Secretary.

The agency's decision on the rest of the suspension and closure orders will be known much later.

Environment Chief Roy Cimatu stressed earlier that the decision – whether to reverse or uphold Lopez's orders – that will come out is going to come from the DENR and will be final and executory.

This, according to him, would no longer need approval by the MICC or the Office of the President (OP).

Teh said it is taking a while for the DENR to come up with the decision because it has to sort out the "several reports of the mining audit team and technical review committee."

To recall, inter-agency Mineral Industry Coordinating Council (MICC) is also set to do an audit on the mining orders but that is also faced with a delay.

In order to help resolve the issues surrounding these orders, MICC decided to conduct its own review of the matter, which will supposedly be completed this month.

But Finance Undersecretary Bayani Agabin said the MICC-led audit on mining operations is also facing so many delays.

For the first time since the inception of the multisectoral oversight body five years ago, MICC, which is led by the Secretaries of DENR and Department of Finance (DOF), earlier decided to conduct a "fact-finding and science-based" review of mining operations across the country.

The first batch of mining operations covered by the review are the 26 sites arbitrarily ordered either closed or suspended by the previous DENR leadership. The MICC would supposedly have the preliminary results of this review by January of this year, with the final report to come out by March.

"They are just about to start, so no results yet," Agabin said before.

*DENR - Dept. of Environment & Natural Resources