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DENR awaits revised rehab plan for termination of Rapu-Rapu mining

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By Danny O. Calleja

LEGAZPI CITY, March 3 (PNA) -- The days of the Korean-Malaysian-run mineral mining operations in the island town of Rapu-rapu, Albay, are numbered but the final plan for the vast mining site's rehabilitation after its decommissioning is yet to be submitted by its operator for approval of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The approval by DENR Secretary Ramon Paje of the Final Mine Rehabilitation Decommissioning Plan (FMRDP) is required as there are various considerations being taken in the post-mining activities of Rapu-Rapu Polymetallic Project (RRPP) as part of its corporate social responsibilities.

Sometime in 2010, RRPP submitted for approval of the DENR's Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) a proposed FMRDP but it was returned with an instruction from Paje to revise it according to the provisions of Department Administrative Order (DAO)-2005-07.

An FMRDP as defined by the DAO, Theodore Rommel Pestaño, the MGB regional technical director for Bicol, on Monday said, should serve as a guide on how to rehabilitate mined-out areas after the mining firms cease operations.

In the preparation of the revised rehabilitation plan, Pestaño said, RRPP was instructed to conduct another consultation dialogue with the Direct Impact Barangays (DIB) to identify further the land use after the mine life.

The mining site involves a 180-hectare mountainous land traversing three coastal and upland barangays of Rapu-Rapu town.

The revised plan, he said, should identify the activities and research required to address rehabilitation and include strategies to address long-term stability, sustainability and time frames for the assessment of rehabilitation activities.

It should be designed to prevent or eliminate long-term environmental impacts by returning mining-disturbed land to a physically and chemically stable, visually acceptable, productive, or self-sustaining condition, taking into consideration the beneficial uses of the land and the surrounding areas and as agreed with the stakeholders.

It should also include a “social plan” defining employee transition programs such as job retraining and education assistance and job search or placement, among others, as well as possible transfer of the management of some facilities to LGUs or communities to generate income.

There must also be an assurance that alternative skills and sustainable livelihood opportunities are provided and left behind to mine employees and their dependents and to the host and neighboring communities.

Market-driven sustainable livelihood and income-generating projects in the DIB are also required in order to gradually wean the residents away from mining dependence while the possible alternative post-mining land uses of the mine site would be the development for forest plantations and agro-forestry.

Financial and or technical assistance to ensure livelihood projects established during operation should also be maintained by the mining firm, Pestaño said.

Maintenance and monitoring plan (MMP) should be developed and designed to demonstrate that the agreed completion criteria have been met and shall include plans for remedial actions where monitoring demonstrates that completion criteria are unlikely to be met.

The MMP should identify key aspects of the closure process that should be monitored, he added.

Pending approval of the plan, RRPP has already deposited an amount of over P71.8 million for the proposed plan as of June 2010 in a government bank and committed to submit the revised plan by the middle of 2012.

The Rapu-Rapu mining operations was earlier projected to last until end of 2013, unless the actual mineral deposits exceed more than what was earlier estimated during the exploration.

The company would continue operation as long as the deposits are there and funds are available to sustain commercial operation, according to resident manager Rogelio Corpuz.

RRPP is jointly run by the Rapu-Rapu Minerals Inc. and Rapu-Rapu Processing Inc., is a subsidiary of Korea-Malaysia Philippines Resources, Inc. that took over in 2008 from the Australian-owned Lafayette Philippines Inc. (LPI).

LPI's operations that mined gold and silver starting in 2005 was terminated following a series of toxic waste spill that triggered a massive fish kill at the coastal water down the mining site. (PNA)

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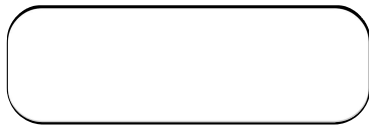
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