

DENR fast tracks action on Minahang Bayan in Benguet

By Jed Macapagal
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The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will fast-track the Minahang Bayan applications following a recent order shutting down illegal small-scale mines.

Roy Cimatu, environment secretary, made this commitment after his visit to Itoyon, Benguet to legalize and regulate small-scale mining operations in the area.

The DENR said at present, no Minahang Bayan has been declared in the Cordillera Administrative Region but there are 65 pending applications according to the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB).

Some of the applications were already endorsed to the MGB Central Office while others have yet to complete their documentary requirements.

The Minahang Bayan was established in 2015 after the implementing rules and regulations of the People's Small-Scale Mining Act of 1991 were revised. To operate as Minahang Bayan, small-scale miners should organize cooperatives to ensure they have the technical capability and financial resources to conform to the structural and taxation requirements of the concession area.

Last week, Cimatu also led the blasting of 18 mine tunnels at Sitio Basa, Camp 4 in Tuba, Benguet, signaling the DENR's crack down on illegal mining activities in the country.

Cimatu said there should be no small-scale mining activities outside a declared Minahang Bayan since some of these operations use sodium cyanide which is highly toxic and lack safety hazard control measures.

He added that the mine tunnels he ordered closed had intruded the military reservation of the Philippine Military Academy and that the illegal operations in the area persisted in spite of a stop order issued in 2013.

As part of the crackdown on small scale mining operations, Cimatu also issued Special Order No. 53 creating the National Task Force on Mining Challenge to ensure strict implementation of existing mining policies and regulations as well as other related environmental laws.

As the enforcement arm of the DENR, the task force will go around the country to close illegal mines. It will also run after illegal importers, retailers and distributors of explosives and cyanide which are commonly used in small-scale mining operations.

"Mining operations affect such a huge part of our environment and are often covered by many interrelated environmental laws that cannot be addressed by the MGB alone," Cimatu said.

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