

Rody to form panels to identify Boracay land owners

By JOCELYN MONTEMAYOR

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PRESIDENT Duterte yesterday said a committee would take care of identifying the real owners of the lands in Boracay and distributing them, after the clean up and rehabilitation of the island resort is completed.

The President, at the 31st anniversary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), said neither he nor government is interested in taking over the island resort.

He said the government just closed the island to clean and rehabilitate it, as Boracay has been bannered as the crown jewel of tourist destinations in the Philippines.

“As for Boracay, I said, ‘allow government to clean it. And after that, I will return Boracay to its rightful owners.’ Now the problem is how to determine who owns what. So there has to be a committee to be fair to everybody,” he said.

He said the committee would include members of the local government.

He said if the lands in the island would not be given to the original Filipino owners, he would “give it to the Mangyans.”

“I will not allow gambling, I will not even give it to big business. Let us determine first who owns the place,” Duterte said.

He reiterated that he would leave it to Congress to come up with laws that would allow the setting aside of a strip of the island for commercial use.

He reiterated that Boracay is categorized as forestal and agriculture land.

Aside from Boracay, the DENR is also watching other ecotourism hotspots such as Panglao Island in Bohol, Puerto Galera in Oriental Mindoro, El Nido and Coron in Palawan, and Siargao in Surigao del Norte.

Duterte also told Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu that he will ban open-pit mining during his presidency regardless of the funds generated by its operation.

“Open-pit mining is really destroying the land,” he said.

He said government would get the equivalent of the revenues from the mining industry from somewhere else.

Duterte said open pit mining operations may continue after his term, but he would not allow it during his time.

“Maybe they’d try to revive it at some other time, but it’s not really my concern anymore. I’ll just do what I have to do during my time,” he said.

Cimatu said the DENR has been reviewing the mine closure and suspension orders issued by former DENR Secretary Regina Lopez with the help of experts from the National Economic and Development Authority and the Development Academy of the Philippines.

He said the results of the review will be available for disclosure this month.

Duterte also handed 75 land titles to qualified beneficiaries of the “Handog Titulo” program of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) from five cities in Metro Manila.

The land titles covered 5,394 square meters. – **With Angela Lopez de Leon**

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