

Lawmaker to DENR chief: Release mining audit report

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BY LLANESCA T. PANTI, TMT ON MARCH 19, 2017 NATION

Secretary Regina Lopez of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) should release results of her team's audit report that prompted her to issue a closure order on at least 22 mining companies for supposed violations of the Mining Law, among other laws.

Rep. Ace Barbers of Surigao del Norte made the call over the weekend, saying a recent congressional probe of Lopez's mining closure order revealed that the Mines and Geosciences Bureau, an attached agency of the DENR, is yet to be given a copy of the audit results.

All of the 22 mining companies ordered shut down, however, remain in operation since their closure has been appealed before the Office of the President.

"The DENR secretary is keeping the audit results to herself and a handful of consultants while the new MGB Director, the highly regarded and well respected Undersecretary Mario Luis Jacinto, was not even furnished a copy. How incredible!" Barbers said in a statement.

"How can Undersecretary Jacinto review the findings if he was not courteously furnished a copy? The MGB is the bureau in-charge of all mining operations in the country, so keeping [it] out of the loop is highly suspicious," the congressman added.

Barbers also questioned the presence of anti-mining groups in Lopez's mining audit team, particularly representatives from the Catholic Church and allies of Alyansa Tigil Mina.

"The membership of the audit team is of doubtful impartiality. Instead of putting independent, highly trained technical people like geologists and mining engineers who are not from DENR, the secretary appointed people with zero knowledge on mining," he claimed.

Lopez is in the United States for her annual retreat.

Her appointment was recently bypassed by the Commission on Appointments (CA).

Rep. Ariel Casilao of Anakpawis earlier slammed the CA panel for bypassing Lopez and other Cabinet members allied with the progressive Makabayan bloc.

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