

DOF, DENR lock horns over mining

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The Department of Finance (DOF) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) have locked horns over mining regulations.

In a strongly-worded statement, DOF Secretary Finance Assistant Secretary Paola A. Alvarez accused DENR Secretary Regina Paz Lopez of “throwing a monkey wrench” at the inter-agency Mining Industry Coordinating Council (MICC).

The MICC, which is co-chaired by Lopez and Finance Secretary Carlos G. Dominguez III, is now in hot water after the DENR chief accused a council member of having interest in some mining operations.

In particular, Lopez claimed that Finance Undersecretary Bayani Agabin, who represented Dominguez in several MICC meetings, was a lawyer of the Philippine Associated Smelting & Refining Corp. (PASAR) and Rapu-Rapu Minerals, Inc.

Lopez also accused the MICC of usurping the functions of the DENR following the council’s approved Resolution No. 6 calling for the review of her suspension and closure order against 28 mining firms.

But Alvarez yesterday countered the DENR chief’s allegations, asserting that the MICC resolution was unanimously approved by the council members, including Lopez, and was prepared by her “personal lawyer.”

The DOF is “perplexed” as to why Lopez is opposing the planned review of all mining operations even if it was ordered by President Duterte and formally endorsed by herself during the MICC meeting last February 9, Alvarez said.

“DENR Secretary Regina Lopez was present at the first MICC meeting held on February 9, in which she signed with her Council co-chairperson, DOF Secretary Carlos Dominguez III, this MICC resolution that her personal lawyer, Christian Monsod, had helped draft in that same gathering,” Alvarez said.

She also revealed that Lopez approved the proposed P50-million funding from the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) to conduct the review, which covers not only the 28 mines but all mining operations in the country.

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