

Developers moving outside Baguio City

BAGUIO CITY—Businessmen are moving heaven and earth to downplay an old geological report detailing the summer capital's vulnerability to erosion.

Debates about the city's stability resurfaced last week after four landslides, triggered by rains brought by Typhoon "Pepeng," killed 24 people on Oct. 8.

But real estate developers told a news briefing on Wednesday that the old geological report had not affected business because property development projects had already begun exploring the potentials of neighboring Tuba and Itogon towns in Benguet.

A study commissioned by a condominium developer indicated that 49 percent of Baguio lands were already built-up, making the city an oversaturated market.

Instead, the study urged development in Tuba, which is twice the size of Baguio, and in Itogon, which is three times bigger.

1990 study
The news briefing was called by Councilor Isabelo Cosalan Jr. to address TV reports that 90 percent of Baguio was "landslide-prone." The reports referred to a 1990 study issued in the aftermath of the Luzon earthquake that devastated Baguio and featured traces of fault lines and ground waterways that crisscross the surface of Baguio.

The ground lines render the summer capital vulnerable to erosions, according to documents of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB).

Because of the study, Baguio briefly imposed a policy setting building height at only four stories.

But City Hall approved the construction of new buildings of up to 12 stories, according to the city environment office.

Cosalan said developers had addressed the potential hazards by using technology allowing them to offer safe and affordable housing.

"Baguio remains safe," he said.

Congested
However, developers already discovered that the huge population and volume of settlements had also breached the city's carrying capacity.

Baguio, which turned 100 years old on Sept. 1, was designed for a community of 25,000, but it now hosts a population of more than 300,000.

Cost of development is also rising, according to condominium developer Alexander Bangsoy.

Residents can afford to finance or mortgage property if they are allowed to pay from P5,000 to P8,000 in monthly amortization, he said.

But Bangsoy said permit fees and land development expenses represented an additional P800 to P1,200 for each square meter of processed land that must be passed onto buyers.

However, cheaper lots are available in areas not more than an hour's travel away from downtown, he said.

Only 3 percent of Tuba is built-up, while only 7 percent of Itogon, a mining town, has been exploited.

Both have been cited as potential suburbs for Baguio by European experts that drew up the Baguio-Dagupan Urban Planning Project (BDUPP). (*Inquirer.net*)



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Church denies holding talks with Sinnott kidnappers

by ROEL PAREÑO
Philstar.com

ZAMBOANGA CITY—A Church official last Oct. 28 denied reports that they have succeeded in negotiating with the kidnappers of Fr. Michael Sinnott last Oct. 26.

Fr. Gilbert Hingone, spokesman of the Pagadian Diocese, told the provincial crisis management committee (CMC) negotiating the release of the kidnapped priest that he was misquoted in a radio interview claiming emissaries had succeeded in getting in touch with the kidnappers and expected a positive development in the next three days.

CMC spokesman Alan June Molde said Hingone denied before the committee that emissaries had been sent and were able to get in touch with the kidnappers last Oct. 26.

"Fr. Hingone, acting as the spokesman of the archdiocese of Pagadian, said he was misquoted and denied saying that there is negotiation with the kidnappers," Molde told reporters following a meeting with Hingone.

Hingone denied they had made contact with the kidnappers. "How can there be a negotia-

tion when there was no contact with the kidnappers," Molde said.

CMC chairman Zamboanga del Sur Gov. Aurora Ceriles, on the other hand, allowed the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to help in the rescue of Sinnott.

Molde said the acceptance of the CMC of the assistance offered by the MILF was contained in a resolution approved by the provincial board.

He said the resolution would be forwarded to the joint ceasefire committee to authorize the MILF to help the police and military locate Sinnott and his kidnappers.

Molde said Western Mindanao Command chief Maj. Gen. Ben Dolorfino was also notified.

The MILF had created Task Force Sinnott and deployed a company size of its forces to locate the priest.

However, the MILF was limited only to assisting the crisis management committee.

According to Molde, the MILF would help validate and provide information on the whereabouts of Sinnott and his abductors.

The MILF was also requested to help facilitate negotiation with the kidnappers, Molde added.

"The resolution also sought the MILF to help facilitate the delivery of medicine (to Sinnott)," he added.

However, poor telecommunications signal in the area where Sinnott is being held captive has been hampering efforts to negotiate with his kidnappers, police and military intelligence sources revealed.

Even the 300 guerrillas of the MILF helping to locate the priest in the jungle area straddling the boundaries of the Lanao provinces are having difficulty contacting their "spotters" tracking down the kidnappers of Sinnott.

"We cannot use two-way radios because they can possibly monitor our communications. There are very few spots there where we have mobile phone transmission signal," an MILF commander said.

The MILF issued a statement saying Sinnott and his kidnappers are still holed up in the jungle area between the Lanao provinces.

"Our information is that he is being moved by his captors from one place to another every now and then," said Ghad-zali Jaafar, MILF vice chairman for political affairs. ■

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