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## INQUIRER HEADLINES - REGIONS

### Palawan town officials scored for favoring mining firm

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Inquirer

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY -- Encouraged by a permissive local government sector and regulatory agencies that may be willing to cover for their violations, errant mining companies continue to operate in Palawan province.

A company penalized last year by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for violating Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) conditions, including overextraction of minerals, has applied for a new mining exploration permit in Narra town in southern Palawan and has reportedly been endorsed by local municipal officials, according to a mining watchdog organization.

Platinum Group Metals Corp. (PGMC), whose ECC was stripped by the DENR on Sept. 25, 2006, has closed its operations, but it recently applied for exploration on a new site in the same municipality.

"They (PGMC officials) are back despite the punitive actions imposed on them by the DENR. They seem to enjoy the support of local officials despite violations they committed," Beth Maclang, advocacy officer of the Palawan NGO Network (PNNI) told the Inquirer.

Company officials repeatedly failed to return calls from the Philippine Daily Inquirer to respond to the issues raised against them by anti-mining groups.

### Planned operation

Roberto Nieto, a senior official of PGMC, however, was interviewed by a local radio station, wherein he stated that they planned to restart operations "within the next four months."

The PGMC case triggered a turf war between the Office of the Executive Secretary and the DENR during the term of then Environment Secretary Angelo Reyes, who had ordered the cancellation of PGMC's permit.

PGMC had convinced Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita to reverse Reyes' ruling on the complaint filed against it for overextraction and ECC violations.

The matter was resolved recently after Justice Secretary Raul Gonzales issued a legal opinion upholding the authority of the DENR to impose the sanction against mining companies, like PGMC.

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**'Restricted zone'**

Maclang claimed that Narra officials recently revised their zoning plans in order to reclassify the area being applied for by PGMC in Sitio Lapu-Lapu, Barangay Poblacion from its previous designation as "restricted zone" which means closed to mining, to "multiple-use zone."

"The municipality is one of the few municipalities in Palawan that deliberately revoked its own land classification plan in February 2006 just to accommodate the mining projects that have come to that place," Maclang said.

Maclang pointed out that PGMC mining operations in Barangay San Isidro, Narra had left in its wake problems such as laterite siltation of rice and agricultural lands.

PGMC paid damages to farmers whose farm lots were affected by siltation, records obtained by the Inquirer newspaper (parent company of INQUIRER.net) showed.

The PNNI recently closed ranks with the Roman Catholic Church to step up its anti-mining campaign in Palawan, taking PGMC as a rallying issue.

Some legislators critical of the mining company have vowed to scrutinize the firm's permit applications in the provincial level.

"They should first restore the mountains that they destroyed before even contemplating on filing another application," said Board Member Gil Acosta, chair of the environment and natural resources committee. ***Redempto Anda, Inquirer Southern Luzon***

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