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# Mining company hits town execs over siltation claims

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PUERTO PRINCESA CITY, Philippines -- The Berong Nickel Corp. (BNC), a mining company operating a large-scale nickel ore extraction project in the southern municipality of Quezon in Palawan, had criticized its host local government unit for claiming the company was covering up the environmental damages created by the mining project.

BNC environmental safety consultant Keith Halford denied Quezon Mayor Ronilo B. Caputilla's said in a Philippine Daily Inquirer interview that the company, which boasts of having a world-class mining operation facility, had been hiding its failures from the public.

"It simply is not true. There is no river siltation as claimed by the mayor, and we have never received a complaint of that nature," Halford told the Inquirer Wednesday.

A staff member of BNC, however, contradicted Halford's claim during a separate interview, admitting that the soil erosion systems that they had installed around the steep and sloping areas of the nickel mining concession had not been sufficient to hold water runoff that had silted the Berong river and the causeway during heavy rains.

"It is true that despite great efforts by BNC to establish safety measures, there is still siltation of the river when it rains," said a technical staff member who requested not to be named.

"I was there during typhoon Lando and I saw that the river and sea was blanketed in red," the source said.

Halford, however, insisted that the presence of soil erosion around their mining areas was caused by the natural physiology of the area and not by the excavation work being conducted by the mining company.

"It's physiologically impossible that it came from us. Our mine site is a good 11 kilometers away and we don't release water into the river," he claimed.

Local officials have raised concern that the mining operations of BNC, which is located in a high elevation area, could further damage the town's river system and coastal marine environment, a charge that BNC officials have sought to refute.

Caputilla announced earlier this week that the municipality of Quezon, which has the highest number of pending mining applications in Palawan with 37 mining tenement claims, will no longer endorse any new mining project because of its experience with BNC.

Asked if the independent monitoring body led by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) had been able to verify Caputilla's claim, the source said the Multisectoral Monitoring Team had not been able to reach the actual mining sites to make an adequate observation.

Halford pointed out that BNC's redundant water management systems located beside its stockpile was able to hold impounded water from two major typhoons, and that they did not release them into the connecting irrigation system unless it had been cleaned.

He added that they had prevented soil erosion from the mined-out site with the successful planting of new trees and vetiver grass.

He claimed that BNC, which began shipping nickel ore to buyers early this year, had spent over \$1 million in environmental safety measures alone.

"I challenge you to find anyone who has the same commitment to the environment as we do. And I hope you can find one so that it makes two of us," Halford said.

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