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DENR won't let court stand in way of port closure

By Yolanda Sotelo-Fuertes
Inquirer Northern Luzon

DAGUPAN CITY—THE DEPARTMENT OF Environment and Natural Resources Friday insisted it was shutting down the operations of a port contractor in Poro Point in a move that had been criticized as part of a squeeze play to boot the contractor out of the port on request of a close ally of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Joel Salvador, regional director of the DENR's Environmental Management Bureau, led EMB personnel and policemen in enforcing the cease-and-desist order (CDO) that his office issued last month to

the Poro Point Industrial Corp. (PPIC) Salvador said he issued the order after discovering that the PPIC had been operating the seaport without an environmental compliance certificate and was violating environmental laws.

The PPIC earlier questioned the DENR order that it must get a separate ECC, saying it is not an individual locator inside the Poro Point Special Economic and Freeport Zone but the "operator, manager and administrator of the seaport area."

"If an ECC is really needed, why are they demanding that we get it now when we're already operating for seven years?" said PPIC lawyer Brigido Dulay.

Workers and executives of the PPIC said the DENR ruling was part of a ploy to boot out the PPIC from the port.

A former official of the Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) and a Palace official pointed to Ilocos Sur Gov. Luis "Chavit" Singson as the one behind the squeeze play.

On Aug. 7, the regional trial court granted the PPIC a 72-hour temporary restraining order that was later extended to 20 days.

Silverio Mangaoang Jr., PPA port manager, stopped the PPA's operations on Friday in favor of the PPIC, saying the court might hold him in contempt if he continued to defy the TRO.

Salvador told Mangaoang that the PPIC had not complied yet with the DENR order.

Mangaoang said the DENR, not PPA, should enforce the CDO.

He said he signed a memorandum with the PPIC officials on Thursday that it would be the PPIC that would operate the seaport because of the TRO.

At 3 p.m. Friday, however, EMB officials and the police arrived at the PPIC's operations.

PPIC lawyer Brigido Dulay said he did not receive any information about DENR personnel going to the port and enforcing the CDO.



BRINGING his case to media in Manila, PPIC legal counsel Brigido Dulay shows a position paper issued by the BCDA in a media forum in Quezon City. RYAN LIM

