NATION
Study: Vizcaya rivers still 'alive' but aquatic life no longer safe

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BAYOMBONG, Nueva Vizcaya – The presence of mercury in certain Nueva Vizcaya rivers near known traditional **small-scale mining** sites, although quite alarming, is not yet enough to classify these rivers biologically dead, a recent study shows.

According to a research study conducted by the Nueva Vizcaya State University, the bodies of water in the areas of Runruno village in Quezon town and in Didipio, in Kasibu town could not yet be classified as dead rivers or streams since they are still capable of sustaining living organisms like plants, fishes and other aquatic resources.

However, the aquatic lives, including fishes and shellfish, found in the Didipio and Runruno Rivers and their nearby environs are no longer safe for human consumption as they were already accumulated with mercury as a result of the age-old **small-scale mining** operations in the two villages using the deadly substance.

"If nothing is done in the future about the levels of mercury in the said rivers, maybe in years time, these rivers will ultimately become biologically dead with no living organisms capable of surviving," Professor Elmer Cas-tañeto, director of NVSU's center for environmental resources management and sustainable development, said yesterday during a briefing with the media.

Even so, the study shows, much of the available shellfish and other plant life still harvestable in the rivers have shown a capacity to "bio-accumulate" mercury to such an extent as to make them practically inedible.

"Based on studies, the level of mercury in rivers surrounding Runruno is not yet that alarming. But what is alarming is that the mercury level at the mining areas and ball mills of small-scale miners in the area is very high that it can possibly affect these rivers, especially when typhoons and storms wipe out the miners' equipment," Castañeto said.

Dr. Marilou Gilo-Abon, NVSU president, likewise confirmed earlier findings in Didipio village showing the presence of mercury in the blood of some residents in the area.

"However, we could not be so sure about where the residents had been exposed to mercury, since investigation showed that those affected had been going back and forth between Runruno and Didipio," Castañeto said.

NVSU's findings on the high levels of mercury were confirmed earlier by the Natural Science Research Institute of the University of the Philippines.

"Thus we could not be accused of doctoring or exaggerating our research to make it look alarming nor was it replete with typographical errors," the University said.

In the last two years, the university had undertaken research of mercury content in the various rivers surrounding Runruno and Didipio villages, both traditional **small-scale mining** sites, with the findings showing presence of mercury in their bodies of water.

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