



## Today's Headlines

# Group asks gov't to require hiring of local engineers

**EMPLOYMENT of Filipino engineers should be made a requisite for the grant of mining project incentives based on a proposal submitted to the Board of Investments (BoI).**

The Council of Engineering Consultants of the Philippines (CECOPHIL) made the recommendation in line with the drafting of the 2011 Investment Priorities Plan (IPP), which lists mining among the business activities eligible for tax perks.

Doing so would enforce provisions in existing rules that require mining firms to prioritize Filipino suppliers, CECOPHIL President Virgilio A. Madrazo said at the sidelines of a public consultation late last week.

The implementing rules of the Philippine Mining Act of 1995 (Republic Act 7942) state that firms behind mining operations should "give preference to Filipino construction enterprises..." a Dec. 22 CECOPHIL letter to BoI Chairman Gregory L. Domingo states.

"It is worthy to note that the subsequent chapter of [the implementing rules] point to the need for technical and professional services, which happen to be within the range of capabilities of Filipino engineers," the letter adds.

"Our professional and technical expertise is at par with those which can be sourced outside the country. Thus, we look forward to the coming days wherein many of the services of the invigorated mining industry have been delivered and realized with the involvement of our local engineering firms."

But mining industry leaders opposed the proposal, saying firms need the prerogative to decide who to hire and that Filipino engineers are capable of bagging work by themselves.

"You cannot force the investors to accept any engineer. We are market-oriented. They will be hired as long as the engineers are competitive and maintain a high standard of construction work. The government will have to see the investor's side," Chamber of Mines Chairman Artemio F. Disini said in a telephone interview.

Mining industry observer Richard Mills, for his part, said: "Anything that restricts the flow of business will be a big concern for the international community."

Foreign mining firms "need to have their own people in place especially in the initial stages", Mr. Mills added. "Most firms bring in expatriates initially but move those jobs to senior Filipino engineers eventually."

Corazon H. Dichosa, BoI director for policy and planning, said at the consultation that the CECOPHIL proposal would be considered. She hinted at a rejection, however, saying: "Investors are supposed to be given a free hand."

-- Jessica Anne D. Hermosa

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