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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



'More climate change investments needed'

BY BELLA CARIASO

ENVIRONMENT Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga underscored the need for more investments to address biodiversity and climate change challenges at the 15th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15) in Montreal, Canada.

Yulo-Loyzaga highlighted the need to shore up biodiversity investments to establish the adaptive management and capacity of regions and communities.

"More investments in sci-

ence-informed mainstreaming are needed to build adaptive management at the subnational down to the community level," she said.

The Department of Environ-

ment and Natural Resources chief represented President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in the summit.

Yulo-Loyzaga reported the steps being undertaken by the Philippine government to address biodiversity and climate change challenges when she participated in the High-Level Panel on Financing Delivery of the Global Biodiversity Framework upon the invitation of the United Kingdom.

She said the Philippines has begun to align its official development assistance (ODA) with strategic goals such as extending support to the 10-Point Agenda for Financing Biodiversity and

the High Ambition Coalition.

"These aim to address the complex and interrelated linkages between biodiversity, climate change, and inclusive, equitable, and resilient development," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

In addition to the country's international environmental commitments, the official said the Philippine government has partnered with the One Planet Initiative to explore the potential development of a biodiversity credits market in the country.

As part of its initiatives, the Philippines, through the Department of Finance (DoF) has built

a Sustainable Finance Ecosystem, which gained strong support from the United Kingdom.

"The framework has enabled collaboration among the DoF, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, and the private sector in investing in enterprise risk management, ESG reporting, and the issuance of government and private green bonds," she added.

Yulo-Loyzaga announced that the Philippines has started establishing a national natural resource geospatial database and a natural capital account-

ing system which will aid in the prioritization of investments and actions. The country has also instituted a climate change tagging system in its national budget and crafted legislation on the protection of forests, wetlands, caves, mangroves, and reefs.

"We have adopted a whole of society and systemic risk-based approach where multi-lateral development banks and the private sector have a key role in achieving sustainable development, nature-based solutions and climate action, and the valuation of ecosystem services," Yulo-Loyzaga said.



Private sector financing of biodiversity stressed

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

[@jonlmayuga](#)

THE Philippines continues to advance and explore new ways to unlock finance for conservation and climate action through private sector investment.

This was disclosed by Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Antonia Y. Loyzaga, underscoring the importance of private-sector collaboration in measures to protect and restore biodiversity.

Loyzaga, head of the Philippine delegation to the 15th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, served as one of the panelists in Conservation International's event, "Innovations for a Nature Positive and Net Zero Future."

In that event held last December 14, the designated representative of President Ferdinand Romualdez R. Marcos Jr. said that traditional public sources of funding for biodiversity conservation are not sufficient. Loyzaga said this is the nexus that the private sector must be in.

The Philippine delegation is composed of officials from the Philippine Embassy in Ottawa, Permanent Mission to the UN, Department of Science and Technology, Department of Tourism, Department of Agriculture, National Commission on Indigenous Peoples and experts from civil society.

Loyzaga said the Philippines is focused on two general ways to encourage and enable private sector investment in addressing the biodiversity financing gap: adoption of a systemic, risk-based and whole-of-society approach; and the creation of a sustainable finance ecosystem.

A systemic, risk-based and whole-of-society approach underlines that biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development are inextrica-

bly linked, she said.

According to Loyzaga, more than 50 percent of global gross domestic product is linked directly to nature, but public sector funds support over 80 percent of annual spending.

"This challenge must be owned by all of us," she said. "Each stakeholder—the whole of government, private sector, philanthropies, academia, non-government organizations and communities—needs to contribute to our sustained action."

ESG goals

LOYZAGA said the Philippines is moving to institutionalize environmental social and governance (ESG) goals and operations and reporting through the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Currently, ESG reporting is voluntary in the Philippines.

This as the DENR chief bared that the Philippines is now espousing direct targeted engagement to develop partnerships with the private sector for ESG goals and operations.

Loyzaga said debt-for-nature agreements are being implemented. She added that the offset agreements with Conservation International and Procter & Gamble Co. (P&G) are being finalized to enable the identification and valuation of natural resources and ecosystem services. This in turn will provide P&G opportunities to reach its net-zero goal by 2050.

As for the construction of a sustainable finance ecosystem, Loyzaga shared that the Department of Finance (DOF) has already established a Sustainable Finance Roadmap.

This, she said, strengthened the synergies between the DOF, the SEC and the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas in enabling private financial institutions to issue green, development and social bonds and support projects that contribute to the just energy transition.



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EDITORIAL



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Boost biodiversity investment – DENR secretary

By Joel dela Torre

DESIGNATED by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to represent the country, Environment Secretary Antonio Loyzaga highlighted during a convention in Montreal, Canada the need to shore up biodiversity investments to establish the adaptive management and capacity of regions and communities.

"More investments in science informed mainstreaming are needed to build adaptive management at the subnational down to the community level," Loyzaga said at the 15th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15).

President Marcos Jr. named Loyzaga as head of the Philippine delegation which is composed of officials from the Philippine Embassy in Ottawa,

Permanent Mission to the UN, Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Agriculture (DA), National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), and experts from civil society.

During the meeting, Loyzaga reported the steps being undertaken by the Philippine government to address biodiversity and climate change challenges when she participated in the High-Level Panel on Financing Delivery of the Global Biodiversity Framework upon the invitation of the United Kingdom.

The environment chief also said that biodiversity finance will contribute to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on reducing inequality, poverty, hunger, health, clean water and energy, decent work and economic growth, sustainable cities, and respon-

sible consumption and production, among others.

This is in addition to the goal of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to attain SDGs 14 and 15 or life below water and life on land, respectively.

She shared that the Philippines has already begun to align its official development assistance (ODA) with "strategic goals" such as extending support to the 10-Point Agenda for Financing Biodiversity and the High Ambition Coalition.

These steps she pointed out, aim to address the complex and interrelated linkages between biodiversity, climate change, and inclusive, equitable, and resilient development. In addition to the country's international environmental commitments, Loyzaga said the Philippine government has partnered with the One Planet Ini-

tiative to explore the potential development of a biodiversity credits market in the country.



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ASEAN biodiversity upkeep needs global support

THE efforts of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity in fighting climate change have been recognized by no less than President Marcos.

In a press statement, Dr. Theresa Mindita Lim, ACB executive director, said it was crucial that the President himself stressed the organization's roles in conserving biodiversity, particularly in preserving the rich natural heritage of the region through the ASEAN Heritage Parks.

Marcos called on EU member countries and the rest of the world to act together to fight the effects of climate change and to ensure sustainable development at the opening ceremony of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations-European Union Commemorative Summit in Brussels, Belgium on December 14.

"We are currently losing huge chunks of our natural resources at a rate difficult to repair and impossible to replenish in our lifetime. The ACB's work is vital in preserving and growing ASEAN's rich natural heritage which serves as a main pillar of our culture and our economy," he said in his speech.

Lim said the ACB and EU's long-

standing partnership has supported the AHP and other nature conservation initiatives in the region to address biodiversity loss, improve community livelihoods, and increase resilience against climate change and future pandemics.

"As we recalibrate our gears and navigate towards these new and realistic targets, the ASEAN will need all the support that we can get from our national governments and our international partners to achieve these goals. We are indeed grateful for the strong support from our host country, the Philippines, in our regional conservation efforts," he said.

The ACB's headquarters is located in Los Baños, Laguna.

Established in 2005 as ASEAN's response to the challenge of biodiversity loss, it is an inter-governmental organization that facilitates cooperation and coordination among the 10 member-states and with regional and international organizations.

The President said that as the coordinator of the ASEAN-EU Dialogue on GreenTech and Innovation Mapping until 2024, the Philippines would

pursue collaboration and coordination with the EU to meet the aim of facilitating green technology transfer and cooperation between the two regions.

The EU-backed Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in the ASEAN Project provides the AHPs and protected areas with support for capacity development, monitoring and law-enforcement technology, and communication, education, and public awareness, among others.

Lim said Marcos' call for stronger ASEAN-EU cooperation is timely as biodiversity targets for the next decades are being agreed upon and finalized at the ongoing UN Biodiversity Conference in Montreal, Canada to advance regional goals and priorities for the conservation and sustainable use of the region's rich natural resources.

During the 19th ASEAN-India Summit held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in November, he also pitched the need to curb biodiversity loss to mitigate the destructive effects and im-



Landmark global biodiversity agreement: A gift for the planet and future generations

Amid the flurry of holiday-related activities, COP15 — formally known as the United Nations Biodiversity Conference — concluded last Monday, Dec. 19, 2022, in Montreal, Canada. What came out of the two-week meet was dubbed as a “landmark biodiversity agreement” — the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

The importance of this agreement couldn't be more stressed even though observers have noted the lack of public attention. The COP15, chaired by China and hosted by Canada, had gathered 188 governments who have agreed in principle on some steps to help avert the damage to biodiversity and aid in healing of the planet.

According to a statement from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the GBF aims to “address biodiversity loss, restore ecosystems, and protect indigenous rights.” The plan also includes “concrete measures” to “halt and reverse nature loss, including putting 30 percent of the planet and 30 percent of degraded ecosystems under protection by year 2030.” This was dubbed by the media as the “30 by 30 goal.”

“The stakes could not be higher: the planet is experiencing a dangerous decline in nature as a result of human activity. It is experiencing its largest loss of life since the dinosaurs. One million plant and animal species are now threatened with extinction, many within decades,” said the UN statement.

To be clear and actionable, the GBF consists of four overarching global goals to protect nature, including: halting human-induced extinction of threatened species and reducing the rate of extinction of all species tenfold by 2050; sustainable use and management of biodiversity to ensure that nature's contributions to people are valued, maintained, and enhanced; fair sharing of the benefits from the utilization of

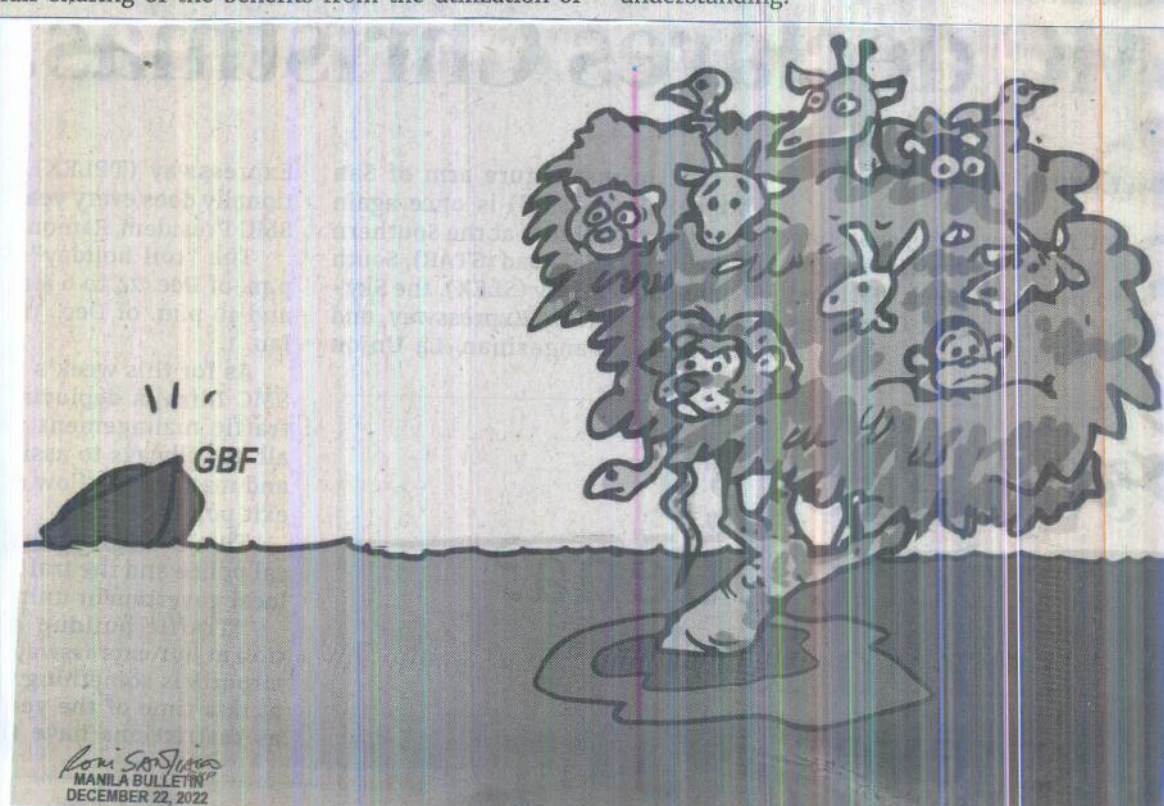
genetic resources, and digital sequence information on genetic resources; and that adequate means of implementing the GBF be accessible to all parties, particularly least developed countries, and small island developing states.

“Success will be measured by our rapid and consistent progress in implementing what we have agreed to. The entire UN system is geared to support its implementation so we can truly make peace with nature,” said UNEP executive director Inger Andersen.

To ensure accountability and fulfillment of goals, the GBF has 23 “targets” to achieve by 2030. Among the 23 targets that will matter to our country include “restoration of 30 percent of terrestrial and marine ecosystems;” “reduce to near zero the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance;” “halving global food waste;” among others.

What is important for us to also know is that during COP15, discussions were made on how much money developed countries will send to developing countries to address biodiversity loss. “It was requested that a Global Environment Facility set up a special trust fund (GBP Fund) to support the implementation of the GBF, in order to ensure an adequate, predictable, and timely flow of funds.” The approved text showed that rich countries will provide “at least US\$20 billion per year by 2025... and at least US\$30 billion per year by 2030,” which is approximately double, and then triple the current international aid for biodiversity.

This GBF agreement may not be noticed by most Filipinos, but there is one thing that everyone of us should know — the Philippines is one of the world's top biodiversity hotspots, and we are, sadly, putting our biodiversity at so much risk. The world is starting to do something about this but it would not be complete without our cooperation, empathy, and understanding.



Roni Sanjaya
MANILA BULLETIN
DECEMBER 22, 2022



DATE 22-22

Editorial

Funding climate action needs a broader approach

IN a recent commentary, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) complimented the Philippines for its focus on addressing climate change, noting that the country has set one of the most ambitious emissions-reduction targets — 75 percent by 2030 — among Southeast Asian countries. The ADB also highlighted the number of resources available to help finance climate action, including funding facilities managed by the bank, other multilateral funds and relatively recent innovations such as green bonds.

However, there is still a significant gap that must be crossed in order to connect the country's climate action ambitions to the resources needed to carry them out, and the ADB has made five recommendations to achieve that. As the ADB is one of the Philippines' most important development partners, the government ought to take the suggestions seriously.

To be fair, there has been a considerable amount of action already taken toward financing climate-related programs and projects, as ADB's analysts are careful to point out. Between 2018 and 2020, donor governments and multilateral institutions provided \$2.4 billion in climate-related development financing. Just this year, the Philippines' first sovereign sustainability bond issuance raised \$1 billion for funding green projects. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) has introduced policies to integrate environmental, social and governance issues into banking practice and encourage green lending. In addition, recent policy changes to liberalize foreign investment in renewable energy are intended to attract more development of sustainable and secure energy sources.

While praiseworthy, this is not nearly enough, and the implication is that the Philippines is not giving climate action the priority it should, or is at least not prioritizing it in the most effective way. One reason it is important to improve absorptive capacity in order to maximize available climate resources is that most of the Philippines' climate goals are, as a matter of policy, dependent on outside assistance. Almost all of the country's emissions-reduction pledge, for example, is conditional. According to the terms of the Philippines' commitment formally presented to the UN, the country only guarantees a 2.7-percent reduction in emissions through programs it can fund on its own, with the remaining 72.3 percent dependent on funding from elsewhere, presumably the advanced economies that are responsible for most of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.

And even that modest, self-financed target may be doubtful. Although the economy is gaining strength, it is still beset by the lingering effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath, including high inflation and a significant amount of government debt.

We agree with the implied view of the ADB, however, that climate investment and economic recovery are not mutually exclusive, and that climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives, if managed properly, can be excellent economic drivers. Thus, the first recommendation, to increase government spending on climate-related needs, is quite sensible.

The second recommendation is to do more to mobilize the available international financing. Here the ADB seems to be suggesting that government planners need to propose more projects that are a better "fit" for potential funding sources, and retool others that may not necessarily have a climate action goal to include more sustainability benefits. Investors, after all, will only invest when they are presented with something to invest in.

The third recommendation recognizes the traditionally conservative and slow-to-innovate nature of the Philippine banking sector. While the BSP's policy initiatives are good, ADB explains, more work is needed in building capacity in banks to integrate them into their business. Simply imposing standards does not ensure they will be met, as we have seen with lending shortfalls to agriculture and small businesses.

The fourth recommendation, attracting more private investment, is the one area where the Philippines may already be making great strides. Time will tell whether the recent opening up of the renewable energy sector will bear fruit.

Finally, and we believe this may be the most critical recommendation, ADB stresses the need to mobilize and build the capacity of local governments. Local communities are the ones which feel the effects of climate change most keenly, and are where efforts towards adaptation and mitigation are most effective. Channeling funds to their needs is one thing, but building their awareness and know-how to be able to use resources most effectively is absolutely vital.



The new wonder of Boracay

SINCE my hometown, Tagbilaran City, is 15 minutes drive from the shorelines of the fabulous Panglao beaches, I had not really visited Boracay for many years now.

Visiting Boracay lately greeted us with a new sense of wonder about how "good can still be better"—and that magic has taken place after the government closed the island for six months and liberated it from "the curse of civilization."

For a while, greed for profit, sloth and plain unsanitary habits converted into a virtual "cesspool" what was once the "magic of an island" whose long pristine white beach and sparkling blue waters are a balm to a soul especially in the afternoon "sunset" view, a taste of heaven on earth.

Former President Rodrigo Duterte sent his DENR secretary as his cop to clean up the mess. Secretary Roy Cimatu is a former AFP chief of staff, who may be soft-spoken but can be as hard as nails if he wants to. Strong-willed as a bull, and against the wishes and angry resistance of some capitalists and LGU officials in Boracay, the government cleaned up and brought back Boracay to its original splendor.

The sewage and solid waste management were restored and illegal pipes spilling dirty sewage into the seas were cut off. The use of plastic was banned and cleanliness strictly observed on the sand and seas. No more disturbing the sand with crazy sandcastles and stuff, no more peddlers of what-not on the shores, and unsightly massage activities blocking one's path. No more stray dogs and their unwanted feces and piss.

No more hustlers annoying tourists, no more thugs posing as Good Samaritans.



FINEX FREE
ENTERPRISE

Zoilo 'Bingo' Dejaresco III

with registered numbers.

Stations Two and Three are meant to serve specific markets, while Zero is where the super-prime hotels sprawl. Boracay has preserved its diving sites and water sports galore in the open seas. The mountains are still an option to trek. And the subdued relaxing music and dancing all stop at 10 p.m.—the better to sleep earlier or get a hotel massage and get ready for the next active day.

There is a great variety of food and shopping places to choose from. And one walks through Boracay now feeling so safe, clean, and at peace with the world. No overpricing and haggling with creatures with bad intentions.

No wonder, if one visits Boracay today, it will only make one year to come back for more. There are just too many other islands to hop, visit and swim. The Caticlan to Boracay transfer is now smooth as silk, unlike before. On the other side of Boracay lies the great New Coast area—planted with many high structures and edifices developed by Megaworld for those who want a detached quiet rest from the bustling Boracay crowd and just descend to the beaches when they feel like it.



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The New Wonder Of Boracay

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At least in the Station One area, the best affordable and scenic area, no more people and men and women in various stages of undress—smoking grass, cigars and sniffing shabu. No more loud, irritating music and gyrating folks as if they owned the place.

Most importantly, the heretofore-docked bancas were told to get lost and all establishments were asked to observe the “25 plus 5 meters easement rule” of structures from the shoreline. “Do it yourself or we will demolish you” was the barking order. Some big fish were not spared: national boxer Manny Pacquiao’s resort on an island was closed, and so were the houses of prominent politicians near Diniwid Beach and Station Zero.

The government widened the streets by implementing easement rules for the establishments, and built new pavements for pedestrians. E-trikes, which can carry five people, now practically rule the roads—noiseless, pollutant-free and with courteous drivers with names emblazoned at the back of their tee shirts

Boracay then, Bohol next. This seems to be the anthem in Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco’s model for the Alona Beach area, a similar but shorter stretch of white sand in Panglao, when she visited the place recently. Alona Beach is what Boracay was before the clean-up—a definite eyesore amid an otherwise resplendent beach sand and sea. A huge budget will be set up for this specific purpose.

After Panglao, all other similarly situated tourist beaches in the country should copy many of Boracay’s bold steps to make their island paradise oh-so-inviting to tourists. And then some.

This way we can reclaim our title as a nation with one of the world’s most exciting and cleanest beaches for tourists.

Bingo Dejaresco, a former banker, is a financial consultant and media practitioner. He is a Life and media member of Finex. His views here, however, are personal and do not necessarily reflect those of Finex and BUSINESSMIRROR. Dejarescobingo@yahoo.com)



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Plunder raps eyed vs Bantag

By RALPH EDWIN VILLANUEVA

Bureau of Corrections officer-in-charge Gregorio Catapang is eyeing the filing of a plunder case against former BuCor chief Gerald Bantag over the supposed unfinished construction of buildings at the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) in Muntinlupa City that were almost fully paid for by the government.

In an interview with "The Chiefs" on Signal TV's *One News* channel, Catapang said he had asked Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla for "support" in filing the plunder case against Bantag.

He was referring to the

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Plunder From Page 1

P1-billion fund supposedly withdrawn by the BuCor even if the projects were not fully completed.

"We already paid 95 percent of the cost of building up the facilities. But, we came to realize that it was only 60 percent finished, so we would like to look into this, especially since these are public funds that need to be accounted for," he said.

"I informed the secretary about this. I need assistance that the case is solid and he assured me of his support in my request to file a plunder case against Bantag," he added.

Bantag, along with his deputy Ricardo Zulueta, are charged with last October's murders of 63-year-old radio commentator Percy Lapid (real name: Percival Mabasa) and Cristito Palaña, also known as Jun Villamor, an inmate who allegedly brokered the contract to kill the broadcast journalist.

Illegal excavation

A case will also be filed against Bantag for the illegal excavation found within the NBP reservation in Muntinlupa City.

During the interview, Catapang cited how the Department of Environment and National Resources (DENR) called the digging "illegal."

"The DENR already made their findings and there was indeed an illegal quarry in the director's quarters. Somebody should be blamed for it," he said.

"And, because of those findings, we will file a case against director general Bantag for illegal excavation, and also with Agua Tierra Oro Mina (ATOM) Development Corp., because they already confirmed they were told to do the digging," he added.

When Catapang discovered the digging and made it public, Bantag said he had wanted a deep diving pool in the premises for divers like himself.

But Remulla revealed that Bantag had told him earlier that the digging was a hunt for Yamashita gold.

Catapang told "The Chiefs" that they are now looking into allegations that ATOM donated more than 200

hectares of land, but the titles were withdrawn "all of a sudden."

He had said certain BuCor officials supposedly allowed the sudden withdrawal of the donations without informing him.

Under probe

Yesterday, Catapang also said he is investigating allegations Zulueta had ordered a person deprived of liberty (PDL) to stab another prisoner who had a disagreement with him inside Bantag's office last February.

"We are investigating the PDL that (got) stabbed, and we heard that it was ordered by Zulueta," Catapang said in an interview with *dzBB* radio.

The wounded prisoner has since been transferred to the correction facility in Leyte, he added.

"When I visited Leyte, he was still at the hospital. I said bring them here so we can be sure [that he is safe]," Catapang said.

He said complaints will be filed either by the end of the week or next week.

'Come out'

Maj. Gen. Jonnel Estomo, National Capital Region Police Office director, dared Zulueta to come out and face the complaints against him "personally."

"If he is really innocent, let him personally face (the complaints) and not through a video call," Estomo, speaking partly in Filipino, told reporters.

Estomo was referring to the video call with ABS-CBN facilitated by Zulueta's lawyer, in which he denied involvement in the killing of Lapid and Villamor.

Estomo said Zulueta's refusal to come out in the open is an indication he is "afraid of justice" being handed down.

An immigration lookout bulletin order has been issued against Zulueta and Bantag.

Meanwhile, as far as BuCor reforms are concerned, Catapang said they are also expected to be "full steam ahead" by next year as Remulla has already given him marching orders to close down the NBP.

- With Emmanuel Tupas



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CHINA 'RECLAMATION' CITED; 'FAKE NEWS,' SAYS EMBASSY

By Frances Mangosing
@FMangosingINQ

China has been carrying out reclamation at four previously unoccupied features in the Spratly Islands, including two that are claimed by the Philippines, in what "Western officials" said were efforts by Beijing to change the status quo in the South China Sea, according to a Bloomberg report.

FROM A1

Chinese fishing vessels operating as "de facto maritime militias" controlled by Beijing carried out the construction activities at the maritime features over the past decade, according to the report.

The officials said the reclamation is "part of Beijing's long-running effort to strengthen claims to disputed territory in a region critical to global trade."

China has built seven artificial islands on reefs in the South China Sea and transformed them into military outposts with barracks, radars and several with airstrips.

The DFA said it took note of the Bloomberg article.

"We are seriously concerned as such activities contravene the Declaration of Conduct on the South China Sea's undertaking on self-restraint and the 2016 Arbitral Award. We have asked relevant Philippine agencies to verify and validate the contents of this report," it said.

2002 agreement

DFA spokesperson Tessie Daza told reporters such activities would violate the 2002 agreement between China and the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean).

The agreement reaffirms the peaceful resolution of disputes,

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on Wednesday said the Philippines was "seriously concerned" and that the reclamation violated a 2002 agreement between China and Southeast Asian nations not to occupy new features or raise tension in the South China Sea and also the 2016 arbitral award.

The report comes two weeks ahead of President Marcos' visit to Beijing for talks with Chinese freedom of navigation and overflight, and the exercise of self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would affect the peace and stability in the region.

The nonbinding accord calls on the parties to refrain from "inhabiting on the presently uninhabited islands, reefs, shoals, cays and other features" in the South China Sea.

The 2016 ruling by the international arbitral tribunal reaffirmed Philippine sovereignty over its EEZ and invalidated China's historical claims to virtually all of the South China Sea.

In Beijing, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning called the Bloomberg report "completely groundless."

"Not taking action on uninhabited islands and reefs of the South China Sea is a solemn consensus reached by China and Asean countries through actions and declarations by each party," she said.

"The development of China-Philippines relations currently has good momentum, and the two sides will continue to appropriately handle maritime issues through friendly consultation," she added.

It's 'by Vietnam'

In Manila, the Chinese Embassy referred to SCSPI's Twitter post which said that of the four reefs mentioned, there were "no signs of land reclamation" on three—Lankiam Cay,

leader Xi Jinping.

The Chinese Embassy in Manila dismissed the report as "fake news," citing a Twitter post by the South China Sea Probing Initiative (SCSPI), a research group based in China.

The report on Tuesday night said the fresh reclamations were taking place on Malvar (Eldad) Reef in the northern Spratlys, Julian Felipe (Whitsun) Reef, Sandy Cay and Pana-

ta (Lankiam Cay) Island.

Sandy Cay and Panata Island are claimed by the Philippines, while Julian Felipe Reef is within the country's 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Panata is 13 km northeast of Philippine-occupied Loaita Island and 53.3 km from Chinese-held Zamora (Subi) Reef.

About 450 km to the east of Lankiam Cay is Palawan, the

nearest major landmass.

The military's Western Command said that it had observed "persistent presence of China militia vessels" in the areas identified in the Bloomberg report.

"As of this time, validation and assessment of all information gathered from those areas are ongoing," it said in response to a query from the Inquirer.

The report, quoting unidentified Western officials, said "some sandbars and other formations in the area expanded more than 10 times in size in recent years."

"They warned that Beijing's latest construction activity indicates an attempt to advance a new status quo, even though it's too early to know whether China would seek to militarize them," it said.

features [that] now sit permanently above the high-tide line."

Marcos trip to Beijing

According to the Washington-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, what Vietnam has occupied was Sand Cay, which is 78 km farther away from Pag-asa.

Opposition Sen. Risa Hontiveros said the President should directly raise the unabated illegal entry by Chinese vessels into the West Philippine Sea during their talks.

"I expect nothing less than a firm assertion of our sovereign and legal rights in the West Philippine Sea," Hontiveros told reporters.

Mr. Marcos should not enter into any agreement with Xi unless China recognizes the Philippines' EEZ, she said.

She reminded the President that he had declared in his first State of the Nation Address that he would not allow any foreign entity to occupy "even a square inch" of the country's territory.

Hontiveros said China should also first comply with the 2016 arbitral ruling if it really wanted to engage in joint oil exploration with the Philippines in the WPS.

"Only then could both parties start to truthfully and faithfully discuss a joint exploration," she said.

—WITH REPORTS FROM JACOB LAZARO, MARLON RAMOS AND AFP/INQ



SANDY CAY A Navy sailor plants a Philippine flag on Sandy Cay during a visit on June 25, 2022. A Bloomberg report says China is reclaiming land at this sandbar near Pag-asa Island and at three other maritime features in the South China Sea. —MARIANNE BERMUDEZ

Eldad Reef and Whitsun Reef.

But there "is indeed reclaiming" at Sandy Cay but it was "conducted by Vietnam," SCSPI said. SCSPI added that it was "ridiculous to blame China" since Sandy Cay has been occupied by the Vietnamese since 1974.

"The reporter of Bloomberg News should do more homework on SCS issue," it said.

The Inquirer sought comment from the Vietnam Embassy, but it did not immediately respond.

The report included pictures taken by satellite showing a Chinese vessel offloading an amphibious excavator at Eldad Reef in 2014.

New land formations have since appeared above water over the past year, and images showed large holes, debris piles and excavator tracks at a feature that used to be only partly exposed at high tide.

On Panata Island, one feature "had been reinforced with

a new perimeter wall over the course of just a couple of months last year."

Physical changes were observed at Julian Felipe Reef, where Chinese ships have remained since last year despite repeated protests from the Philippines, as well as at Sandy Cay, a small strip of sand bars between Philippine-occupied Pag-asa (Thitu) Island and Chinese-held Zamora Reef. Both were "previously submerged



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PHIL concerned over reported SCS land-reclamation activity by China

THE Philippine government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), has expressed concern over China's latest reported reclamation activities in some unoccupied features in the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea (SCS).

Bloomberg reported Tuesday night that China is constructing on several unoccupied land features in the contested waters, citing warnings from Western officials that these latest activities indicate an "attempt to advance a new status quo, even though it's too early to know whether China would seek to militarize them."

Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Ma. Teresita Daza said the DFA is checking the veracity of the report with relevant Philippine government agencies.

"The department takes note of the Bloomberg article on reported reclamation activities by China in unoccupied features of the Spratlys. We are seriously concerned as such activities contravene the Declaration of Conduct on the South China Sea's [DOC] undertaking on self-restraint and the 2016 Arbitral Award," she said in a statement issued on Wednesday. "We have asked relevant Philippine agencies to verify and validate

the contents of this report."

The DOC, signed by China and the 10 Asean member-nations in 2002, explicitly states that all parties would exercise self-restraint from conducting activities that complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability, including "refraining from action of inhabiting on the presently uninhabited islands, reefs, shoals, cays, and other features" in the SCS.

China and the 10-member bloc are negotiating a code of conduct, which builds upon and would serve as the upgraded version of the non-binding DOC.

In a separate statement, the Chinese Embassy in Manila tacitly denied the allegation and tagged the Bloomberg report as "fake news."

China is building up several unoccupied land features in the SCS, according to Western officials, an unprecedented move they said was part of Beijing's long-running effort to strengthen claims to disputed territory in a region critical to global trade.

While China has previously built out disputed reefs, islands and land formations in the area that it had long controlled—and militarized them with ports, runways and other infrastructure—the officials pre-



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DFA spokesperson Ma, Teresita Daza PNA FILE PHOTO

sented images of what they called the first known instances of a nation doing so on territory it doesn't already occupy. They warned that Beijing's latest construction activity indicates an attempt to advance a new status quo, even though it's too early to know whether China would seek to militarize them.

Fishing fleets that operate as de facto maritime militias under the control of authorities in Beijing have carried out construction activities at four unoccupied features in the

Spratly Islands over the past decade, according to the officials, who asked not to be identified to discuss sensitive information. Some sand bars and other formations in the area expanded more than 10 times in size in recent years, they said.

The officials said new land formations have appeared above water over the past year at Eldad Reef in the northern Spratlys, with images showing large holes, debris piles and excavator tracks at a site that used to be only partially exposed at high

tide. A 2014 photo of the reef, previously reported to have been taken by the Philippine military, had depicted what the officials said was a Chinese maritime vessel offloading an amphibious hydraulic excavator used in land reclamation projects.

They said similar activities have also taken place at Lankiam Cay, known as Panata Island in the Philippines, where a feature had been reinforced with a new perimeter wall over the course of just a couple of months last year. Other images they presented showed physical changes at both Whitsun Reef and Sandy Cay, where previously submerged features now sit permanently above the high-tide line.

Tensions between China and other claimants in the South China Sea—the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Brunei—have been rising for years as Beijing invested more in naval and coast guard ships to enforce its claims.

The Spratly Islands, historically tiny and uninhabited, have taken on greater geopolitical significance given they straddle one of the world's busiest shipping lanes and could have military significance, particularly if tensions over Taiwan trigger a regional war. PNA and Bloomberg News



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Villar: Plant trees to take care of the environment

CITING the benefits of planting for the environment, Senator Cynthia A. Villar urged the public to participate in planting activities.

Aside from making the environment beautiful, Villar said that environmentalists all over the world preach that planting trees and shrubs improve soil and water conservation.

"It helps prevent land erosion, intercept the runoff and reduce the severity of floods, increase wildlife habitat, store carbon dioxide that help in reducing global warming, moderate local climate by providing shade, regulate temperature extremes and improve

the land's capacity to adapt to climate change," Villar said.

Planting of agricultural products also generates employment for farmers, Villar added.

"It also strengthened food security in communities in our country," Villar, the chairperson of the committees on agriculture and food and environment and natural resources, said.

She expressed confidence that the public will preserve the health and survival of trees and other plants.

"Let us exert efforts to take care of the plantation, let us not forget to take care of them to ensure they

will bring us benefits," she further stated.

Being a staunch advocate of the environment and agriculture, the senator said she is happy participating in planting activities.

She proudly related their family and the Villar SIPAG (Social Institute for Poverty Alleviation and Governance) had launched planting in their home city of Las Piñas.

In 2005, they started planting bamboos at the riverside of Zapote River as part of their "Sagip Ilog River Rehabilitation Program."

Macon Ramos-Araneta