

26 January 2023, Thursday



DENR

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EDITORIAL



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Stop Bohol town water project, DENR asked

A town mayor in Bohol is asking the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to stop a neighboring municipality from extracting water in their jurisdiction.

In a letter to DENR Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, Sevilla Mayor Juliet Dano sought to stop a P95-million water project of the Balilihan local government unit (LGU) in the town.

"As indicated in its water permit, LGU Balilihan should be extracting water from Bugwak Spring in Sto. Niño in Balilihan, but the truth is they have been extracting water from Bugwak Spring in Magsaysay,

Sevilla contrary to their approved water permit," Dano said.

He said "utmost attention and immediate action" are needed, noting that the project is a violation of DENR regulations.

Dano filed a similar petition before the National Water Resources Board (NWRB).

"The actual (water) diversion point is located in Magsaysay, Sevilla as evidenced by the installations made by the DPWH (Department of Public Works and Highways)-Bohol first engineering district," Dano said in her petition before the NWRB.

— Romina Cabrera



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REIMATE OPINION

ANG INYONG LINGKOD

NI DR. HILDA C. ONG

SA pagpasok ng bagong taon 2023, ipagpapatuloy ng Manila Water ang kanilang pangako sa pagbibigay ng libreng wastewater services sa mga customer nito, dahil inanunsyo nito ang iskedyul ng buwanang desludging caravan nito para sa 1st quarter ng 2023.

Ngayong Enero, ang mga serbisyong desludging ng Manila Water ay magsisimula sa Barangay 765, 767, 775,

790, 791, 796, at 798 sa Lungsod ng Maynila, Barangay Bagong Ilog sa Pasig City, Barangay Batingan at Mahabang Parang sa Binangonan at Barangay Mahabang Parang sa Angono, Rizal.

Para sa buwan ng Pebrero, ang desludging caravan ay iikot sa Barangay Magtanggol at Tabacalera sa munisipalidad ng Pateros, at Tandang Sora at Krus na Ligas sa Quezon City. Sa mga residente ng Mahabang

Parang, Angono, Barangay Batingan at Mahabang Parang sa Binangonan, Barangay 765, 767, 775, 790, 791, 796, at 798 sa Lungsod ng Maynila, at Barangay Bagong Ilog sa Pasig lungsod, babalik muli ng Manila Water.

Sa buwan ng Marso, babalik ang desludging caravan sa parehong barangay sa Maynila, Barangay Bagong Ilog sa Pasig City, Tandang Sora at Krus na Ligas sa Quezon City at bibisita rin sa Barangay UP Campus. Sa mga customer sa Barangay Martirez del 96 at Santo Rosario-Kanluran sa Pateros, Barangays 764, 769, 776,

778, 877, 878, 879, at 880 sa Manila, Barangay Sta. Lucia sa Pasig City, at Barangay San Isidro sa Cainta, Rizal, kasama rin sa iskedyul na seserbisyuhan ng kompanya.

Ang pagpapalinis ng mga septic tank tuwing lima hanggang pitong taon ay mahalaga, hindi lamang para sa regular na pagpapanatili ng septic tank, kundi pati na rin para sa pangangalaga ng kapaligiran at ng komunidad.

"From January to September 2022, we have siphoned more than 84,000 septic tanks in our service area. This year, we aim to ramp up our desludging caravan and hit our goal of desludging more than 100,000 septic tanks, which is crucial in ensuring that the collected used water will be properly treated through Manila Water's septage treatment plants before it is released back to bodies of water. This equates to reduction in public health risk, and water pollution," ayon kay Dittie Galang,

Corporate Communications Department Head ng Manila Water.

"With this, we continue to encourage our customers to avail of these services when scheduled, to not incur added cost to their water bill," dagdag pa niya.

Kung nais malaman ang tiyak na petsa ng pagbisita ng desludging caravan sa iyong mga barangay, maaaring makipag-ugnayan ang mga customer sa kani-kanilang barangay council o sa pamamagitan ng pagtawag sa Manila Water Consumer Desk Hotline 1627.

Kung nais ninyo malaman ang **TAMANG IMPORMASYON, TAMANG SERBISYO** ni **AGARANG SERBISYO LADY, i-search sa YOUTUBE CHANNEL, "HILDA ONG"** at sa **Facebook Fanpage "TV RADIO HILDA ONG"**. Huwag kalimutan i-click ang salitang **"SUBSCRIBE"**, **"LIKE"** at **"SHARE"**.



House panel OK's bill protecting areas of 'West Philippine Sea'

By Beatriz Marie D. Cruz

A PHILIPPINE House of Representatives committee on Wednesday approved a bill that seeks to declare parts of the Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea protected zones.

The House committee on natural resources endorsed House Bill 6373, which seeks to protect the three nautical miles around the Kalayaan group of islands and Scarborough Shoal.

These areas are within the Southeast Asian nation's exclusive economic zone, which it calls the West Philippine Sea.

The measure bans fishing, dumping of toxic chemicals and littering in these areas. People are also barred from introducing exotic species and installing structures or enclosures.

The bill will also set up a Kalayaan Island Group and Scarborough Shoal Protected Area Management Board and a management office. It will also create a joint oversight committee, composed of congressmen.

Party-list Rep. Eduardo C. Villanueva, who sponsored the measure, cited a 2019 study by the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute that found coral reefs in the Kalayaan islands, particularly Thitu Island, Lankiam Cay and Sabina Shoal were damaged by illegal activities such as blast fishing.

"The coral reefs in Kalayaan islands serve as breeding ground for fishes," he told the hearing on Wednesday. "The same reefs become the source of fingerlings and larvae, which are carried away by sea currents to coral reefs in other parts of the country."

"The disruption of coral reefs in Kalayaan island group and Scarborough Shoal will adversely impact fish production in the country."

Mr. Villanueva said the bill only seeks to protect marine resources and has nothing to do with the Philippines sea dispute with China.

China's alleged encroachment and poaching, construction of artificial islands in areas of the sea within the Philippines exclusive economic zone has allegedly damaged marine species and their habitats.

A 2016 ruling by a United Nations-backed arbitration court voided China's claim to more than 80% of the waterway based on a 1940s map.

FULL STORY



Read the full story by scanning the QR code or by typing the link

<bit.ly/WestPhilSea0126>



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House panel OKs bill declaring parts of WPS 'protected areas'

By **RYAN PONCE PACPACO**

THE House committee on natural resources on Wednesday approved House Bill (HB) No. 6373, which designates certain areas in the Kalayaan Islands Group (KIG) in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) as marine "protected areas."

HB 6373, authored by Palawan Representative Edward Hagedorn and sponsored by CIBAC Party-List Rep. Bro. Eddie C. Villanueva, aims to declare as "Marine Protected Areas" (MPA) the area three-nautical miles (around ten square kilometers area) sur-

rounding the islands of KIG and Scarborough Shoal to protect the country's marine resources in the area.

According to the bill, as per local studies, the three-nautical miles area (roughly ten square kilometers) protected area is preferable as it will already give "safe and protected habitat space for young marine organisms to grow."

Villanueva said he emphasizes that the bill is only for protecting the marine environment - particularly in the Kalayaan Islands - which is situated within the country's exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and "nothing about territorial disputes" in WPS.

He said that a study by the UP-Marine Science Institute in 2019 found that coral reefs in Kalayaan Islands - particularly in Pag-asa Island, Panata Island, and Sabina Shoal - were already damaged by, apparently, illegal activities such as blast fishing. The bill is thus an operationalization of proposals from local marine experts to declare the Kalayaan Islands as MPAs to protect the coral reefs therein.

A 2014 study by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) showed that the Kalayaan Islands comprise 30% of the country's total coral reefs and serve as the breeding grounds for fish and marine species in the country.



EDITORIAL

Free to fish, safe, too?

YEAH, right: Filipinos are free to fish in Ayungin Shoal as the area is part of the country's exclusive economic zone and continental shelf.

It's easy for them to say so, but is it safe for the fishermen to actually do so?

We have naval defense and maritime security provided by the Navy and the Coast Guard, respectively, but both have not stopped the harassment by intrusive foreign vessels, mainly Chinese, of local fishermen within our territorial waters.

PN and PCG vessels seem to be always seem to be out of sight or far away every time fishermen encounter hostile foreign ships during them away from traditional fishing areas within our maritime waters.

Like proverbial cops responding to a crime scene, Navy and Coast units always arrive too late – long after the incident happened and the hostile parties have left the scene.

"Ayungin Shoal is part of the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf of the Philippines. The Philippines is entitled to exercise sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the area, without any intervention from another country," Department of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Ma. Teresita Daza said.

"Filipino fishermen are free to exercise their rights and take whatever they are due under Philippine and international law, particularly the 1982 UNCLOS and the final and binding 2016 Arbitral Award," Daza added.

The DFA issued the statement Tuesday amid reports that the Chinese Coast Guard drove away a Filipino boat while fishing in the waters off Ayungin Shoal on January 9.

The incident was reported to the Philippine Coast Guard on January 20 by the Filipino fishing boat's captain Lito Al-os, who said the Chinese Coast Guard vessel 5204 at that time maneuvered towards FFB KEN-KEN at a distance of approximately 800 yards and deployed a rigid hull inflatable boat (RHIB).

The CCG personnel onboard the RHIB gestured to the Filipino fishermen to leave the area, FFB KEN-KEN altered course and departed Ayungin Shoal.

The CCG, however, continued to shadow the boat while underway to Boxall Reef, the boat captain said.

The government has established a permanent presence in Ayungin Shoal in 1995 with the actively commissioned Philippine naval vessel, the BRP Sierra Madre, she added.

The DFA is currently waiting for official reports from relevant government agencies, which would be the basis for its diplomatic action on the incident.

Daza said the DFA monitors any developments in the West Philippine Sea, especially following the discussions between President Marcos and Chinese President Xi Jinping during the former's state visit to China.



Should forestry remain a licensed profession?

NOT many people know this,

but I hold a bachelor's degree in forestry from the University of the Philippines Los Baños, and one of my master's degrees is in forestry. Forestry was my discipline prior to becoming a political scientist. > **ContrerasA11**



ON THE
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CONTRERAS**

■ CONTRERAS FROM A1

Should forestry remain a licensed profession?

However, I am not a licensed and registered forester, simply because I did not take the forest licensure exam. There is a law that regulates the practice of the forestry profession. Republic Act 10690, passed in 2015, which repealed RA 6239, stipulates in Section 5 that the following practices of forestry shall be regulated, and only licensed foresters can legally perform them:

(a) Different aspects of actual or supervisory activities or services such as the parametric classification of lands of the public domain and subclassification and capability determination of forest lands; inventory of forest or timber and other forest products; reconnaissance and survey of road locations and quarry sites; planning and implementing of harvesting operations and timber improvement; scaling and grading of, and manifesting taxes on logs and derivative wood products as well as other forest products preparation of designs, plans and specifications of forest products processing plants; treatment of wood and other forest products; inspection and investigation of harvesting and processing plants; preparation, certification or authentication, or both, of log and lumber dealers, sawmill operators and other mill test reports; planning and implementation of forest nursery, afforestation, reforestation, industrial and community-based tree plantation, tree farm and agroforestry farm projects; planning and implementation of forest parks, wilderness areas, coastal areas and other protected area systems development; planning and implementation of forest protection systems, forest and soil resources conservation measures; and conduct of environmental risk scoping and environmental impact assessment;

(b) The preparation and conduct of feasibility studies pertaining to natural forest and plantation forest management, watershed management, range or grazing land management, wildlife and biodiversity systems management, wood technology and timber engineering, wood products manufacturing and marketing management, and technical or management consultancy;

(c) The conduct of forest experiments, research and development, training and extension concerning forestry, and the teaching of forestry subjects in any accredited college or school of forestry;

(d) Government institutional activities or services wherein the principal policy and strategy is forestry, and the practice of professional forestry is essential, such as in the undertaking, supervision, or administration of studies, programs, stations, centers, community/provincial/regional offices, and such other activities or services that, by law, should be inherently exercised by professional foresters; and

(e) Forestry activities and services required by local government units, private corporations, foundations, non-government organizations and foreign assisted projects.

Unfortunately, it is a fact that many of these tasks are no longer performed solely by licensed foresters, and much of the work of foresters are now being done by other professionals from allied fields in natural resources management, environmental science and the social sciences.



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The more fundamental alteration of the professional landscape is that the core of the purview of the work of foresters, which is the regulation and supervision of logging operations, has now been radically diminished with the banning of logging from natural forests, and the tight regulation of harvesting even from plantations. In addition, management planning and regulation of forest parks, wilderness areas, coastal areas and other protected area systems, and of forest protection systems and forest and soil resources conservation measures, are no longer confined to forestry but now involve graduates from other disciplines. The conduct of environmental risk scoping and environmental impact assessment is no longer limited to licensed foresters. The preparation of feasibility studies in relation to forest management and the wood industry is no longer the sole province of foresters, but now includes resource economists.

Even inside the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), particularly in the regional, provincial, and community environment and natural resource offices, tasks that were previously reserved for licensed foresters are now performed by DENR officers who have other professional training aside from forestry. This was further amplified when the DENR reorganized to streamline its technical departments and units and structure them no longer along sectors, where forestry was distinct from others, but along functional tasks.

It is not entirely clear if the Professional Regulatory Board for Foresters, with the approval of the Professional Regulatory Commission (PRC), has amended and removed certain tasks defined in RA 10690 to be the jurisdiction of licensed foresters since the release of its implementing rules and regulations in 2016. It should be noted that in Section 5, letter c of the law, which is quoted above, the teaching of forestry subjects, even the conduct of experiments, may only be done by licensed foresters. It is now a fact that non-licensed foresters but with advanced degrees not only in forestry but in other disciplines such as economics, environmental science, the social sciences, development communication, and earth and natural sciences, are now teaching in colleges that offer degrees in forestry.

We thus have a profession whose graduates are facing a professional landscape that, by law, are supposed to have well-defined niches of work for them to perform, but now find themselves confronting an uncertain terrain. And yet, we keep on producing foresters, requiring them to take board exams, and we still have more than 70 universities and colleges offering forestry in the country, even as there are now very limited concerns for them to sign off their licenses, or activities that are reserved only for them, that would necessitate a professional franchise affirmed by a PRC license number.

This is now the time for the Society of Filipino Foresters, and the various colleges and universities offering forestry programs, to sit down and begin to re-imagine and plot their next moves. The options would include reframing what the forestry profession is all about, as well as once and for all entertaining the possibility of repealing RA 10690, and treat forestry as a profession that would no longer require a license. Continuing the status quo is not a healthy and rational option for forestry graduates, the profession and the discipline, and even the country.





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Solons move to guard WPS areas

THE proposed measure aimed at declaring certain areas in the Kalayaan Group of Islands (KGI) in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) as protected areas is now ready for transmission to the House plenary for sponsorship and debate.

This was after the House Committee on Natural Resources approved on Wednesday House Bill No. 6373, which seeks to declare the area 3-nautical miles (around 10 square kilometers) surrounding the KGI and Scarborough Shoal as Marine Protected Areas (MPA) to protect the country's marine resources.

HB 6373 was authored by Palawan Rep. Edward Hagedorn and sponsored by CIBAC Party-List Rep. Eddie Villanueva.

This developed as Sen. Risa Hontiveros expressed hope that President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. will not wish for a compromise with China on Ayungin Shoal and instead make a categorical statement on the issue after fresh reports of Filipino fishermen being chased away by the Chinese Coast Guard in the area.

Hontiveros noted that Ayungin Shoal is part of our Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) "with no compromise."

"That is an exclusive home to the Philippines," she said. "I hope the President will not surrender one square unit of our territory."

A compromise, she said, can be made in common areas, but not in the EEZ.

"What compromise is there? Our national interest is at stake here," she emphasized.

Earlier, Hagedorn thanked House Speaker Martin Romualdez for prioritizing the hearing of his proposed bill.

Hagedorn cited in his proposed measure the Republic Act No. 11038 or the "Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 2018" and the Arbitral Ruling in seeking to declare the areas as MPA.

According to the bill, local studies showed the 3-nautical mile protected area is preferable as it will give the protected habitat enough and safe space for young marine organisms to grow.

Villanueva said the bill is only for the protection of the marine environment -- particularly in the Kalayaan Islands, which is situated within the country's exclusive economic zones -- and nothing about territorial disputes in the WPS.

He said a study by the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute in 2019 found out that coral reefs in Kalayaan Islands -- particularly in the Pag-asa Island, Panata Island and Sabina Shoal -- were damaged by apparent illegal activities such as blast fishing.

The bill is an operationalization of proposals from local marine experts to declare the Kalayaan Islands as MPAs to protect the coral reefs therein, Hagedorn said.

A 2014 study by the Asian Development Bank showed that the Kalayaan Islands comprise 30 percent of the country's total coral reefs and serve as breeding ground of fishes and marine species in the country.

"Fishes and marine life breed in the coral reefs of Kalayaan Islands and the eggs and fingerlings are carried by sea currents to other parts of the country's



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seascapes where they thrive, grow, and are eventually caught by fishermen," the CIBAC solon said in his sponsorship speech.

"Coral reefs are the breeding ground or the "nursery" of marine life. If reefs are destroyed, we nip marine life at its bud. Thus, to allow the destruction of the coral reefs in Kalayaan Islands will adversely impact fish production in the country and in several adjacent countries," Villanueva said.

The bill will prohibit and penalize certain acts and activities within the waters of the 3-nautical mile area to guarantee protection of marine habitat.

Villanueva, however, said it will still allow traditional fishing as it is considered generally harmless to the marine ecosystem.

The bill will also create a Kalayaan Island Group and Scarborough Shoal Protected Area Management Office (KIGSS-PAMO) and a Joint Congressional Oversight Committee to ensure effective implementation of the provisions of the proposed measure. **Macon Ramos-Araneta and Maricel V. Cruz**



Bill seeking to protect marine life in Kalayaan Islands approved

BY WENDELL VIGILIA

THE House committee on natural resources yesterday approved a bill which seeks to designate certain areas in the Kalayaan Islands Group in the West Philippine Sea “as marine protected areas.”

The panel chaired by Cavite Rep. Elpidio Barzaga Jr. approved House Bill No. 6373 which prohibits and penalizes certain acts and activities within the waters of the three-nautical mile area to guarantee protection of marine habitat while still allowing traditional fishing as it is considered generally harmless to the marine ecosystem.

The measure, which was prin-

cipally authored by Palawan Rep. Edward Hagedorn and sponsored by Rep. Eduardo Villanueva (PL, Cibac), said the three-nautical mile area (roughly 10 sq. km) protected area “is preferable as it will already give safe and protected habitat space for young marine organisms to grow.”

Villanueva stressed that the bill is only for the protection of the marine environment, particularly in the Kalayaan Islands, which is situated within the country’s exclusive economic zone and has nothing with the territorial dispute in the West Philippine Sea in the South China Sea.

Representatives from different government agencies including

the Department of National Defense have expressed full support for the proposed law.

Villanueva said a study by the UP-Marine Science Institute in 2019 found that coral reefs in Kalayaan Islands, particularly in the Pag-asa Island, Panata Island, and Sabina Shoal – were damaged by, apparently, illegal activities such as blast fishing.

The bill is thus an operationalization of proposals from local marine experts to declare the Kalayaan Islands as marine protected areas in order to protect the coral reefs therein, Villanueva said.

The bill will also create a Kalayaan Island Group and Scarborough Shoal Protected Area

Management Office and a joint congressional oversight committee to ensure effective implementation of the provisions of the proposed measure.

“We acknowledge that there are tensions relating to territory claims in the West Philippine Sea. However, we cannot afford not to act because the habitat of marine life in our waters, which benefit not only the Philippines but also the adjacent countries like China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei, are being destroyed. We need to protect the biological productivity of our Kalayaan Islands in order to sustain our ever-increasing demand for marine produce,” said Villanueva.



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Excluded

In a few years, China and Vietnam will likely be exploiting the oil and gas resources, possibly in collaboration under the aegis of shared benefit from whatever resources the South China Sea may offer.

The Philippines will be excluded from this bonanza. The Supreme Court ruling declaring unconstitutional the Joint Seismic Exploration arrangement earlier concluded with China and Vietnam excludes us from the game. At the very least, this leaves our government very little elbow room to enter into a collaborative effort with our neighbors.

Although the results of the Court's vote was announced, the actual decision has yet to be released. Constitutional experts are awaiting the release of the ruling, aching to study the text closely. The Solicitor General awaits release of that decision that should trigger a Motion for Reconsideration. Considering the large majority of magistrates voting for the ruling, this could be a long shot.

If the ruling stands, our future prosperity is compromised. By some estimates, the natural gas deposits beneath the South China Sea could be at least as large as what Saudi Arabia has. We direly need that for our energy needs—and therefore our economy's progress.

I have talked to a few lawyers who have an inkling about what led to the Supreme Court's possibly supremely disastrous ruling. They point out two possible infirmities in the decision.

The first involves collapsing "sovereignty" and "sovereign rights" into one and the same concept. Sovereignty is a familiar concept. Sovereign rights is a phrase that occurs only in the language of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). It is an ill-defined concept. But it is certainly something inferior to sovereignty.

By the terms of the UNCLOS, the Philippines enjoys sovereignty over its internal waters defined by the archipelagic doctrine and our own baselines law. We do not have sovereignty over the 200-mile exclusive economic zone. What we have are sovereign rights. One is not the other. Only merchants of jingoism conflate sovereignty and sovereign rights.

While China is a signatory to the UNCLOS, they are not inclined to be bound by whatever hair-splitting we might want to engage in over the distinction between sovereignty and sovereign rights.

The second infirmity involves the definition of our territorial waters. Some of the possible exploration sites lie in our exclusive economic zone but beyond our territorial waters as defined by the Treaty of Paris as well as by our Baselines Law that we submitted to the UN.

Other possible exploration sites lie beyond anyone's exclusive economic zone. They are in that area our earlier foreign policy delineated for potential "common benefit" of countries surrounding this sea. Whatever resources they hold will be shared by the contiguous countries.

If these areas are beyond our territorial waters, then they are beyond the coverage of our constitutional inhibitions. Our Constitution covers only areas over which the Philippine state exercises sovereignty.

The Supreme Court ruling overextends, applying constitutional restrictions over areas outside our baselines. That strikes a non-lawyer like me as patently



Obsolete

President Marcos Jr. clarifies that his administration is not seeking the privatization of the assets of the NAIA. What is possible, he says, is cutting a service contract for the management of air services so that the facility could accommodate more flights.

That begs the question: How many more flights can we accommodate with the limited runway space of the NAIA?

As air travel booms, how many more flights will we need to accommodate in the near future? How many can be accommodated without compromising passenger safety (and sanity)?

It seems to me that thinking in terms of increasing plane movements in this congested airport is like moving chairs around the deck of the Titanic as it sinks. It does not address the most basic fact about this facility: it is utterly obsolete.

I am old enough to remember Hong Kong's old Kai Tak airport where planes had to navigate perilously between high rise condominium buildings. The last British governor-general of Hong Kong, rather than surrender the territory's funds to China upon the colony's turnover, decided it was best to invest in building a new airport. Beijing frowned on the idea. On hindsight, that was the best decision ever made to ensure Hong Kong's continued prosperity in the age of jet travel.

Fortunately, we have an option in the New Manila International Airport (NMIA) currently rising from the marshes in nearby Bulacan. The new airport will have at least six runways and a terminal that can handle millions of passengers a year.

The new airport facility being built by San Miguel will be a complete air hub, with enough space for aircraft servicing and a high-tech industrial zone that could host \$200 billion in manufacturing investments. It will be served by a rail link (LRT-7) as well as an expressway.

The NMIA is the outcome of an unsolicited proposal submitted by San Miguel that had to go through many years in the bureaucratic wringer. Given the inherent (and incurable) limits of the NAIA, the NMIA is testimony to the far-sightedness of the private sector compared to the short-sightedness of our bureaucracy.

In a few years, the NMIA will be serviceable. It will offer lower rates that the NAIA cannot offer—especially if it will need a service contract to manage flights. This is a gift to the nation.





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EYES WIDE OPEN

IRIS GONZALES

Of bikini-clad conservationists and climate change

There they were, a bunch of 14- to 18-year-old kids protesting outside a capitol building in Negros Occidental to oppose a 300-megawatt coal-fired power plant, says Joshua Villalobos, now 20, of the Youth for Climate Hope.

And then there's an eye doctor, sometimes clad in her different bikinis – Dr. Frances Yap – who keeps local communities informed on a damaging reclamation project in Dumaguete.



Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte also has a story to tell. She shared the city's gender-responsive climate initiatives, which included an urban agriculture program that generated green livelihoods for more than 13,000 women while Makati Mayor Abby Binay affirmed the crucial role of women as environmental advocates "that lead the charge to protect our planet."

These and more are real stories and not some propaganda or some small and fleeting passion projects which we could all learn from.

I heard these real life experiences of Filipino explorers and conservationists at the "Explorer Encounters: Movements, Creating Tomorrow," a recent event organized by The Masungi Georeserve Foundation.

The different individuals shared their different stories on how they are addressing this thing called climate emergency.

Supported by the government of Canada through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, the event gathered these explorers and conservationists to share their transformational ideas and to connect with inspiring people. The indefatigable Colin Townson, head of political affairs of the embassy of Canada in the Philippines, represented the embassy that night.

It was an honor to be there in that room and hear the experiences of individuals who are charting the path for tomorrow.

The energy in the room was almost tangible. You feel it in the air – the passion and determination and the strong sense of community to help address one of the biggest problems in our lifetime today – climate change.

Call to action

To a jam-packed crowd at Kondwi in Poblacion, five presenters shared their inspiring campaigns.

"From a bunch of 14- to 18-year-olds protesting outside the capitol, we are now here working with adults and experts to stir the energy scenario of an island with five million residents to the right direction," said the young Joshua Villalobos.

Josefa-Cariño Tauli, a member of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network steering committee and an Ibaloi-Kankanaey Igorot indigenous youth, emphasized the protection of indigenous tribes as a key element in protecting environmental spaces.

She talked about the importance of including indigenous communities in dialogues in forming ways to strengthen sustainable biodiversity.

"In all our actions, we must welcome diverse voices and diverse visions because only then can we stop business as usual and learn from the voices of youth, from indigenous peoples, local communities, of women, of PWDs, to enrich the actions that we do on the ground no matter what field we are in," she said.

But it was Dumaguete's Dr. Frances Yap of Oceans 6 who brought the house down with her stories on how she and her group embarked on creative campaigns against the said reclamation project in Dumaguete – including wearing a bikini!

In the mornings, before her daily swim, she would post her bikini-clad photos to accompany her rally announcements – anything to raise awareness on the issue.

It wasn't really to flaunt her bodacious body but to really show the community how reclamation projects can harm the ocean.

Yap and five other women formed Ocean 6 and accomplished the tremendous feat of swimming six kilometers across Tañon Strait to raise awareness on ocean protection.

Ann Dumaliang, managing trustee of the Masungi Georeserve Foundation, for her part, captured the night's message.

"Our call to action is simple. We ask you to stay vigilant and to stand by us. Big challenges like this give us the opportunity to make monumental changes for our country. So for this we must be grateful and not bitter. We have to be more determined than ever and not hopeless."

These stories and actions aren't enough to address climate change of course but for sure, these are major steps toward a better tomorrow.

We should also write our own similar stories – big or small – of how we can help address this climate emergency that is happening all around us.

The story of Masungi

May we find inspiration in the story of Masungi itself, a piece of paradise somewhere in the Sierra Madre mountain range. It is a conservation area and rustic limestone landscape tucked in the rainforests of Rizal.

Here, wildlife and plant species abound and the air is still fresh and crisp. It's a community rich with heritage and life but threatened by modern-day developments.

The group behind it is the Masungi Georeserve Foundation, a non-profit organization which is doing what it can to fight threats against the area – from land grabbing to quarrying to urban development.

They need all the support that we can give. Kudos to Metro Manila mayors Joy Belmonte (Quezon City), Marcelino Teodoro (Marikina), Vico Sotto (Pasig) and Jaime Fresnedi (Muntinlupa) who are supporting Masungi by calling for the cancellation of quarrying agreements within the Upper Marikina Watershed and the Masungi Georeserve.

There's really so much work to do with so little time as we deal with the climate emergency that is happening all around us today.

It is not enough to listen to stories but as I said, we must write our own too and do our part in creating a better tomorrow for us, our children and our children's children.

As Joshua of the Youth for Climate Hope said, the best time for significant climate action was 20 years ago. "And the second best time is now."

Email: eyesgonzales@gmail.com. Follow her on Twitter @ [eyesgonzales](https://twitter.com/eyesgonzales). Column archives at [EyesWideOpen](https://www.facebook.com/EyesWideOpen) on FB.





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BuCor to file plunder rap vs Bantag

BY CHRISTIAN CROW MAGHANOY

THE Bureau of Corrections said on Wednesday it will file plunder charges against suspended BuCor director general Gerald Bantag for the alleged anomalous construction of P300 million worth of facilities in four provincial penitentiaries.

BuCor Officer in Charge Gregorio Catapang Jr. said he will tap the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) to trace the disbursement of the P1 billion fund that Bantag used to construct facilities in Iwahig Prison and Penal Farm in Palawan, Davao Prison and Penal Farm, Leyte Regional Farm,

and Correctional Institution for Women in Mandaluyong City.

"Today we will be having a meeting with the AMLC and we will ask them how to go about this because we already have the evidence that indeed, about P300 million was released even if the project is not yet finished," said

Catapang in a television interview.

He added he would request the scrutiny of Bantag and his family's financial transactions.

Catapang said the filing of charges against Bantag will be done by Friday or next week.

"We have to document these properly so that you have sufficient evidence to file a case against him," he said.

Catapang said the construction projects in the four penal facilities were only 60 percent finished, however, people close to Bantag claimed they were 95 percent completed.

The BuCor is also planning to file illegal quarrying charges against Bantag for the unauthorized excavations executed by Agua

Tierra Mina Oro Development Corp. inside the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) compound in Muntinlupa City. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources earlier classified the operation as illegal quarrying.

Catapang said Bantag ordered the digging in search of the fabled Yamashita treasure, a cache of gold supposedly buried by the Japanese Imperial Army in the Philippines during World War 2, following the order of General Tomoyuki Yamashita, known as "The Tiger of Malaya."

Bantag was earlier tagged by the Department of Justice as one of the alleged masterminds in the murder of radio commentator Percy Lapid.



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CCC, First Gen to help LGUs tap PSF

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA
@jonlmayuga

THE Climate Change Commission (CCC) and First Gen Corp. (First Gen) will work together to support local government units (LGUs) in mainstreaming climate change action and accessing the People's Survival Fund (PSF).

CCC Vice Chairperson and Executive Director (VCED) Robert E.A. Borje and First Gen President and COO Francis Giles B. Puno formalized the partnership with the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) last January 24 at the Eugenio Lopez Center in Antipolo, Rizal.

Carol Kay Paquera, CCC Chief-of-Staff; Shirley H. Cruz, Vice President, and Chief-of-Staff; Ricky A. Carandang, Vice President for Corporate Communications; and Ramon Araneta, Vice President for External Affairs

and Security of First Gen witnessed the event.

Following the MOA signing, seedlings of Narra, Ipil, Banuyo, and Supa trees were planted at the BINHI Arboretum to kick off the partnership, which is expected to benefit Maria Aurora, Aurora; Pantabangan and Carrangalan in Nueva Ecija; Alfonso Castañeda, Nueva Vizcaya; Lobo, Batangas; Caramoan and Garchitorena in Camarines Sur; Baungon, Impasugong, Libona, Manolo Fortich, and Talakag in Bukidnon; and Jabonga in Agusan del Norte.

The partnership will help LGUs in terms of enhancing their Local Climate Change Action Plans (LCCAPs) including updated climate and disaster risk assessments and greenhouse gas inventory, and developing PSF project proposals.

As of January 19, 1,399 out of 1,715 LGUs (81.57 percent) have submitted

their LCCAPs to the CCC. Through partnerships and capacity-building initiatives, the Commission hopes to achieve 100 percent compliance by 2024.

This collaboration forms part of both the CCC and First Gen's shared advocacy for strengthening local communities' resilience to climate change and its impacts.

"Our LGUs, down to the barangays, are at the frontlines of climate change and its impacts. They need all the help they can get to have a fighting chance, but they also need transformation. We don't want them to just adapt, we want them to thrive and grow, and this particular agreement—through formulation of eLCCAPs and capacitating them to access the PSF—will exactly do that," Borje said in a statement.

"Our mission of forging collaborative pathways for a decarbonized and

regenerative future simply means that we cannot do it alone. Signing an agreement with the Climate Change Commission is completely aligned with what our company is trying to do, in addressing an important challenge that's ahead of us—climate change," Puno said.

The CCC and First Gen will also strengthen initiatives that involve key stakeholders to promote science- and evidence-based risk assessment and sustain climate-smart leadership and governance among the target beneficiaries.

"At the end of the day, we have to safeguard our national interests, which for us means, 'Buhay, kabuhayan, at kinabukasan ang nakataya.' That's all we have to plan for, but it takes more than a village to do this. We need to work very closely together, and this partnership is key to making that happen," Borje added.



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SHARED ADVOCACY Climate Change Commission Vice Chairman and Executive Director Robert Borje and First Gen Corp. President and Chief Operating Officer Francis Giles Puno lead the ceremonial signing of the memorandum of agreement to help the local government units in implementing their climate change mitigation and adaptation programs on Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2023, at the Eugenio Lopez Center in Antipolo, Rizal. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Climate change action plans of LGUs get boost

THE Climate Change Commission (CCC) and power generation firm First Gen Corp. have signed a deal to help the local government units (LGUs) in implementing their climate change mitigation and adaptation programs.

CCC Vice Chairman and Executive Director Robert Borje and First Gen President and Chief Operating Officer Francis Giles Puno led the ceremonial signing of the memorandum of agreement (MoA) at the Eugenio Lopez Center in Antipolo, Rizal on Tuesday.

In a statement sent to reporters on Wednesday, the CCC said the MoA will capacitate the LGUs to mainstream climate change adaptation into national development and gain access to the People's Survival Fund (PSF), an annual fund for the implementation of climate change adaptation projects.

"The partnership aims to capacitate representatives from Maria Aurora, Aurora; Pantabangan and Carrangalan in Nueva Ecija; Alfonso Castañeda, Nueva Vizcaya; Lobo, Batangas; Caramoan and

Garchitorena in Camarines Sur; Baungon, Impasug-ong, Libona, Manolo Fortich and Talakag in Bukidnon; and Jabonga in Agusan del Norte," the CCC said.

The deal also aims to enhance Local Climate Change Action Plans (LCCAPs), including updated climate and disaster risk assessments and greenhouse gas inventory and developing PSF project proposals.

"This collaboration forms part of both the CCC and First Gen's shared advocacy for strengthening local communities' resilience to climate change and its impacts," the CCC said.

As of January 19, the CCC said that around 81.57 percent or 1,399 out of 1,715 LGUs have submitted their LCCAPs to the commission.

The CCC expressed optimism that through partnerships and capacity-building initiatives, the LGUs' "100 percent compliance" is attainable by 2024.

"Our LGUs, down to the barangay, are at the frontlines of climate change and its impacts. They need

all the help they can get to have a fighting chance, but they also need transformation," Borje said.

"We don't want them to just adapt, we want them to thrive and grow, and this particular agreement — through the formulation of LCCAPs and capacitating them to access the PSF — will exactly do that," he added.

Puno, for his part, said the signing of MoA with CCC is in line with First Gen's commitment to address climate change.

"Our mission of forging collaborative pathways for a decarbonized and regenerative future simply means that we cannot do it alone," Puno said.

"Signing an agreement with the Climate Change Commission is completely aligned with what our company is trying to do, in addressing an important challenge that's ahead of us — climate change," he added.

Under the MoA, the CCC and First Gen will also strengthen initiatives that involve key stakeholders to promote science- and

evidence-based risk assessment and sustain climate-smart leadership and governance among the target beneficiaries.

"At the end of the day, we have to safeguard our national interests, which for us means, 'Buhay, kabuhayan, at kinabukasan ang nakataya' (Lives, livelihood, and the future are at stake)," Borje said.

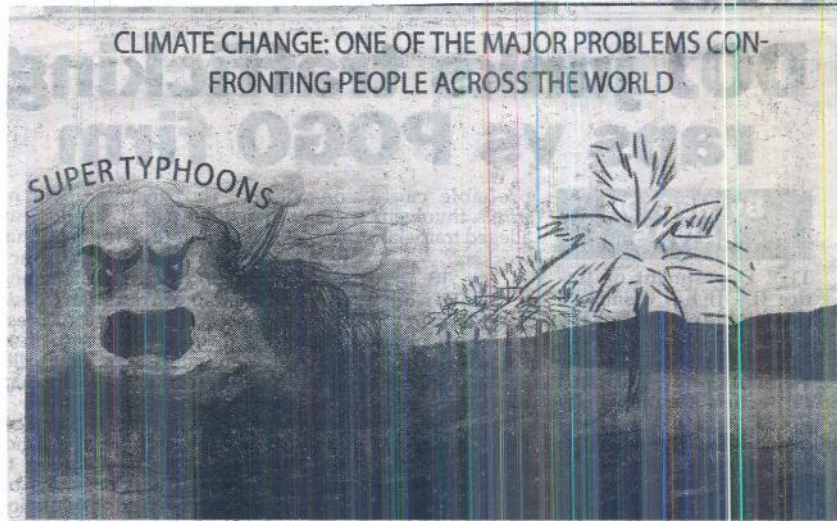
"That's all we have to plan for, but it takes more than a village to do this. We need to work very closely together, and this partnership is key to making that happen," he added.

Following the MoA signing, seedlings of narra, ipil, banuyo and supa trees were planted at the Binhi Arboretum to kickoff the partnership.

The CCC was formed under Republic Act 9729 or the "Climate Change Act" signed on Oct. 23, 2009.

Meanwhile, according to its website, First Gen is one of the leading providers of clean and renewable power in the Philippines.

CATHERINE S. VALENTE



CLIMATE CHANGE: ONE OF THE MAJOR PROBLEMS CONFRONTING PEOPLE ACROSS THE WORLD

SUPER TYPHOONS

EDITORIAL

Climate hazards

WITHOUT doubt, the climate change issue is acknowledged to be one of the major problems confronting people across the world, including poverty-stricken Philippines.

This is understandable because the damage brought about by natural disasters "cannot bring back what we have lost in terms of lives, livelihoods, assets and opportunities."

And to think that the billions of pesos in losses could have been used to finance various health and social welfare programs for the beleaguered Filipino people.

We share the view of Senate President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda, a certified environmentalist, that "a whole of nation approach" is vital in addressing the worsening global crisis.

Legarda pointed out that the Philippines is among the vulnerable countries that is entitled to financial support through the 2015 Paris Agreement on the effects of climate change.

It is also a beneficiary under the global Green Climate Fund created to serve the Paris Agreement and the Kyoto Protocol that aims to provide funding for climate mitigation and adaptation of developing nations.

Just like the post-war reparations, the highly-articulate lady senator said that these financial grants "help get us on an appropriate development track."

Climate finance, she said, is needed to build defenses, safeguard Filipinos from climate impacts and shift the economy and society towards low-carbon development and growth.

And with so many people now in the grip of misery because of typhoons, floods and prolonged droughts, ignoring the adverse effects of natural disasters is unconscionable.

Dapat tayong lahat ay magtulong-tulong para i-address ang climate change.



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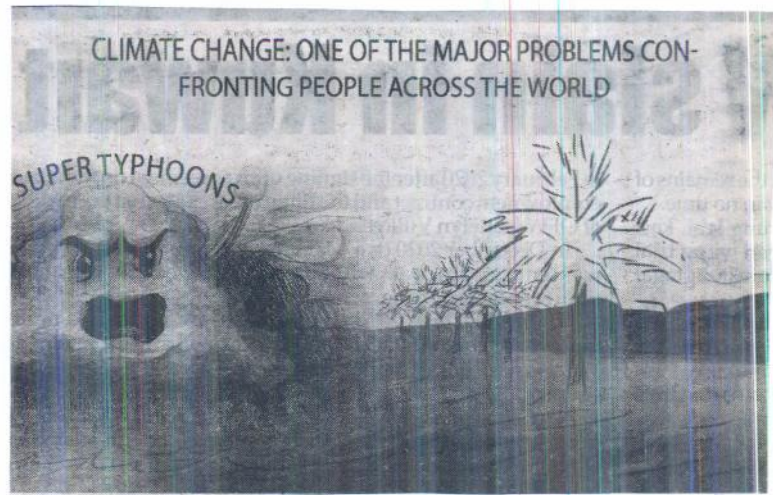
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Water woes fix pressed

BY MARIA ROMERO
@tribunephil_mbr

EXCLUSIVE

Government Corporate Counsel Rogelio Quevedo has pressed the creation of a Department of Water to solve the country's recurring potable water supply insufficiency.

"I think we should really have a
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Water woes fix pressed

Quevedo said the dwindling supply of water will be augmented once the P12.2-billion New Centennial Water Supply Project becomes operational

From page 1

Department of Water because (water) is a big problem. Look at the Kaliwa Dam, until now it has not been finished – it hasn't been completed by two administrations," Quevedo said in an interview with *Straight Talk* on Tuesday, an online show of the *Daily Tribune*.

"But during this administration, maybe I can tell you that it (construction) will roll and I think maybe by 2027 (the dam will be ready)," he added.

Quevedo said the dwindling supply of water will be augmented once the P12.2-billion New Centennial Water Supply Project becomes operational. And with a Department of Water in place, supply will be better regulated, he added.

"The one that actually ensures the provision of

water throughout Metro Manila is the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, but it's having a hard time seeing what our water has become," he said.

"We can get water from Kaliwa Dam now because the problem is that our water only comes from Angat, then the Laguna De bay, the water in Laguna De Bay is a problem, the cleaning of the water in Laguna De Bay is a big problem," he added.

Kaliwa Dam is a 60-meter-high concrete gravity dam on the Kaliwa River that will have a reservoir surface area of 291 hectares. It is regarded as the solution to an expected water shortage in Metro Manila and nearby provinces.

It will have a maximum gross reservoir volume of 57 million cubic meters and a discharge capacity of 600 million liters a day.

To date, around 32 bills had been filed in the House of Representatives to create a department that will oversee all water-related issues.

The bills are pending before the committee on government reorganization. The proposed measures seek to create an "umbrella department" that integrates all stages of water resource management.



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Construction of new Maynilad treatment plant in Muntinlupa in full swing; set to produce 150 MLD for the south

West Zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services, Inc. (Maynilad) aims to produce 50 million liters per day (MLD) of additional water supply by December 2023 as initial output of its treatment plant that is currently being constructed in Poblacion, Muntinlupa.

Construction of the new Poblacion Water Treatment Plant (WTP)—which will be Maynilad's third facility to tap Laguna Lake as an alternative raw water source to the Angat Dam—is now 53% complete. Once fully operational by the first half of 2024, this facility will have the capacity to produce 150 MLD of potable water for the southern portion of Maynilad's concession area, particularly Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, and Cavite.

At present, Maynilad has two treatment plants in Putatan, Muntinlupa, that provide

300-MLD of water supply for around 1.7 million customers in the south.

"Our production of 300 MLD is stretched to meet the current requirements of our customers in the south. Hence, whenever extreme conditions necessitate reduced production, there is

GOOD NEWS rematenewscentral@yahoo.com

no extra supply so some of our customers experience service disruption. The additional output that we will get from the Poblacion WTP will help to address that," said Maynilad Chief Operating Officer Randolph T. Estrella-

do. The Poblacion WTP is part of Maynilad's Php220-billion service enhancement program from 2023 to 2027 that is focused on promoting enhanced water sustainability and climate resiliency.

