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Phl: No objection to Japan's release of Fukushima water

By PIA LEE-BRAGO

The Philippines did not object to Japan's release of 1.3 million metric tons of treated radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean from its tsunami-wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant yesterday as it recognizes the International Atomic Energy agency's (IAEA) technical expertise on the matter, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said.

"The Philippines continues to look at this issue from a science- and fact-based perspective and its impact on the waters in the region. As a coastal and archipelagic state, the Philippines attaches utmost priority to the protection and preservation of the marine environment," DFA said in a statement yesterday.

According to an IAEA report, Japan's plans to discharge the ALPS (Advanced Liquid Processing System) treated water into the sea will have negligible radiological impact on people and the environment and is consistent with relevant international safety standards.

Japanese Ambassador Kazuhiko Koshikawa earlier said Japan would manage the annual discharge volume of tritium so it will not exceed 22 trillion Becquerel, which is equivalent to the target discharge management value for the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station before the accident in March 2011.

"It is worth noting that other countries also discharge tritium into the sea in compliance with their own domestic laws and regulations; for instance, according to the China Nuclear Energy Association website, China is discharging 112 trillion Bq from Yangjiang Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in 2021," Koshikawa said.

"The amount of tritium in the ALPS treated water is far smaller than the amount of tritium discharged from many nuclear power plants and other facilities in other countries," he added.

The ambassador said Japan will take all possible measures to ensure the safety of the discharge into the sea even after it begins,

and will not discharge anything that could adversely affect the health or environment.

On the other hand, fishers' group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mammalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) criticized the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) yesterday for their failure to take a stand on the matter.

According to Pamalakaya vice chairman Ronnel Arambulo, the radioactive wastewater might reach the western part of the Pacific Ocean with the onset of the northeast monsoon, posing potential hazards in the country's eastern seas, including the resource-rich Philippine Rise (formerly Benham Rise) which is not only rich in fisheries resources but also gas deposits and mineral resources.

"The DENR and BFAR should issue statements on the impending catastrophe brought by the release of treated wastewater as it will have a big effect in the Pacific Ocean. It will kill our fishermen and affect our food security," Arambulo said.

He warned that toxic treated wastewater could also reach the Bicol region and other parts of the southern archipelago during the northeast monsoon.

"We don't believe that the radioactive chemical was already treated," Arambulo said.

He said that other countries like South Korea have also opposed the discharge of radioactive wastewater from Japan.

"We should not allow the Pacific Ocean to be used as a sewerage system. It is the obligation of the DENR and BFAR to have a position as what is at stake here is the livelihood of the fishermen," Arambulo said.

At a separate press conference, Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration deputy administrator for operations and services Bonifacio Pajuelas said the state weather bureau is part of the panel that studies the implication of the discharge of Japan's treated radioactive water.

- With Bella Cariaso, Evelyn Macairan



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PHL fine with Japan release of radioactive water to ocean

By MALOU TALOSIG-BARTOLOME
@maloutalosis

MANILA is not protesting Tokyo's controversial release of radioactive wastewater from its Fukushima nuclear power plant.

The Department of Foreign Affairs said it defers to the opinion of the United Nations' agency in charge of nuclear cooperation, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

On Thursday 1pm local time, Japan's Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco) started discharging

purified and treated water stored at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station into the sea.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the tritium, the radioactive material present in the Fukushima waste, has been significantly diluted with seawater. The tritium concentration after dilution is less than 1/40 of the safety standard (or 1/7 of the WHO drinking water standard).

The Vienna-based organization also sent independent on-site inspectors and confirmed that the tritium concentration that is being

discharged Thursday is "far below the operational limit of 1,500 becquerels per liter."

"The Philippines continues to look at this issue from a science- and fact-based perspective and its impact on the waters in the region. As a coastal and archipelagic State, the Philippines attaches utmost priority to the protection and preservation of the marine environment.

"The Philippines recognizes the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) technical expertise on this matter," DFA spokesperson Teresa Daza said in a message to reporters.



Here's what you need to know as Fukushima nuclear plant's wastewater is discharged to the sea

BY MARI YAMAGUCHI | The Associated Press

TOKYO—Japanese officials plan to start discharging treated radioactive wastewater from the damaged Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant into the Pacific Ocean on Thursday, a contentious step more than 12 years after a massive earthquake and tsunami set off a battle against ever-increasing amounts of radioactive water at the plant.

The government and plant operator say the release is an unavoidable part of its decommissioning and will be safely carried out, but the plan faces opposition in and outside Japan. Here is a look at the controversy.

Why is there so much wastewater?

THE March 2011 earthquake and tsunami destroyed the plant's cooling systems, causing three reactors to melt. Highly contaminated cooling water applied to the damaged reactors has leaked continuously to building basements and mixed with groundwater. The plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings (TEPCO), has taken steps to limit the amount of groundwater and rainwater entering the reactor area, and has reduced the increase in contaminated water to about 100 tons a day, 1/5 of the initial amount. The water is collected and partly recycled as cooling water after treatment, with the rest stored in around 1,000 tanks, which are already filled to 98 percent of their 1.37 million-ton capacity.

Why is TEPCO releasing the water now?

THE government and TEPCO say they need to make room for the plant's decommissioning and prevent accidental leaks from the tanks. Japan has obtained support from the International Atomic Energy Agency to improve the transparency and credibility of the release and ensure it meets international safety standards. The government has also stepped up a campaign promoting the plan's safety at home and through diplomatic channels.

What's in the treated water?

THE water is being treated by what's called an Advanced Liquid Processing System, which can reduce the amounts of more than 60 selected radionuclides to government-set releasable levels, except for tritium, which officials say is safe for humans if consumed in small amounts.

About 70 percent of the water held in the tanks still contains cesium, strontium, carbon-14 and other radionuclides exceeding government-set levels. It will be retreated until the concentrations meet those limits, and then diluted by more than 100 times its volume of seawater before it is released. That will bring it way below international safety limits, but its radioactivity won't be zero.

How safe is it?

IAEA concluded in a report that the plan, if conducted as designed, will have negligible impact on the environment and human health. IAEA chief Rafael Grossi visited the plant and said he was satisfied with preparations.

Japan's government says the release of tritium into the sea is a routine practice by nuclear plants around

the world and that the amount will be several times lower than from plants in China and South Korea.

Scientists generally support the IAEA's conclusion, while some call for more attention to dozens of low-dose radionuclides that remain in the water, saying data on their long-term effects on the environment and marine life are insufficient.

Experts say the release of treated water from Fukushima is much less challenging than the daunting task of removing deadly radioactive debris that remains in the damaged reactors.

How will it be released?

TEPCO executive Junichi Matsumoto says the release will begin with the least radioactive water to ensure safety. After samples are analyzed in final testing, the water will be transported through a thin black pipe to a coastal area where it will be diluted with hundreds of times its volume of seawater.

The diluted water will enter an undersea tunnel and be released a few minutes later from a point one kilometer (0.6 mile) off the coast. The release will be gradual and will continue for decades until the decommissioning of the plant is finished, TEPCO officials say. Matsumoto said the slow release will further reduce the environmental impact.

Final preparation for the release began Tuesday when just one ton of water was sent for dilution with 1,200 tons of seawater, and the mixture was to be kept in the primary pool for two days for final sampling to ensure safety, Matsumoto said. A batch of 460 tons will be sent to the mixing pool Thursday for the actual discharge. The company plans to release 31,200 tons of treated water by the end of March 2024, which would empty only 10 tanks because of the continued production of wastewater at the plant. The pace will later pick up.

Why are people worried?

FUKUSHIMA'S badly hit fisheries, tourism and economy are still recovering from the disaster. Fisheries groups worry about a further damage to the reputation of their seafood. Fukushima's current catch is only about one-fifth its pre-disaster level due to a decline in the fishing population and smaller catch sizes.

The head of the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperatives, Masanobu Sakamoto, said on Monday that "scientific safety and the sense of safety are different."

Groups in South Korea and China have also raised concerns, turning the release into a political and diplomatic issue. China has stepped up radiation testing of fishery and agricultural products from Fukushima and nine other prefectures, halting exports at customs for weeks, Fisheries Agency officials say.



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On Fukushima's water release: Is it really safe for the planet?

By SARA HUSSEIN

TOKYO (AFP) — From livestreamed fish to diplomatic study trips, Japan has waged a concerted campaign to calm controversy before it released treated water from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the sea on Aug. 24, Thursday.

The problem is massive: the Fukushima Daiichi plant, where several reactors melted down after the 2011 tsunami overwhelmed cooling systems, generates 100,000 liters (3,500 cubic

feet) of contaminated water a day.

The mix of groundwater, rainwater that seeps into the area and water used for cooling is treated by plant operator TEPCO and stored on site. But 1.33 million cubic meters later, space has nearly run out.

TEPCO and Japan's government has released the treated liquid, diluted with seawater, via a pipe extending a kilometer from the coast where the plant sits.

They say filtration removes most radionuclides — elements



Aerial photo shows storage tanks used for storing treated water at TEPCO's crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Okuma, Fukushima prefecture on Aug. 24, 2023. (AFP)

Regional and international delegations and media have been led on plant tours, sometimes stopping at tanks where fish swim in treated and diluted wastewater — an experiment streamed on YouTube.

There have also been technical briefings for neighbors like South Korea, though government officials said multiple invitations for such talks with China had gone unanswered.

Perhaps the most important plank of Japan's campaign is a review by the International Atomic Energy Agency, which has endorsed the release plan and will monitor its implementation.

"This is the organization which can provide reassurance to not only the Japanese people but to the international community... they provide the gold standard," said Shinichi Sato, director of the international nuclear cooperation division at Japan's foreign ministry.

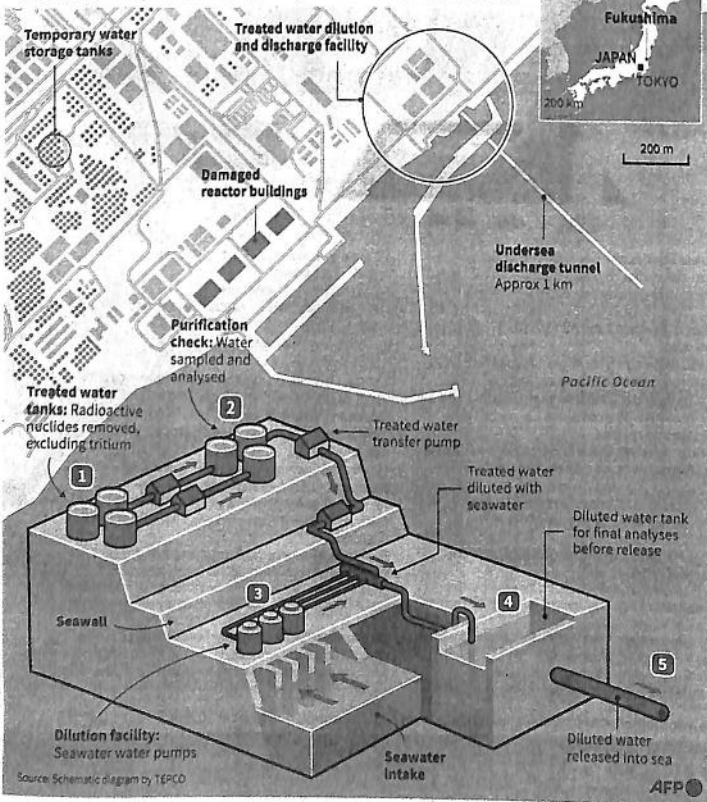
Negligible impact

The IAEA, whose chief is visiting Tokyo and the Fukushima plant this week, said Tuesday the plan meets international standards and will have "a negligible radiological impact on people and the envi-



Fukushima water release

Treated water from wrecked nuclear power plant to be released into the ocean



that emit radiation — and renders the water no different to that regularly released by nuclear plants elsewhere, a view endorsed by experts and the UN nuclear watchdog.

The release is a "robust plan," according to Tony Hooker, an associate professor at the University of Adelaide's Centre for Radiation Research, Education and Innovation. "No environmental or human health impacts are likely to be observed," he said, though he noted there is growing debate about the global practice of ocean dumping.

Claims about risks "are not founded in scien-

tific evidence," added Jim Smith, professor of environmental science at the University of Portsmouth. "Those making claims... should consider the negative impact of their — I think scientifically baseless — claims on the communities in Japan who have been affected by the Fukushima accident."

Radiation risks

Still, Japan's government and TEPCO have faced persistent concern and criticism, with some pointing to missteps around the initial accident as grounds for distrust.

Anti-nuclear group Greenpeace has been among the loudest voices condemning the plan, accusing the government of having "discounted the radiation risks."

And neighbors from China to Pacific nations have expressed varying degrees of concern.

Fishing communities that spent years battling stigma and even bans on their catches now fear that rebuilt customer confidence will be destroyed.

ronment."

Still, it is likely to remain controversial, with Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Henry Puna last month urging "more time and an abundance of caution."

And while Seoul has tempered earlier opposition, as diplomatic ties between the neighbors warm, that hasn't stopped panic buying of salt by some convinced the release will contaminate local seawater.

It's a painful moment for Fukushima's fishing communities, whose livelihoods have been battered.

A spokesman for the Fukushima Prefectural Federation of Fisheries Cooperative Associations said TEPCO's measures inspired little confidence about radiation risks.

But "the reputational damage is the bigger concern," he told AFP, declining to be named. "There are still concerns raised both at home and abroad... and we want the government to do more."

The release is expected to unfold over several decades, and Japan's government says its campaign is far from over. "We understand that this requires a lot of explanation, and we are ready to do that," said Sato.



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Japan releases water from Fukushima nuke plant



A student participates in anti-Japanese protests in South Korea yesterday. REUTERS

TOKYO (AFP) – Japan began releasing wastewater from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean yesterday, prompting a furious China to ban all seafood imports from its neighbor.

The start of the discharge of around 540 Olympic swimming pools' worth of water over several decades is a big step in decommissioning the still highly dangerous site 12 years after one of the world's worst nuclear accidents.

Live video provided by plant operator TEPCO showed two engineers clicking

on computer mouses and an official saying – after a countdown – that the “valves near the seawater transport pumps are opening.”

Japan has repeatedly insisted the wastewater is treated and will be harmless, a position backed by UN atomic watchdog the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The IAEA said again yesterday that new on-site tests had confirmed the levels of radioactive tritium in the water being discharged were safe.



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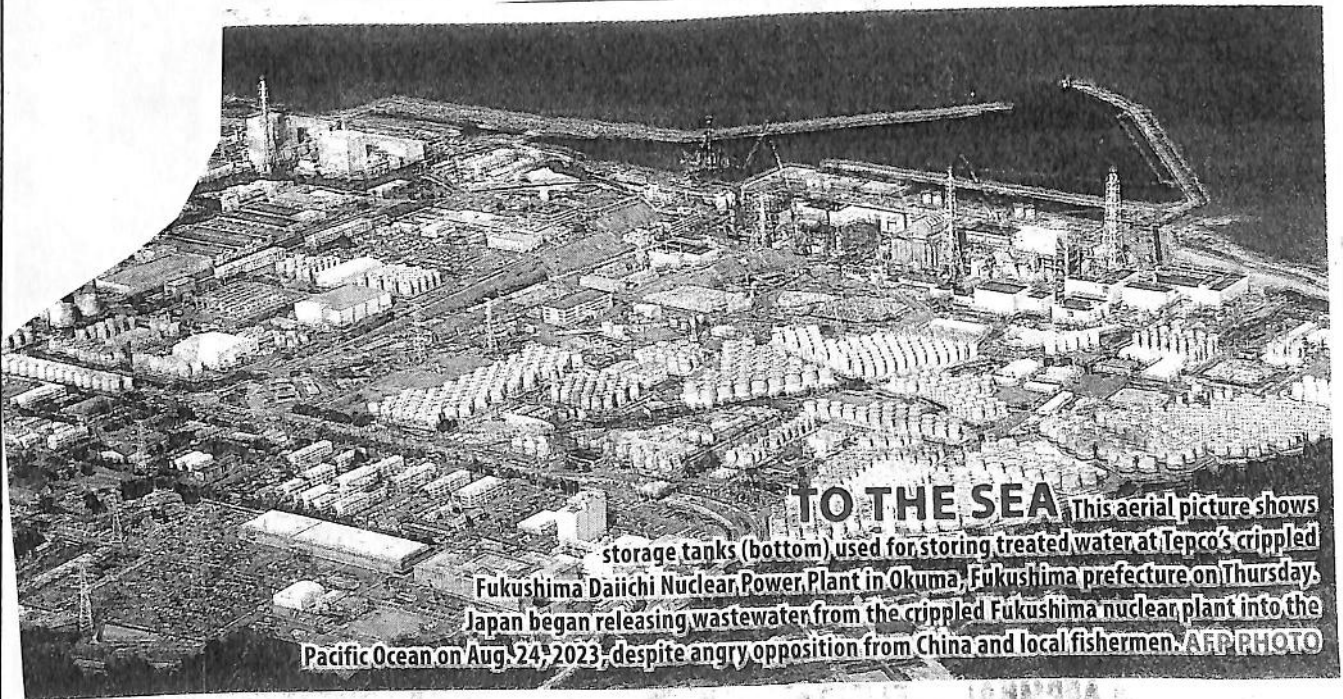
JAPAN RELEASES WASTEWATER INTO PACIFIC OCEAN

JAPAN began releasing wastewater from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean on Thursday, prompting a furious China to ban all seafood imports from its neighbor.

The start of the discharge of around 540 Olympic swimming pools' worth of water over several decades is a big step in decommissioning the still highly dangerous site, 12 years after one of the world's worst nuclear accidents.

Live video provided by plant operator

➤ **WastewaterA6**



TO THE SEA This aerial picture shows storage tanks (bottom) used for storing treated water at Tepco's crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Okuma, Fukushima prefecture on Thursday. Japan began releasing wastewater from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean on Aug. 24, 2023, despite angry opposition from China and local fishermen. AFP PHOTO



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■ WASTEWATER FROM A1

JAPAN RELEASES

Tepco showed two engineers clicking on computer mice and an official saying — after a countdown — that the “valves near the seawater transport pumps are opening.”

Japan has repeatedly insisted the wastewater is treated and will be harmless, a position backed by the UN atomic watchdog the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The IAEA said on Thursday that new on-site tests had confirmed the levels of radioactive tritium in the water being discharged were safe.

But China has warned the release will contaminate the ocean, and immediately responded on Thursday by blasting Japan as “extremely selfish.”

It then banned all Japanese sea-

food imports “to comprehensively prevent the food safety risks of radioactive contamination” — with Japan hours later demanding China lift the ban.

North Korea’s foreign ministry likewise criticized the release, urging Japan to call it off.

Local fishermen in Japan have also voiced opposition.

About 10 people held a protest near Fukushima on Thursday, and around 100 others gathered outside Tepco (Tokyo Electric Power Co.) headquarters in Tokyo.

“It’s like dumping an atomic bomb in the ocean. Japan is the first country that was attacked with an atomic bomb in the world, and the prime minister of the country made this decision,” said Kenichi Sato, 68, in Tokyo.

Multiple meltdowns

Three reactors at the Fukushima-Daiichi facility in northeastern Japan went into meltdown following a massive earthquake and tsunami that killed around 18,000 people in 2011.

Since then, Tepco has collected 1.34 million cubic meters of water that was contaminated as it cooled the wrecked reactors, along with groundwater and rain that has seeped in.

Japan says that all radioactive elements have been filtered out except the tritium, levels of which are harmless and lower than what is discharged by operational nuclear power plants — including in China.

Environmental group Greenpeace says that the filtration process is flawed. China and Russia have suggested that the water be vaporized and released into the

atmosphere instead.

But Japan’s analysis is backed by most experts.

“When released into the Pacific, the tritium is further diluted into a vast body of water and would quickly get to a radioactivity level which is not discernibly different from normal seawater,” said Tom Scott from the University of Bristol.

Tepco will carry out four releases of the treated water from Thursday until March 2024.

The first will last about 17 days, though it is expected to take around 30 years for all of the wastewater to be discharged.

With around 1,000 steel containers holding the water, Tepco has said it needs to clear space for the removal of highly dangerous radioactive nuclear fuel and rubble from the three wrecked nuclear reactors.

The Philippines “recognizes” the IAEA technical expertise on



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which Japan-based its decision to release treated radioactive water into the sea, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said, as the Philippines "continues to look at the issue from a science- and fact-based perspective and its impact on the waters in the region."

"As a coastal and archipelagic state, the Philippines attaches utmost priority to the protection and preservation of the marine environment," DFA spokesman Ma. Teresita Daza said on Thursday.

On March 11, 2011, a tsunami triggered by a magnitude 9.0 earthquake flooded the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, destroying its power and cooling systems and triggering meltdowns at three reactors.

Japanese Ambassador to Manila Koshikawa Kazuhiko said Tokyo decided on August 22 to start releasing on August 24 ALPS (Advanced Liquid Processing System)-treated water into the

Pacific Ocean.

Kazuhiko made the move after the IAEA published on July 4 a comprehensive report, which stated that Japan's plans to discharge the ALPS-treated water into the sea "are consistent with relevant international safety standards."

He said the IAEA also noted that the release of treated water from the nuclear plant into the sea is "technically feasible."

The report assured that the discharge "will have a negligible radiological impact on people and the environment," Kazuhiko said.

"The amount of tritium in the ALPS-treated water is far smaller than the amount of tritium discharged from many nuclear power plants and other facilities in other countries," he said.

China has opposed the release of the treated radioactive water into the sea, citing health and environmental risks.

BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO



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Japan starts releasing wastewater from Fukushima nuclear plant

NAMIE, Japan (AFP) — Japan began releasing wastewater from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean on Thursday, Aug. 24, prompting a furious China to ban all seafood imports from its neighbor.

The start of the discharge of around 540 Olympic swimming pools' worth of water over several

decades is a big step in decommissioning the still highly dangerous site 12 years after one of the world's worst nuclear accidents.

Live video provided by plant operator TEPCO showed two engineers clicking on computer mice and an official saying—after a countdown—that the “valves near the seawater transport pumps ▶9



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are opening.”

Japan has repeatedly insisted the wastewater is treated and will be harmless, a position backed by UN atomic watchdog the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The IAEA said again on Thursday that new on-site tests had confirmed the levels of radioactive tritium in the water being discharged were safe.

But China has warned the release will contaminate the ocean, and immediately responded Thursday by blasting Japan as “extremely selfish.”

It then banned all Japanese seafood imports “to comprehensively prevent the food safety risks of radioactive contamination.”

North Korea's foreign ministry likewise criticized the move, urging Japan to call off the release.

Local fishermen in Japan have also voiced opposition.

About 10 people held a protest near Fukushima on Thursday and around 100 others gathered outside TEPCO headquarters in Tokyo.

“It's like dumping an atomic bomb in the ocean. Japan is the first country that was attacked with an atomic bomb in the world, and the prime minister of the country made this decision,” said Kenichi Sato, 68, in Tokyo.

Japan gets PH's support

In the Philippines, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said the government expressed no opposition to Japan's decision to release the nuclear wastewater into the sea.

The DFA said the Philippines “recognizes the International Atomic Energy Agency's technical expertise” on the matter after the latter greenlighted Tokyo's plans to discharge the Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS) treated water that contains radioactive substances.

“The Philippines continues to look at this issue from a science- and fact-based perspective and its impact on the waters in the region,” DFA said. “As a coastal and archipelagic state, the Philippines attaches utmost priority to the protection and preservation of the marine environment.”

“The discharge will have a negligible radiological impact on people and the environment,” Japanese Ambassador to the Philippines Koshikawa Kazuhiko said, citing IAEA's comprehensive report.

Kazuhiko assured concerned nations that Japan “will take all possible measures to ensure the safety of the discharge into the sea even after it begins, and will not discharge anything that could adversely affect the health or environment.”

Multiple meltdowns

Three reactors at the Fukushima-Daiichi facility in northeastern Japan went into meltdown following a massive earthquake and tsunami that killed around 18,000 people in 2011.

Since then, TEPCO has collected 1.34 million cubic meters of water that was contaminated as it cooled the wrecked reactors, along with groundwater and rain that has seeped in.

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Sushi safety

Even before Thursday's release, China had banned seafood imports from 10 of Japan's 47 prefectures and imposed radiation checks.

Hong Kong and Macau, both Chinese territories, followed suit this week.

China's reaction on Thursday



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extended its ban to cover all of Japan.

Analysts said that while China may have genuine safety concerns, its strong reaction is also motivated at least in part by its economic rivalry and frosty relations with Japan.

The South Korean government, which is seeking to improve ties with Japan, has not objected, although many ordinary people are worried and there have been scattered protests.

On Thursday police arrested more than 10 people who tried to enter the

Japanese embassy in Seoul.

South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo said Thursday that there was "no need to be excessively concerned" about the plan.

Han also criticized what he called a "politically driven" campaign using "fake news" to fan fears.

Social media posts in China and South Korea have included false claims about the release, including doctored images of deformed fish with claims they were linked to Fukushima.

'Future generations'

People in the Japanese fishing industry also oppose the release, concerned that governments and consumers will shun their seafood.

"I am worried about the future," protestor Ruiko Muto, 70, told AFP in Miharuru near the power plant. "We can't pass on the responsibility of what happened during our generation to the generation of our children and to future generations." (With a report from Joseph Pedrajas)



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JAPAN DECISION PASSES ON 'PAIN TO FUTURE GENERATIONS'

CHINA CALLS FUKUSHIMA WASTEWATER RELEASE 'EXTREMELY SELFISH,

IRRESPONSIBLE'

BEIJING—China on Thursday slammed the release of wastewater from Japan's crippled Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean, branding it "extremely selfish and irresponsible."

Japan began discharging the treated contaminated water from the stricken plant earlier on Thursday in an operation it insists is safe but has generated a

fierce backlash from China.

The release has also been deemed safe by the International Atomic Energy Agency, but Beijing has banned food imports from 10 Japanese prefectures, with Hong Kong following suit.

'Risk onto the world'

"The ocean is the common property of all humanity, and forcibly starting the discharge of

Fukushima's nuclear wastewater into the ocean is an extremely selfish and irresponsible act that ignores international public interests," Beijing's foreign ministry said in a statement.

Japan "did not prove the legitimacy" of the plan or the "long-term reliability of the nuclear wastewater purification equipment," it said.

Tokyo also "did not prove the

authenticity and accuracy of the nuclear wastewater data, (and) did not prove that ocean discharge is harmless to the marine environment and human health."

"What the Japanese side has done is to push the risks onto the whole world (and) pass on the pain to future generations of human beings," the statement said.

"By treating the release of

the wastewater as a fait accompli, the Japanese side has simultaneously placed itself in the international dock."

2011 disaster

In 2011, three reactors at the Fukushima-Daiichi facility in northeastern Japan went into meltdown following a massive earthquake and tsunami that killed around 18,000 people.

Since then, plant operator Tepco has collected 1.34 million cubic meters of water contaminated as it cooled the wrecked reactors, along with groundwater and rain that has seeped in.

The beginning of the discharge of around 540 Olympic swimming pools' worth of water over several decades is a big step in decommissioning the still highly dangerous site. —AFP



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China bans Japan seafood after Fukushima wastewater release

By MARI YAMAGUCHI
The Associated Press

OKUMA, Japan—The tsunami-wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant's operator says it began releasing its first batch of treated radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean on Thursday—a controversial step that prompted China to ban seafood from Japan.



THIS aerial view shows the tanks, seen foreground, which contain treated radioactive wastewater at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Fukushima, northern Japan, on August 22, 2023. The operator of the tsunami-wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant will begin releasing the first batch of treated and diluted radioactive wastewater into the Pacific Ocean later Thursday, August 24, 2023, utility executives said. KYODO NEWS VIA AP



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In a live video from a control room at the plant, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings showed a staff member turn on a seawater pump with a click of a mouse, marking the beginning of the controversial project that is expected to last for decades.

"Seawater Pump A activated," the main operator said, confirming the release was underway. TEPCO later confirmed that the seawater pump was activated at 1:03 p.m. (0403 GMT), three minutes after the final step began.

TEPCO said an additional wastewater release pump was activated 20 minutes after the first. Plant officials said everything was moving smoothly so far.

Japanese fisher groups have opposed the plan for fear it will further damage the reputation of their seafood. Groups in China and South Korea have also raised concern, making it a political and diplomatic issue.

In response to the release, Chinese customs authorities banned seafood from Japan, customs authorities announced Thursday. The ban started immediately and will affect all imports of "aquatic products" including seafood, according to the notice. Authorities said they will "dynamically adjust relevant regulatory measures as appropriate to prevent the risks of nuclear-contaminated water discharge to the health and food safety of our country."

But the Japanese government and TEPCO say the water must be released to make room for the plant's decommissioning and to prevent accidental leaks. They say the treatment and dilution will make the wastewater safer than international standards and its environmental impact will be

negligibly small.

Tony Hooker, director of the Center for Radiation Research, Education, Innovation at the University of Adelaide, said the water released from the Fukushima plant is safe. "It certainly is well below the World Health Organization drinking water guidelines," he said. "It's safe."

"It's a very political issue of disposing radiation into the sea," he said. "I understand people's concerns and that's because we as scientists have not explained it in a very good way, and we need to do more education."

Still, some scientists say the long-term impact of the low-dose radioactivity that remains in the water needs attention.

In a statement Thursday, International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi said, "IAEA experts are there on the ground to serve as the eyes of the international community and ensure that the discharge is being carried out as planned consistent with IAEA safety standards."

The United Nations agency also said it would launch a webpage to provide live data about the discharge, and repeated its assurance that the IAEA would have an on-site presence for the duration of the release.

The water release begins more than 12 years after the March 2011 nuclear meltdowns, caused by a massive earthquake and tsunami. It marks a milestone for the plant's battle with an ever-growing radioactive water stockpile that TEPCO and the government say has hampered the daunting task of removing the fatally toxic melted debris from the reactors.

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The pump activated Thursday afternoon sent the first batch of the diluted, treated water from a mixing pool to a secondary pool 10 minutes later. It then moves through a connected undersea tunnel to go out 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) off the coast. Officials said the water moves at a walking speed and will take about 30 minutes to exit from the tunnel.

The operator checked data and the progress on a set of four monitors that show the water volume, pump conditions and any alerts.

TEPCO executive Junichi Matsumoto said Thursday's release was planned to start small in order to ensure safety.

The wastewater is collected and partly recycled as cooling water after treatment, with the rest stored in around 1,000 tanks, which are already filled to 98 percent of their 1.37-million-ton capacity. Those tanks, which cover much of the plant complex, must be freed up to build the new facilities needed for the decommissioning process, officials said.

Final preparation for the release began Tuesday, when just one ton of treated water was sent from a tank for dilution with 1,200 tons of seawater, and the mixture was kept in the primary pool for two days for final sampling to ensure safety, Matsumoto said. A batch of 460 tons was to be sent to the mixing pool Thursday for the actual discharge.

Fukushima's fisheries, tourism and economy—which are still recovering from the disaster—worry the release could be the beginning of a new hardship.

Fukushima's current fish catch is only about one-fifth its pre-disaster level, in part due to a decline in the fishing population.

China has tightened radiation testing on Japanese products from Fukushima and nine other prefectures, halting exports at customs for weeks, Fisheries Agency officials said.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said the release is indispensable and could not be postponed. He noted an experimental removal of a small amount of the melted debris from the No. 2 reactor is set for later this year using a remote-controlled giant robotic arm.

In 2021, the Japanese government announced plans to release the treated water to the sea. Then, on Sunday, Kishida made a rushed visit to the plant before meeting with fisheries representatives and pledging to support their livelihoods until the release ends.

The hurried timeline raised skepticism that it was made to fit Kishida's busy political schedule in September. But Economy and Industry Ministry officials say they wanted the release to start as early as possible and have good safety records ahead of the fall fishing season.

The March 2011 earthquake and tsunami destroyed the plant's cooling systems, causing three reactors to melt. Highly contaminated cooling water applied to the damaged reactors has leaked continuously to building basements and mixed with groundwater.

TEPCO plans to release 31,200 tons of the treated water by the end of March 2024, which would empty only 10 tanks because of the contaminated production of wastewater at the plant, though the pace will later pick up.

AP reporter Huizhong Wu contributed from Taipei, Taiwan.



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Villar proposes reclamation projects to secure approval from NEDA, DOF

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

SEN. Cynthia Villar wants reclamation projects to have the approval of government agencies such as the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and Department of Finance (DOF) before these projects are issued an Environmental Certificate Compliance (ECC) by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

"Under the current set-up, the DENR will issue an ECC. But unfortunately, those ECCs were issued without consultations. That's the problem. Maybe, we can include not only DENR, but also NEDA, or the Department of Finance," Villar said.

She also said government agencies should make it "harder" for reclamation projects to get ECCs because only one DENR subagency—the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB)—is issuing the said clearances.

Villar also said the EMB director issues the ECC "without consultations."

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. earlier said all 22 reclamation projects in Manila Bay, except for one, have been suspended.

The ECCs were issued during the time of DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu, Villar said.

Villar said 15 of these reclamation projects are found in Metro Manila (Region 4-A) and 4 are found in Cavite (Region 4).

She said she has been strongly fighting the two planned reclamation projects in Las Pinas as it will impede the flow of water from four rivers - the Paranaque River, the Las Pinas River, the Zapote River and the Molino River.

Villar, chairperson of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, cited warnings by experts about massive floodings in the areas of Las Pinas and the nearby Bacoor City if reclamation takes place.



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Retailers wary of single-use plastic taxation

By BERNIE CAHILES-MAGKILAT

Local retailers are seeking clarification on the planned imposition of taxes on single-use plastic on fears such move could only trigger increases in prices of consumer products.

Philippine Retailers Association (PRA) President Roberto S. Claudio Sr. told reporters at the National Retail Conference and Stores Asia Expo (NRCE) 2023 held recently that while taxing single-use plastic is a good environmental direction, there are issues that need to be clarified. President Marcos in his last State of the Nation Address mentioned taxing single-use plastic.

First, Claudio said there is a need to classify plastic products because there are plastic items that are 30 percent and 50 percent degradable. "What is single-use plastic," he said.

"We need more clarity and they need to define more what plastic means, what is single-use plastic," he said.

For instance, he said, single-use could mean container used in the wet market and thrown after, but if it is washed and reused, it is no longer single-use plastic and therefore no longer taxable.

"There will be confusion in the implementation," he said adding that they understand the idea that the aim is to ensure less packaging, less plastic, and less garbage. Other plastic products can also be recycled, he noted.

Retailers are wary of this new move of the government because they expect to bear the brunt of this environmental cleanup. "Since we are the retailers, we are the ones packaging the items," he said.

But what worries them is that the taxes imposed will eventually be passed on to consumers. This would mean higher prices.

Retailers, however, have been encouraging customers to bring their own reusable bags when they shop.

"We will define the single use plastic properly to avoid confusion, but the idea of reducing plastic, yes we support that.

Exactly how and who should shoulder the cost, that is the question," he added.

On Nov. 14, 2022, the lower House approved on third reading House Bill 4102 or House Bill (HB) 4102 or the Single-use Plastic Bags Tax Act as the country's contribution to the global movement to reduce pollution. The bill was transmitted to the Senate on Nov. 15, 2022.

The bill seeks to impose an excise tax of P100 on every kilogram of single-use plastics removed from the place of production or released from custody of the Bureau of Customs.

The price of a pack of labo bags is estimated to increase by around 75 percent during the first year of implementation, with an estimated decline in volume by around 24.7 percent.

While the retail price of sand bags will increase by 79.3 percent, which is expected to result in a 26.1-percent decline in volume.

The proposed excise tax will increase yearly by four percent beginning 2026, and incremental revenues collected will be allocated to the Department of Natural Resources' programs for the implementation of Republic Act 9003.

A 70 percent assumption in collection efficiency will translate to estimated revenues of P38.06 billion for five years, or 2023 to 2027, of implementation.

If passed into law, the bill will address the long-standing issue of plastic waste management by promoting the use of recyclable packaging, and ending the "throw-away culture".

Studies have shown that market-based instruments, such as taxes aimed at discouraging the use of single-use plastics, have proven to be effective in curtailing plastic waste generation.

In the ASEAN region, Brunei and Vietnam have already imposed taxes on single-use plastic bags. As a result, Vietnam saw a 23 percent reduction in daily plastic consumption—from 746 tons a day in 2014 to 577 tons in 2017.



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PNOC EC, Nido Petroleum in talks over Cadlao drilling

By LENIE LECTURA @llectura

THE Philippine National Oil Co. (PNOC) Exploration Corp. (EC) is set to participate in the redevelopment of the Cadlao oil field in offshore Northwest Palawan.

"We are already in advanced discussions to participate in SC [service contract] 6B Cadlao field with drilling scheduled this year and production next year," said PNOC EC Planning and Budget Supervisor Alexis De La Torre during a Senate hearing.

Australian-based energy firm Sagsasco Ltd., through its wholly-owned subsidiary, Nido Petroleum Philippines Pty. Ltd. (Nido), has accepted a Letter of Intent from PNOC

EC for its farmin to SC 6B, including the drilling of Cadlao 4 well and an Extended Well Test (EWT) as the first stage of redevelopment of the Cadlao oil field.

The redevelopment targets 6.2 million barrels of economically recoverable oil.

Under the farmin agreement, PNOC EC will acquire from Nido a 20-percent participating interest in SC 6B for the drilling and EWT of

the Cadlao 4 well. The farmin agreement to SC 6B will be subject to the approval of the Department of Energy (DOE), and the usual respective board and joint venture approvals.

Sagsasco Managing Director Gary Jeffery said the Philippine government is supportive of the company's activities, and the local community and that the DOE has shown its support for early drilling offshore Palawan.

"This is just one of a number of projects we are pursuing offshore the Philippines. We have had extensive discussions with suppliers and have identified suitable equipment for an extended well test which if positive and confirms our modeling, will likely lead to a more comprehensive development of Cadlao Oil field and exploration of the nearby Cadlao East Prospect.

Other prospects in the area can

also then be pursued and incorporated into the production operations for the Cadlao Oilfield," he said in a statement.

Last January, Nido Petroleum said it may spend up to \$32 million to develop three to four wells.

In a filing with the environment department's Environmental Management Bureau, Nido Petroleum said the estimated capital expenditure for a development plan for the Cadlao field is at \$8 million per well.

Cadlao is an old oil field that was last produced in the early 1990s with over 11 million barrels. The technical operatorship of this oil field was assigned to Nido Petroleum from the Philodrigill in February 2022 to fund the development costs, which include drilling, extended well tests, and subsequent development of the said oil field.



14 activists charged over SONA protests

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

Criminal complaints were filed by the police against 14 leaders of cause-oriented groups for staging rallies during the second State of the Nation (SONA) of President Marcos without allegedly securing a permit from the local government.

The leaders of the militant groups were charged by the Quezon City Police District (QCPD) for violation of Batas Pambansa 880 or the Public Assembly Act.

The QCPD filed the complaint after it learned from the Quezon City department of public order and safety

on Aug. 14 that a permit to conduct a rally was not issued to the militant leaders' groups for the July 24 anti-SONA rally.

Sought for comment, Bayan president Renato Reyes said the complaint has no basis as they secured a permit to hold a rally from the local government last July 20, four days before the SONA.

He pointed out that Bayan Southern Tagalog is a regional chapter of their organization, hence it no longer secured a separate permit.

"The basic understanding is that they are part of the bigger contingent that was granted a permit for that day," Reyes

said in a message on Viber.

He said the QCPD is trying to come up with more "ridiculous" charges to suppress freedom of speech and the right to a peaceful assembly.

Reyes also condemned the QCPD for filing complaints against the creators of an effigy that was burned during the SONA.

The complaints are for violation of Republic Act 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act and RA 8749, also known as the Philippine Clean Air Act.

"This case is clearly repression hiding behind feigned concern for the environment," he said in a statement.



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LONG OVERDUE

BAGUIO EXECS SEEK NCIP RULES ON ANCESTRAL LAND REGISTRATION

By Vincent Cabreza
@InqNational

BAGUIO CITY—The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) has been asked to draw up long-awaited rules for listing ancestral lands and ancestral domains in local government land registries to further legitimize these indigenous properties as private lands, according to a city council resolution signed on Aug. 14 by Mayor Benjamin Magalong.

The request comes on the heels of a 2022 Department of Justice (DOJ) opinion that Certificates of Ancestral Land or Domain Titles (CALT or CADT) are legitimate documents that should be honored by all agencies in the course of public transactions like applications for building permits.

Section 52 of the 1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (Republic Act No. 8371) requires CALTs and CADTs to be included in the Register of Deeds in their respective localities.

CALTs recognize private home lots which an indigenous peoples (IP) family has occupied "since time immemorial." CADTs, on the other hand, are much larger tracts of communal land that have been administered for centuries by an IP group.

But many CALTs have not been registered in some areas because the bureaucracy governing land registrations were designed for Torrens titles (conventional land titles), and not special titles like CALTs.

Following a series of policy harmonization meetings with the Land Registration Authority (LRA), the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the LRA asked the NCIP for a distinct set of registry guidelines for ancestral land titles in 2016, according to NCIP Cordillera legal officer Arthur Herman during the July 31 session of the city council.

To date, the guidelines have yet to be cleared by the NCIP sitting en banc.

Councilor Arthur Allad-iw

said Resolution No. 477 Series of 2023 urged the NCIP to finally issue LRA's requested guidelines covering "the registration of Transfer Certificates of Titles or derivative titles (subdivided properties) emanating from originally issued CALT."

Security paper

The resolution also noted the LRA's suggestion that the NCIP issue CALTs and CADTs using the same security paper used by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, said Allad-iw, who sponsored the measure.

The harmonization talks among land titling agencies began as early as 2005 and were intended to resolve issues such as the overlapping jurisdictions of NCIP, DENR and other "social reform" programs like DAR and its agrarian lands.

For instance, at least 1,198 areas covered by Certificates of Land Ownership Awards in the Cordillera are within ancestral domains, according to DAR's 2020 Indigenous Peoples Policy Framework Report.

The agencies also worked on common regulations to address the registration of ancestral domains that exceed the territorial boundaries of a town or province.

Resolution No. 477 was a companion measure to Resolution No. 476, also passed on July 31, which directs the City Buildings and Architecture Office to honor CALTs and CADTs submitted by Baguio Ibalays when they apply for building or fencing permits.

The National Building Code does not include ancestral land titles among the documents it prescribes for granting construction permits.

But in the Dec. 15, 2022, opinion released by Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla, DOJ said CALTs and CADTs were "considered as recognition of ownership," and building permits "may be issued on structures built on parcels of land covered by the CADT or CALT that were not nullified through judicial proceeding." INQ



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Toward Palawan's green recovery

Puerto Princesa—"For the first time since 'Odette,' the mountains are green again, starting just a few months ago," Jasper Arcinas, a local hiking guide, told me as we stood at the summit of Mount Airy in Barangay Bacungan, one of the numerous peaks within Puerto Princesa. Atop the ultramafic landscape, even with the cloud cover, we could appreciate a landscape as verdant as when I was living in this city almost a decade ago.

Rarely visited and largely undisturbed since the typhoon, Mount Airy reminded me of United States Agency for International Development's Philippine Sustainable Interventions for Biodiversity, Oceans, and Landscapes' (USAID SIBOL) green assessment report: "Some forest areas left to recover naturally have fared better, indicating that it is preferable to have minimal and selective management interventions." I am also reminded that even before Typhoon "Odette," environmentalists have been advocating for leaving Palawan's forests alone to regenerate—rather than allowing them to be destroyed and promoting active reforestation.

Still, the hopeful sight of green mountains can obscure the enduring damage within them. In Mount Airy, fallen trunks continue to block the trails, and many trees, though still standing, are on the verge of falling, weakened by the storm, infested by fungi, raising the risk of forest fires akin to those in the immediate aftermath of Odette.

Worryingly, some species have not returned, including bees whose honey indigenous peoples rely on for livelihood, as well as the avian species that birdwatchers have long been monitoring (and missing). Years ago, I never failed to see snakes, frogs, insects, birds, and other fauna on each hike, but nowadays the mountains seem quieter.

Scientists are aware that Palawan's "green recovery," if at all fully possible, will take time and unprecedented effort. Aside from the clearing of debris and controlling opportunistic species, the USAID SIBOL report recommends



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reforestation and "assisted natural regeneration" (i.e., augmenting recovery by planting native trees and removing barriers to regeneration, among other steps). In all of these, the role of environmental frontliners—i.e., forest guards and rangers—is critical and they must be supported financially, socially, and legally, mindful of the deadly risks they face.

At the national level, strengthening the protected area status of the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park and Cleopatra's Needle Critical Habitat can help facilitate their recovery, and so can establishing more protected areas—hopefully including Mount Victoria and Sultan Peak in Narra. More broadly, the fact that the environmental impacts of Odette have escaped nationwide attention speaks of the marginality of environmental concerns in our national discourse. If we are to save our forests, we need to move toward an ecological consciousness, and indeed, an ecological politics that takes the environment into consideration whether in urban planning or disaster risk reduction.

Ecotourism—which as the pandemic has shown is essential for Palawan's economic and environmental survival—can help foster this ecological consciousness, while also helping local communities see the value of protecting the environment. For these to happen, however,

we need more environmental education, which should include the opportunity for students to actually immerse in nature. We also need more journalism that tells stories—and histories—about the environment; stories that advance environmental justice while explaining why it matters. And we need more environmental scholarship—including from the social sciences and humanities—to more fully document the richness of our forests and the threats they face.

It is heartening that people's organizations are taking up the challenge of responding to the "ecological emergency." For instance, groups like the Sabang Sea Ferry Multi-Purpose Cooperative, Community Park Warden Association, Samahan Ng Tribong Tagbanua sa Kayasan, Cabayugan Farmers Association, and Samahang Pagkakaisa ng mga Katutubong Tagbanua sa Marufinas are supporting forest recovery through 500 hectares of assisted natural regeneration and increased forest protection mechanisms, through the support of Forest Foundation Philippines.

Meanwhile, Palawan's nongovernment organizations are redoubling their efforts to protect Palawan; when I visited Centre for Sustainability PH, Inc., a youth-led environmental nonprofit, their staff spoke about the importance of declaring the mountains of Narra as protected areas, building on their success in having a similar declaration for Cleopatra's Needle. Farther south, indigenous peoples in Mount Mantalingajan just last week successfully petitioned the Supreme Court to issue a "writ of *kalikasan*" to protect their communities from mining.

Such efforts make me feel hopeful that, with a renewed sense of urgency in Odette's wake, and especially with stronger, sustained, support, the fight for the island's ecosystems remains alive; alive as its wounded but recovering forests; alive as the dream that this island's future will be as green as its past.

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More intense, year-round heat waves seen

GENEVA, Switzerland: As Europe and other regions swelter, a UN researcher cautioned that climate change was enabling increasingly intense and long-lasting heat waves, which in some areas could soon begin to hit year-round.

Extreme heat has dominated the headlines in recent weeks, from the current "heat dome" cooking much of Europe, to heat-fueled wildfires raging in Greece, Spain, Canada and Hawaii, and soaring temperatures in the middle of the South American winter.

Heat waves are beginning earlier, lasting longer and becoming more intense, John Nairn, a senior extreme heat advisor at the UN's World Meteorological Organization (WMO), told Agence France-Presse in an interview.

"It's the most rapidly emerging consequence of global warming that we are seeing in the weather systems," he said, stressing that this was in line with scientific predictions.

"People are far too relaxed about the signs," he lamented.

"The science has been saying this is

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More intense, year-round

coming your way. And this is not where it stops.

"It will only get more intense and more frequent."

'Parked' heat

One reason, he explained, was that global warming appears to be leading to a weakening of the global jet streams — air that flows high in the Earth's atmosphere.

As the jet stream waves grow slower and wavier, they allow weather systems to "become parked" in one spot for longer.

"You can get a summertime situation where you get persistent heat waves, and the heat just builds and builds and builds, because the wave is not moving on," Nairn said.

If you look at the planet as a whole, he said you could see that these heat waves are appearing in each of those same wavelengths around the globe.

"The slowing down and parking of the weather patterns is setting us up so that North America, parts of the Atlantic Ocean, Europe and Asia are simultaneously 'sitting in the (wave) ridges, getting caught."

Heat waves are among the deadliest natural hazards, with hundreds of thousands of people dying from preventable heat-related causes each year.

'More dangerous'

Nairn called for the conversation around heat to become "smarter."

Among other things, he said, there should be far more focus on rising overnight minimum temperatures than on the maximum day temperatures that grab headlines.

Repeated high nighttime temperatures are particularly danger-

ous for human health, since the body is unable to recover from the heat it suffers through during the day.

Higher overnight temperatures also mean that the energy accumulated during the day has nowhere to go, pushing temperatures even higher the next day.

The fact that minimum temperatures are rising faster than maximums is thus pushing excess energy "into longer periods of higher temperatures," Nairn said.

"It's cumulative... So heat waves are becoming much more dangerous."

And as the climate continues to change, the situation is due to get worse, Nairn said.

He voiced particular concern over the situation in the tropics and subtropics, pointing to the record heat seen in South America, with temperatures up towards 40 degrees Celsius in the middle of what is supposed to be their winter.

Looking forward, he cautioned that "we're going to see a lot more heat waves across a much longer period of the year."

In the tropics and subtropics, "unfortunately, the indications are that severe and extreme heat waves are likely to be able to occur anytime (of year) before the end of the century."

Less sunlight means year-round extreme heat waves are not expected at other latitudes, but Nairn stressed that there too we will be seeing more "unseasonably warm periods" even in winter.

Asked what could be done to help in the rampant heat, Nairn stressed that "all of us have the capabilities to actually turn this around."

"We need to electrify everything... and stop burning fossil fuels. It's not harder than that."

AFP