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SKETCHES

ANA MARIE PAMINTUAN

Disappearing sea

The sea is gone – *nawala na ang tubig* – from Roxas Boulevard.

That's President Marcos talking, as he confirmed what his environment secretary had said earlier, that a review will be conducted on all reclamation projects in Manila Bay except one, which he did not identify.



Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga announced the upcoming review amid massive flooding in Bulacan and Pampanga that residents suspect has been aggravated by ongoing bay reclamation projects (strongly disputed by the project proponents).

The US embassy also issued a statement of concern about the environmental impact of the bay reclamation, and the involvement in one of the projects by a state-owned Chinese company blacklisted by Washington for building and militarizing artificial islands in the South China Sea.

Sen. Cynthia Villar has been among the most appreciative of the forthcoming review. For many years now, she has been expressing concern about floods worsening in her home city of Las Piñas and other communities around Manila Bay due to massive reclamation activities.

She should invite the President to the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area that she defended from commercial reclamation. From the park, and from the CAVITEX beyond the dense mangrove forest, the bay still looks magnificent, especially at sunset.

Villar has saved this spot of the bay by pushing for an official declaration of the ecotourism park as a protected Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands – one of only six Ramsar sites in the country. The park has become a wildlife sanctuary and spawning ground for marine life in the bay.

Since the technology and resources for reclamation became available in the country in the late 19th century, there have been reclamation projects around Manila Bay (and Laguna de Bay). Manila's Port Area where The STAR office is located (we're moving out soon) sits on reclaimed land. But the projects were not on the gargantuan scale that we are now seeing.

Rodrigo Duterte, during his presidency, had said in 2020 that he would not approve new reclamation projects in Manila Bay, because of their environmental impact and (in 2021) due to reports of corruption. Yet most of the ongoing large projects were approved under his watch.

After ordering the cleanup of Boracay, Duterte had tasked his DENR secretary Roy Cimatu to do the same for Manila Bay, which would actually implement a Supreme Court writ of continuing mandamus issued on Dec. 18, 2008.

The writ directed 13 government agencies to clean up, rehabilitate and preserve the bay, and restore the sea to a quality that is fit for swimming. It was issued in response to a complaint originally filed in January 1999 before the Imus Regional Trial Court in Cavite against 11 government agencies by a group calling itself the Concerned Residents of Manila Bay.

While the administration of Noynoy Aquino officially said it had no choice but to abide by the Supreme Court order, the subsequent acts (or omissions) indicated that it was largely dismissed by Malacañang as judicial overreach that encroached on executive functions.

Also, Manila Bay obviously poses a far greater challenge than Boracay for cleaning up. But because of Cimatu's work in Boracay, people hoped he might be able to accomplish something.

He would later report that establishments including the Manila Zoo were compelled to stop spewing their sewage into the bay. Cimatu also went for cosmetic bay beautification, through the controversial, high-maintenance Dolomite Beach in Manila.

While the view from the artificial beach is terrific, the view from ground level along Roxas Boulevard, for motorists and pedestrians with no interest in lining up to enter the Dolomite Beach, is a disaster. That's what BBM is surely referring to when he says that the sea is gone from the boulevard.

The DENR and the 12 other agencies covered by the SC order have themselves obstructed the view of the famous sunset, and violated easement rules by constructing that unsightly two-story "Mandamus" administrative building near the Manila Yacht Club.

Unfortunately, it's a common mindset in this country that a handful of persons are entitled to enjoying a national patrimony while depriving the general public of the privilege.

In other countries, seashores are public domain and maintained by the government for free public enjoyment. The typical design is a beach, with a concrete promenade running through or parallel to it for jogging, biking and related activities. Beyond this promenade is a road. Only beyond this road can you find the commercial establishments and residential complexes.

An alternative design, in areas without considerable expanses of natural beaches, is a road that hugs the coast, with rest stops along the way, usually at spots that offer the best views. Always, the sea view is not obstructed.

The only commercial establishments that may be found on the beach itself are docks for sea tours or ferry transport, and underwater attractions like the one in Manila's Ocean Park.

In fishing communities or fishports, an area right by the water may be developed into a commercial wharf, with a seafood market and restaurants. Properly designed, such areas are major tourist draws. Portions of the coastal communities of Cavite used to have this potential, but these areas have almost entirely disappeared.

Tokyo's sprawling Tsukiji Fish Market remains a top tourist destination, even if the fish auction has relocated. During one of my visits to Japan, I readily woke up hours before dawn to watch the lively bidding for top-grade tuna from all over the planet (some were marked from General Santos City).

The much smaller Navotas fishport could have been developed into a tourist spot. Instead it is now also threatened by the impact of the disappearing bay.



STRATEGIC
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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1900
MANILA BULLETIN
THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER



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Bulacan floods due to shallow riverways – DPWH

By RAYMUND ANTONIO

Public Works and Highways Secretary Manuel Bonoan disagreed that the construction of various infrastructure projects has affected the drainage systems and waterways in Bulacan, and caused the massive flooding there recently.

Instead, he said the flooding in Bulacan was triggered by the "shallow rivers".

"I think, sa akin lang naman (for me only), technically kasi (because) some of the problems actually in Bulacan is that many of the rivers there, the riverbed are just so shallow now at this time. So, we need to increase the carrying capacity of these rivers para mas mabilis iyong pagdaloy ng tubig-baha papunta sa Manila Bay (to make the flow of water going to Manila Bay quicker)," he explained during a Palace press briefing on Tuesday, Aug. 8.

However, he agreed that an audit on construction practices will help deal with these issues, and assured that the bypass roads being constructed by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) do not hinder waterways.

The official came to the defense of the agency's flood-control projects after a senator criticized their efficiency despite the billions of pesos being poured into the projects.

Senator Bong Revilla, chair of the Senate Committee on Public Works, is set to summon the DPWH chief and Metropolitan

Manila Development Authority (MMDA) Chairperson Romando Artes for a hearing on the recent spate of flooding brought by monsoon rains and Typhoon "Egay."

Also in his statement, the senator said he will make sure contractors who damage waterways and drainage facilities are held accountable.

An earlier situation briefing reported that damage to waterways, as well as the construction of bypass roads and commuter railways, caused the massive flooding in Bulacan.

Although the official admitted that there are some delays in the projects, Bonoan maintained that these only concerned the smaller projects and that "most of them are ongoing right now."

"Let me put it this way, I can only speak for what we started, actually we have just been in this administration for one year and the projects that we are implementing for flood-control projects under the 2023 budget (are) ongoing," he said.

The secretary was asked to give a status of DPWH's flood-control projects given the perennial problem of flooding, the latest of which occurred in Bulacan and Pampanga.

"This amount is distributed all over the country. They are ongoing and they are on track actually. Wala namang... doon kasi sa budget namin (There is no... in our budget), we have two years to implement all these projects," he said, referring to the quoted ₱180 billion for the agency's ongoing flood-control projects.



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Tulfo measure asks House to probe status of reclamation in Manila Bay

By Maricel V. Cruz

REP. Erwin Tulfo of the ACT-CIS party-list group on Tuesday sought a congressional inquiry in aid of legislation into the status of the Manila Bay reclamation projects, citing "several concerns on national security."

Tulfo, in filing House Resolution 1171, said he shared the sentiment of Speaker Martin Romualdez, who also wants to ensure that national security, transparency, environmental sustainability, and the best interest of the public are upheld.

"I was informed by the Speaker that he was concerned after hearing several news reports regarding national security issues in the reclamation area as he

remained committed to safeguarding our nation's security and upholding our territorial integrity and fostering peaceful cooperation in the region," Tulfo said in a statement.

Tulfo filed the resolution along with fellow ACT-CIS party-list solons Edvic Yap and Jocelyn Tulfo.

The three legislators noted in the resolution that the ongoing reclamation activities in the Manila Bay area "have raised concerns among citizens and various stakeholders."

They said the reclamation projects may pose a danger to the Philippines after the US government recently raised concerns about the Chinese contractor involved in the projects.

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Tulfo...

From A1

"I have read in several news reports that one of the companies involved in the reclamation project in Manila Bay right now is a construction firm from mainland China, the China Construc-

tion Company (CCC). And this same construction company, the news reports added, was also involved in the construction of an airbase and naval base of China in the West Philippine Sea," Tulfo said.

Earlier, Senator Cynthia Villar also warned that six- to eight-meter floods in Las Piñas City and other nearby areas could

likely happen if the ongoing reclamation in Manila Bay reaches her hometown.

Villar, the chairperson of the Senate Committee on the Environment and natural resources, has been strongly objecting to any reclamation project at Manila Bay.

"I'm taking them [to the Supreme Court]. If they don't revise [their plan],

we have no choice. Will I allow my hometown to be submerged in a six-foot flood?" she said.

"If they continue with the reclamation in our part of Manila Bay, there will be no outlet for our four rivers. It was predicted there will be six to eight meters of flooding. Six meters is [equivalent to a] three-story building," Villar added.



Erwin Tulfo, two other lawmakers seek probe into Manila Bay reclamation projects

LAWMAKERS on Tuesday filed a resolution urging the House of Representatives to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, regarding the status of the Manila Bay reclamation projects due to concerns about national security.

ACT-CIS Reps. Erwin Tulfo, Jocelyn Tulfo and Edvic Yap filed House Resolution No. 1171, echoing the sentiment of Speaker Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez, who also wants to know who is in charge of keeping an eye on all

these Chinese vessels involved in the reclamation.

In their resolution, the lawmakers said the preservation and security of the nation are of paramount importance, and any activity that may impact our national security requires scrutiny.

"The ongoing and proposed reclamation projects within Manila Bay have raised concerns about potential implications for the National Security of the Philippines," said the resolution.

"Although the ongoing land

reclamation may offer potential economic benefits and development opportunities, it also raises concerns about its environmental impact, such as the alteration of coastal processes and the possible effects on water quality and marine biodiversity," it added.

Recently, the lawmakers said the United States government has expressed concerns over the potential negative long-term and irreversible impacts on the environment and resilience to natural

hazards of the reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

They added that the United States also raised concerns that the reclamation project had ties to the China Communications Construction Co., which was cited by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for engaging in fraudulent business practices.

"A comprehensive inquiry, in aid of legislation, is essential to assess the current status of Manila Bay reclamation projects, including their compliance with environmental laws, the potential social, economic, and national security consequences," the resolution read. *Jovee Marie N. Dela Cruz*



Ejercito wants Chinese vessels undertaking reclamation in Manila Bay checked

By CECILLE SUERTE FELIPE

Chinese vessels undertaking reclamation work in Manila Bay should be inspected and their officers and crew checked for possible links to China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), Sen. Joseph Victor "JV" Ejercito said yesterday.

"The Philippine Coast Guard and Philippine Navy should check the Chinese vessels undertaking the reclamation on Manila Bay. These are manned by Chinese, it is not far-fetched that some PLA intel might be on board these vessels. They are too near, in Manila Bay," Ejercito said.

He issued the call days after the incident in Ayungin Shoal wherein

a Chinese Coast Guard ship attacked with water cannon a Philippine vessel delivering provisions to troops on the grounded *BRP Sierra Madre*.

Ejercito was among the senators who strongly condemned the latest Chinese act of intimidation.

"It is clear that the government of the People's Republic of China is deliberately ignoring the 2016 Arbitral Ruling that dismissed their baseless nine-dash line claim. At the same time, they are playing deaf to our diplomatic protests and warnings from our allies," he added.

He noted that the Ayungin incident happened shortly after the Senate approved a resolution seeking to raise China's bullying before the

United Nations General Assembly.

"We cannot let this slip. This is too much already. China's abuse of our Philippine Navy, Philippine Coast Guard and fishermen is too much. Territory, security and peace are at stake here," Ejercito added.

He urged the national government to heed the Senate's recent resolution on China's aggression and take decisive measures to safeguard the country's territorial integrity.

"These measures will require us to expedite the modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and strengthen our defense cooperation program and pacts with our allies," he added.

ACT-CIS party-list Rep. Erwin Tulfo, meanwhile, has called for an in-

quiry into the Manila Bay reclamation projects, citing their possible "consequential effects" on the country's national security and environment.

Tulfo said in a privilege speech delivered before the plenary yesterday that the ongoing reclamation of Manila Bay is a cause for concern as it would displace thousands of fishermen and workers.

Tulfo noted he got information that these people were not even considered during the consultation and planning stages of the projects.

"That is part of my advocacy - no one should be left behind. That is also part of the thrust of the Marcos administration and Speaker Martin Romualdez. Everyone should move

forward," he added.

Prior to this, Tulfo, along with other ACT-CIS Reps. Jocelyn Tulfo and Edvic Yap, filed House Resolution No. 1171, seeking a probe "in aid of legislation."

He added the projects may put the Philippines' security at risk, citing concerns raised by the United States that operators of the ships involved in the project "have ties to the China Communications Construction Co., which was cited by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for engaging in fraudulent business practices."

In a statement, Tulfo said Romualdez got information that "Chinese crew of these (Chinese) vessels come to our shores in Pasay and Manila at night." - With Sheila Crisostomo



Editorial

'Green lane' should not sacrifice standards for speed

DURING his second State of the Nation Address last month, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. announced that his administration had launched an investment "green lane," intended to speed up the process of approvals for strategic investments, primarily those in renewable energy and in the mining of minerals such as copper and nickel. Any idea that helps to ease the difficult process of getting new and critically needed investments off the ground is welcome, but the government should realize that implementation of the "green lane" will require a great deal of follow-up work to make it effective.

Executive Order (EO) 18 signed by President Marcos on July 13 created the One Stop Action Center for Strategic Investments (OSAC-SI), intended to be a single entry point for all projects that qualify as strategic investments. Per information from the Department of Trade and Industry's Board of Investments, strategic investments include "highly desirable" projects recommended by the Fiscal Incentives Review Board to the Office of the President; foreign direct investments endorsed by the Inter-Agency Investment Promotion Coordinating Committee; and priority projects included in the Investment Priority Plan, which is a part of the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028.

A bit of skepticism on the part of the public and investors is probably understandable. This is far from the first time an incumbent administration has tackled the country's chronic "ease of doing business" problem, and many of the previous and ultimately unsatisfactory solutions also involved the creation of some sort of "one-stop shop." We are inclined to give the current attempt the benefit of the doubt. The officials to whom responsibility for making the "green lane" work ultimately falls are qualified and knowledgeable people who have the benefit of hindsight toward earlier efforts; there is no obvious reason anyone should expect the new initiative to fail.

However, there are a couple of obvious pitfalls. Launching the OSAC-SI is one thing; constantly monitoring its outputs and being alert to the possibility that fine-tuning along the way will be necessary is quite another.

There are two big areas of concern. First, the OSAC-SI and its "green lane" will only apply to investment intake processes at the level of the national government. As we have repeatedly highlighted, a common refrain among prospective investors, whether foreign or domestic, is that the biggest obstacles to completing permits and other requirements are found at the local rather than the national level. Inconsistent and changing rules, inefficiency, and, in some cases, petty corruption are constant complaints.

Some local governments do strive to improve their processes and create a welcoming environment for investors, but unfortunately, these still seem to be the exception. That is one reason why so many economic zones, many of which in any other environment would be considered completely inappropriate, have been created across the country. It is a workaround, but one that ultimately limits the diffusion of investment benefits to local communities.

The second area of concern is that streamlining project permitting processes will allow the launch of projects that are environmentally unsustainable or otherwise harmful to communities. The recent controversy over the large-scale reclamation projects in Manila Bay, about which serious questions have been raised, has perhaps highlighted the concern that the "green lane" will encourage sacrificing proper vetting of projects and their risks for speed.

It is a concern that must be addressed, but the proper way to do that is not to discard the framework intended to facilitate investments but to apply the same thinking to improving processes such as environmental impact assessments. Consistency in carrying out processes, in regulation, and in enforcement of laws and guidelines that already exist should not be considered extraordinary, and shortcomings in performance in any agency should not be considered normal business. If that dysfunction were not already so commonplace, then creations such as the "green lane" would not be necessary; thus, perhaps the real objective of the government should be to ensure that it is the last by ensuring that all who might be concerned with it are doing their jobs and properly working together.



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CTALK
CITO BELTRAN

**Floods? No problem
- for the Dutch!**

Albert Einstein is quoted as saying: "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them." I would venture to add that we also should stop relying on the same people who have been responsible for solving the problem for many decades but consistently failed.



The column title obviously refers to our perennial problem with flooding, whether it's in Metro Manila or on the NLEX or wherever it has occurred time and again for decades. Our "thinking" has always been to throw money at the problem by cleaning esteros, canals or fixing dikes and irrigation canals just before the rainy season. We fool ourselves into believing it helps, but it doesn't.

What happens is that those seasonal projects create temporary jobs in every barangay that endear politicians to those who get hired who in turn vote for their imagined "employers" who end up giving business and profits to contractors, coordinators and to themselves.

As Einstein suggested, we need to think differently in order to solve the problem. For starters, it would make a vast difference if Filipinos simply admitted that we have failed in our quest for legitimate "flood control" programs and systems that work. Floods have gotten out of our control and no matter the gallant efforts of the MMDA and the DPWH, we must admit that our solutions are too little, too primitive, too late. We simply are not qualified to fix the problem.

Yes, we have a sprinkling of accomplishments and valiant efforts such as San Miguel Corporation voluntarily dredging the Pasig River as well as tributaries that have visibly reduced flooding in certain areas where the Pasig River runs. But in terms of whole-of-country approach, what we need is a solution that is based on science, systems, technology and proven track record. We need to deal with flooding with extreme prejudice and bring in the big guns.

But we must first admit that we are all the cause of the problem. Yes, all of us contribute to the problem. Our love for concrete, paved roads and walkways that prevent water from penetrating into the ground, living wall-to-wall sucking up ground water, resistance to managing our garbage, sewage. Our ignorance or refusal to obey environmental management by dumping kitchen and construction slurry as well as chemicals into canals, etc. Our love for commercial mix-use spaces and malls built in former rice lands, wetlands and orchards. And yes, let's include the greed that drives the reclamation of shorelines since the time of Ferdinand Marcos Sr.

Learning our sins against the environment, we need to put a peso value or monetize the country's financial losses that is a direct result of flooding and the revenge of mother nature. We cannot be dismissive and treat floods as a momentary or seasonal inconvenience or disruption. Floods kill people, destroy homes, farms, properties and livestock. Floods disrupt regional or national productivity, along with food security and commerce.

We never used to think hard about the impact of traffic in Metro Manila until global banks and organizations such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency said that traffic costs the Philippines P3.5 billion in lost opportunities daily. It will probably shock all of us to know how much money is lost directly from floods. Learning the cost will in turn make us better appreciate the amount needed or the required expense for instituting a long-term, systematic approach to flood control and water management for the Philippines.

And now the most important part of it all: Let's call the world's leading experts when it comes to creating systems that allows an entire nation to exist amid water all around, an advanced European nation that has mastered the science of managing flood controls, waterways and turned a natural disadvantage into a modern technology-based opportunity for transport, agriculture and environmental management: the Netherlands.

If you Google it, you will learn that one third or 30 percent of the Netherlands (more popularly called by Filipinos as "Holland") is below sea level. But after decades upon decades, the Dutch people have cleverly created solutions, systems of managing waterways, dikes, even the sea and restored submerged lands and made many areas habitable, productive and profitable.

"To keep low-lying land free of water, they use dikes, which are walls that are built to keep water out. Along with the dikes, they use continuously operating pumps." They designed waterways with enclosures and gates that move boats, barges and watercraft and you could see in some areas where the waterways are higher than the roads.

Flood and water management are very serious matters in the Netherlands, so much so that they have a ministry called the Rijkswaterstaat which is "responsible for the management of the major waters, such as the sea and the rivers," alerting the national government in case of emergencies in times of possible floods and storm. The Ministry maintains dikes, dams, storm surge barriers and giving more room for rivers by deepening flood plains and constructing secondary channels.

If the Dutch allowed nature to take its course, half of the country would probably be gone. In fact, one of the triggers that fast tracked the Dutch commitment to flood control and water management was the result of a major storm in 1953 when a storm from the North Sea created a "Yolanda-like" storm surge and killed so many people and destroyed many homes, farms and properties.

Since then, the Netherlands has transformed from "victim" to "victor" by becoming one of if not the world's foremost expert in managing water, floods, coastal tides and is committed to sharing their expertise with all countries that are perennially victims of flooding and storm surge - such as the Philippines.

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US senator eyes sending students to Phl nursing schools

By HELEN FLORES

The United States is looking at sending American students to nursing schools in the Philippines to address its shortage of nursing programs and residency slots, according to visiting US Sen. Tammy Duckworth.

Duckworth paid a courtesy call on President Marcos at Malacañang yesterday.

In a statement, Malacañang said the American senator told Marcos about the US plan to send American nursing students to the country's schools, citing the number of Filipino nurses in the US and the quality of service they provide.

"Sen. Duckworth opens about her talk with the US embassy in the Philippines about the possibility of sending American students to nursing schools in the country, as one of the measures to address the United States' shortage of nursing programs and residency slots," *Radio Television Malacañang (RTVM)* said in a post on Facebook.

"The American official says that Filipinos all over the US are recognized for being well-educated and for their fluency in the English language, among other factors," *RTVM* added.

Marcos and Duckworth also talked



President Marcos welcomes US Sen. Tammy Duckworth at Malacañang yesterday.

about their respective governments' shift to renewable energy, noting the impact of climate change and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the world economy.

Duckworth is an Iraq war veteran, Purple Heart recipient and a former assistant secretary of the US Department of Veterans Affairs.

She was among the first Army women to fly combat missions during

Operation Iraqi Freedom.

She has been in service in the Reserve Forces for 23 years before retiring with the rank of lieutenant colonel in 2014.

Duckworth won re-election to the US Senate last year.

Before her election as senator in 2016, she represented Illinois's eighth congressional district in the US House of Representatives for



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US senator...

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two terms.

E-vehicle battery

The US is also eyeing a partnership with the Philippines on electronic vehicle battery production to meet the huge demand of the American market, according to Duckworth.

"So, for example, we've discussed at length about electronic vehicle batteries, and we can't get enough of them to meet the American market. And I can't think of a better place to create a new manufacturing ecosystem for the American market than here in the Philippines, where we can work together to supply that market so that we can continue to make our switch to renewables as well. And there are many other places where we can work together," Duckworth told Marcos during the same meeting.

"And again, I would rather have America's manufacturing supply chain rest here in a nation that has been a long-time friend and ally, than in a nation that is our adversary or our competitor. And so, I think there are lots of opportunities, and we had a really productive meeting," Duckworth added.

* The US senator disclosed that she had a conversation with Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga and Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla about the US transi-

tion to renewable energy sources as well as its current challenges.

Marcos said that with the renewable energy sources such as solar and wind that rely on nature and are not constant, this is where batteries become very important.

He added that the Philippines has great potential for battery manufacturing, considering the presence of mineral deposits that are necessary elements for battery production.

"We have nickel, we have bauxite, we have cobalt. And so, the idea of manufacturing ... has shown more and more potential, the more we study it," the President told the American senator.

"And so this is what we are hoping to develop here. Not just - we will have a demand locally for these batteries not just for the local demand, but also for sale to other countries and for other markets. That is certainly something that we have been pushing very hard for in terms of developing the capabilities," Marcos added.

Duckworth is a member of the US Senate committees on armed services, environment and public works, commerce, science, transportation and small business and entrepreneurship.

US Ambassador MaryKay Carlson was among those present at the meeting.



ACEN to develop large-scale Laguna Lake solar project

By RICHMOND MERCURIO

ACEN Corp. will develop its first large-scale floating solar project in Laguna Lake with a potential capacity of 1,000 megawatts (MW).

ACEN signed yesterday a renewable energy contract area utilization agreement with the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) to lease 800 hectares of renewable energy areas.

The project will be situated on Laguna Lake, the Philippines' largest freshwater lake, and has the potential to contribute 1,000 MW to ACEN's growing renewables capacity.

"We're still in the process of the pre-development stage so we have to work on the permitting, including the ECC (environmental compliance certificate)," ACEN president and CEO Eric Francia said.

"We still have a lot of work to do ahead of us. We have to talk to suppliers because this is the first time we'll be doing floating solar. Obviously, there will be some differences compared to ground-mounted solar. You'll be needing floaters here, you'll be needing wave breakers, especially in Laguna Lake because of the waves. You need to make it resilient against typhoons, storms," he said.

Francia said it is still too early to determine the capital expenditures needed for the project.

ACEN, through subsidiaries AC Subic Solar, AC Laguna Solar, SolarACE4

Energy, Ingrid Power and GigaWind 1, received notices of award from LLDA in July following an invitation to develop floating solar renewable energy projects on Laguna Lake.

ACEN said solar energy operating contracts for eight blocks of hundred hectares each in the southern and eastern sections of the lake have been applied with the Department of Energy.

"As we explore the potential of our first large-scale floating solar project, which will be a crucial part of ACEN's master plan to achieve our 2030 goal, we are excited to spearhead this energy innovation in the Philippines.

We are committed to expanding our clean energy assets while addressing land scarcity," Francia said.

"This initiative is a tangible opportunity for ACEN to adopt new technologies, contribute to the Luzon grid, and bolster the Philippines' energy self-sufficiency while tackling the critical issue of climate change," he said.

ACEN's venture into the floating solar market is part of its aggressive push

to boost its renewable energy portfolio. The company is on track with its portfolio of greenfield renewable energy projects aimed at reaching 20 gigawatts of renewables by 2030.

Aside from ACEN, the LLDA also signed a renewable energy contract area utilization agreement with SunAsia Energy Inc., a Filipino company developing sustainable solar energy in the country since 2013.

SunAsia's floating solar facilities will be installed across 1,000 hectares of Laguna Lake's water surface, with a potential capacity of 1,300 MW.

SunAsia will develop the projects in partnership with Singapore-headquartered Blueleaf Energy.



Francia



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ACEN to invest 1,000MW floating solar at Laguna Lake

By MYRNA M. VELASCO

Ayala-led ACEN Corporation will put up a 1,000-megawatt floating solar development at the Laguna Lake, deemed to be the biggest in the country's renewable energy sector.

According to the company, the proposed facility will locate in an 800-hectare area within the domain of the freshwater lake.

For this project, ACEN and its subsidiary-firms involved in the project, already inked a renewable energy contract area utilization (RE-CAU) agreement with the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) for the lease of the targeted site of the installation.

"Following an invitation to develop floating solar renewable energy projects on Laguna Lake, ACEN, through its subsidiaries, received notices of award from LLDA in July," the firm said in a statement Tuesday, Aug. 8.

It added that "solar energy operating contracts (SEOCs) for eight blocks of 100 hectares each in the southern and eastern sections of the lake have been applied with the Department of Energy."

ACEN President and CEO Eric Francia said this breakthrough floating solar project "is a tangible opportunity for ACEN to adopt new technologies, contribute to the Luzon grid, and bolster the Philippines' energy self-sufficiency while

tackling the critical issue of climate change."

There is no definitive commercial operation date (COD) set for the facility yet, but the company chief executive indicated that the signing of an award deal with LLDA is a positive signal for the project getting advanced into implementation.

Francia noted this innovative floating solar investment, "will be a crucial part of ACEN's master plan to achieve our 2030 goal," which is primarily in reference to the firm's 20,000MW RE capacity portfolio by the turn of the decade.

On the investment cost for the project, he stated that capital outlay is still being firmed up, but the initial numbers portend at least 20 to 30-percent premium compared to ground-mounted solar installations.

Currently, the capital spend for ground-mounted solar is at \$800,000 per megawatt; hence, the rate for floating solar shall factor in the 20 to 30-percent premium.

"We're still finalizing our cost, including transmission cost... rule of thumb, we expect floating solar to have 20-percent premium over ground-mounted solar," he asserted.

Francia expounded the cost of floating solar "comes at a premium, except to say that we are sharpening our pencils to make sure that we are on the lower end of that premium, we want to be on the low end, to be as close to 20-percent."



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ACEN signs deal to lease 800 hectares of Laguna Lake for floating solar site

By Alena Mae S. Flores

ACEN Corp., through its subsidiaries, on Tuesday signed a renewable energy contract area utilization agreement with the Laguna Lake Development Authority

project. It also forms part of ACEN's commitment to incorporating emerging technologies into its renewable energy portfolio.

The project will be situated on Laguna Lake, the country's largest freshwater lake, and could contribute a substantial 1,000 MW to ACEN's growing renewables capacity.

ACEN president and chief executive Eric Francia said the large-scale floating solar project would be a crucial part of the company's master plan to achieve its 2030 goal.

"We are committed to expanding our clean energy assets while addressing land scarcity. This initiative is a tangible opportunity for ACEN to adopt new technologies, contribute to the Luzon grid, and bolster the Philippines' energy self-sufficiency while tackling the critical issue of climate change," Francia said.

ACEN, through subsidiaries AC Subic Solar, AC Laguna Solar, SolarACE4 Energy, Ingrid Power and GigaWind 1 received notices of award from LLDA in July following an invitation to develop floating solar renewable energy projects on Laguna Lake.

LLDA asked renewable energy developers to lease up to 2,000 hectares

to lease 800 hectares for the development of 1,000 megawatts of floating solar project.

ACEN said the agreement marks a pivotal step toward the development of a groundbreaking large-scale floating solar

where aside from ACEN, SunAsia Energy Inc. and its partner, Macquarie Group's Blueleaf Energy was able to secure the lease of 1,000 hectares with a capacity of 1,300 MW, while Vena Energy will lease the remaining 200 hectares.

ACEN applied for solar energy operating contracts for eight blocks of 100 hectares each in the southern and eastern sections of the lake with the Department of Energy.

"We're still in the process of the predevelopment stage so we have to work on the permitting, including the ECC [environmental compliance certificate]. We need to work on the grid connection. Obviously, we need a market for that, I think the Green Energy Auction hopefully will create the right space," Francia said.

Francia said Laguna Lake addresses the need for large parcels of land needed by solar developers.

"The lake is so large that you don't compete necessarily. The fishing activities in Laguna Lake do not require too large an area, so that there's enough space, enough room within that 90,000 hectares for co-use between floating solar, fishing, transportation and so forth," he said.



ACEN inks lease with LLDA for solar project

ACEN Corp. will proceed to build its first large-scale floating solar power project after it signed on Tuesday a Renewable Energy Contract Area Utilization agreement with the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) to lease 800 hectares of renewable energy areas (REAs) in Laguna.

"We were awarded 800 hectares, that should be good for approximately 1,000 MW capacity," said ACEN President Eric Francia after the signing ceremony.

Following an invitation to develop floating solar renewable energy projects on Laguna Lake, ACEN, through its subsidiaries, received Notices of Award from LLDA in July. Solar Energy Operating Contracts for eight blocks of a hundred hectares each in the southern and eastern sections of the lake have been applied with the Department of Energy (DOE).

These subsidiaries include AC Subic. Solar, AC Laguna Solar, Soalr ACE4 Energy, Ingrid Power and GigaWind 1.

Francia said it would take about 3 years to complete the project, which will form part of ACEN's plan to achieve 20 gigawatts (GW) of renewables capacity by 2030.

"That could take 2 or 3 years. I think floating solar is subject to supply chain. The key question here is supply chain availability of materials. But all else being equal, I think two years should be comfortable timeline. Three years is

a tad generous. But with transmission connectivity, 3 years is a more reasonable assumption.

It also depends on all the permitting and so forth but hopefully three years will be comfortable timeline to get to full operations if everything goes well," he said.

He did not say how much ACEN will invest since the companies involved are still in the predevelopment stage, including permitting process. "It's too early to talk about the specific capex [capital expenditure] cost, that's a work in progress."

As floating solar power projects are more expensive than ground-mounted solar, Francia appealed to the DOE and the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) to take note of the risks involved in pursuing large-scale floating solar power projects.

"Yes, it is more expensive... It's about 20 percent more expensive. I think that's more or less the right order of magnitude. It is very rare to see large-scale land of this magnitude available. So if you want scale, sometimes it comes at a premium to other technologies.

We also encourage our regulators and policymakers like DOE to take that into consideration that these things do take time especially if you need to build fixed infrastructure. We're taking so much risk because there are hard deadlines in green energy auction," he said. *Lenie Lectura*



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SC voids Batangas decree on use of desalinated water

By JOEL R. SAN JUAN [@jrsanjuan1573](#)

THE Supreme Court (SC) has declared void for being unconstitutional the ordinance issued by Batangas City requiring heavy industries surrounding Batangas Bay to use desalinated seawater for their cooling systems.

In a 25-page decision penned by Associate Justice Marvic Leonen, the Court Second Division junked the appeal of the provincial government on the joint decision and resolution of the Court of Appeals, which in turn, affirmed the ruling of the trial court declaring Ordinance No. 3 Series of 2021 unconstitutional "for want of necessity, lack of public hearing, and violation of due process."

The SC ruling favored respondents JG Summit Petrochemical Corp., First Gas Power Corp. and FGP Corp. JG Summit manufactures polyethylene and polypropylene in Batangas City while First Gas operates a 1,000-megawatt natural gas-fired power-generating facility.

FGP Corp., meanwhile, owns a 500-megawatt natural gas-fired power-generating facility in Batangas City.

JG Summit said it was granted a water permit by the National Water Resources Board (NWRB), allowing it to utilize underground freshwater resources in Batangas City.

It argued that the ordinance is contrary to the Water Code of the Philippines, the law granting the NWRB the power to regulate the exploitation and utilization of water resources owned by the State.

It added that by requiring industries operating along the Batangas Bay to construct desalination plants and use desalinated water as coolants, the Batangas City ordinance effectively "rendered nugatory an express grant of permission by the State" to utilize its water resources.

Furthermore, the respondent noted the failure of the Batangas City government to get prior approval from the NWRB before enacting an ordinance involving the conservation and protection of water resources, in violation of Article 85 of the Water Code.

It also claimed that the ordinance

is unconstitutional as it entails huge investments, "a requirement unduly oppressive upon businesses and tantamount to taking property without due process of law."

First Gas and FGP also raised the same arguments, adding that the ordinance violated their right to equal protection of the laws when it singled out heavy industries.

The petitioner maintained that the ordinance was enacted in the exercise of its police power, stressing that "the right to life is more important than property rights."

In ruling in favor of the respondents, the SC declared that the ordinance was issued contrary to the provisions of the Water Code.

"Indeed, Ordinance No. 3, Series of 2001, involves the appropriation, utilization, conservation, and protection of water resources. This is clear from the objective behind the enactment of the Ordinance—to protect the local freshwater aquifers of petitioner from salination," the SC said.

"While it has a laudable objective, the Ordinance is contrary to a statute, specifically, the Water Code of the Philippines. Under the Water Code, the appropriation, utilization, conservation, and protection of our country's water resources is under the jurisdiction of the National Water Resources Board."

The SC said NWRB exercises such jurisdiction by issuing water permits, which remain valid until revoked.

Without proof that the enactment of the said ordinance was with prior approval of the NWRB, the SC said, it should be considered void for "contravening a statute."

Likewise, the SC said the ordinance is oppressive since there is no scientific proof that the heavy industries are causing the seawater intrusion in the city's freshwater aquifers.



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Maynilad may resume water interruptions

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Maynilad customers may once again experience water interruptions as water allocation to the concessionaire remained at 48 cubic meters per second (CMS) despite improvements in the level of Angat Dam, according to officials of the Maynilad Water Services Inc.

At a forum, Maynilad president and CEO Ramoncito Fernandez noted that despite the more than 20 meters increase of the water level of Angat Dam – which now sits at 199.92 meters – the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) has yet to adjust the water allocation for Maynilad and Manila Water.

“Before, Angat Dam released 52 CMS of water allocation to

Metro Manila. Now, only 48 CMS are released. Definitely, if the water allocation is this low, we cannot supply all our customers,” Fernandez said, in reaction to an earlier interview of NWRB executive director Sevilla David Jr. saying that Angat’s current water level is enough to meet the requirements of Metro Manila for 60 days.

Fernandez added that the NWRB decision to still maintain the 48 CMS allocation is understandable in anticipation of the possible El Niño phenomenon.

Fernandez clarified though that affected customers will be fewer or between 500,000 and 600,000 households, compared to the previous 1.2 million customers affected by the water

interruption in April.

In a separate interview with **The STAR**, Maynilad senior assistant vice president and corporate affairs and communication division head Marie Antonette de Ocampo said Maynilad and Metropolitan Manila Waterworks and Sewerage System officials will meet today to discuss the push for an increase in water allocation.

De Ocampo explained that of the current 48 CMS water allocation for Maynilad and Manila Water, three CMS are allotted to Bulacan.

“The 48 CMS from Angat will only be 45 CMS even without the losses. Ideally, Maynilad and Manila Water allocation should be 46 CMS to ensure enough supply for our customers,” she

said, adding that Maynilad suspended water interruption after the water level of Ipo Dam in Bulacan improved because of the rains.

“There will be water interruption if our water allocation will stay at 48 CMS. We are still OK until the third week of August. Our water allocation was decreased to 48 CMS when the water level of Angat Dam reached 180 meters. The level is more than 199 now but our allocation is still 48 CMS, it’s the same,” De Ocampo added.

Fernandez assured that efforts are being made to improve the services of Maynilad, noting that the new management of Maynilad inherited more than 3,000 kilometers of old pipes.

“We inherited NRW (non-revenue water) or leaks to a staggering 68 percent, meaning for every liter of water being produced by Maynilad at that time, 68 percent was wasted due to leakage,” Fernandez explained.

According to Fernandez, from the 600,000 connections, Maynilad customers more than doubled to 1.5 million.

“Before, only 30 percent of customers received 24/7 service and today we are happy to say to you that more than 80 percent of our customers are receiving 24/7 service using the same water from Angat,” he noted.

As of 6 a.m. yesterday, the water level of Angat Dam increased by 0.10 meters compared to its previous level of 199.82 meters.



TITLE:

Zambales steps up river dredging

BY MAHATMA RANDY V. DATU

IBA, Zambales: The recent flooding in several coastal communities caused by torrential rains enhanced by Typhoons Egay and Falcon only provided more compelling reasons for the provincial government of Zambales to intensify its river dredging projects.

Zambales Gov. Hermogenes Ebdane Jr. said there is a need to remove sediments and debris from the bottom of the river and restore the river's capacity to carry water into the sea.

He said 26,799 residents were affected by the recent calamity and the damage to infrastructure reached P545.1 million as well as P24.3 million in agriculture.

Ebdane pointed out that hardest hit are villages adjacent to the tributary rivers from the Mount Pinatubo area that overflowed or punched holes into the dikes and protective embankments.

"Flooding was also observed to be worse in barangay near river mouths because sediments get deposited there naturally when the current slows down at the point where the river meets the sea," he explained.

"Thus, it is crucial that these areas which are natural catch-basins for sediments should be dredged immediately as more rains are expected, so that we can create bigger drainage areas that will convey river

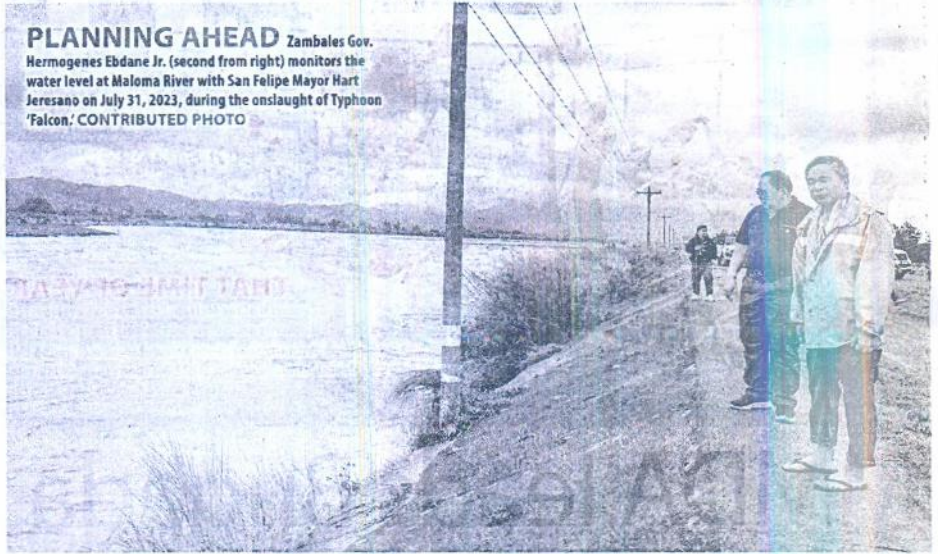
water to the sea more efficiently."

In San Marcelino town where the municipal council declared a state of calamity, the swollen river breached the protective embankments of Barangay Sta. Fe and destroyed various public infrastructure worth P515 million.

The Zambales Provincial Disaster Risk-Reduction and Management Council (PDRRMC) reported that 8,421 families comprised of 26,799 individuals were adversely affected by the downpour last week. Most of the affected villages are in San Antonio town, with a total of 6,749 families or 20,602 individuals.

In San Antonio's Barangay San Miguel where the Pamatawan River empties into the sea, 42 families comprised of 357 persons had to evacuate to safety on July 28 as floodwaters rose to chest-deep in some areas, the PDRRMC said.

Residents said it was the first time they experienced serious flooding there. They said that strong current damaged the river embankment about a hundred



PLANNING AHEAD Zambales Gov. Hermogenes Ebdane Jr. (second from right) monitors the water level at Maloma River with San Felipe Mayor Hart Jeresano on July 31, 2023, during the onslaught of Typhoon 'Falcon.' CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

meters from the river mouth.

Incidentally, opposition by San Miguel residents to the government's proposal to dredge Pamatawan River for fear that the project would harm local fishing prompted Ebdane to suspend dredging activities there.

Still, residents elsewhere affirmed that heavily silted waterways perennially brought floods in their area.

"Nasasakal kasi ang takbo ng

tubig, kaya may baha (The river is choked by debris, that's why there is flood)," observed Marites, a tourism personnel manning a checkpoint to a seaside resort area in San Felipe town.

"OK lang naman ang dredging, basta hindi masyadong maingay sa gabí (Dredging is okay, as long as there's not much noise at night)," said John Esmelo, a 45-year-old fisherman who lives near the mouth of the Bucao River in Botolan town.

Ebdane said the river dredging program has been endorsed by local government units and national government agencies that they consulted in 2014 to formulate solutions following flooding and landslides in the province during Typhoon Odette in September 2013.

Added to this, he said the Department of Environment and Natural Resources issued in October 2019 Department Order 13-2019, which rationalized dredging in

heavily-silted river channels of Bucao, Maloma, and Santo Tomas rivers in order to arrest the degradation of river systems due to the continuous flow of sediment from upland areas and restore their natural state and water flow.

"Our river rehabilitation program is validated by local observation and experience, and more important, it is based on science. We have to do this for everyone's sake," Ebdane said.



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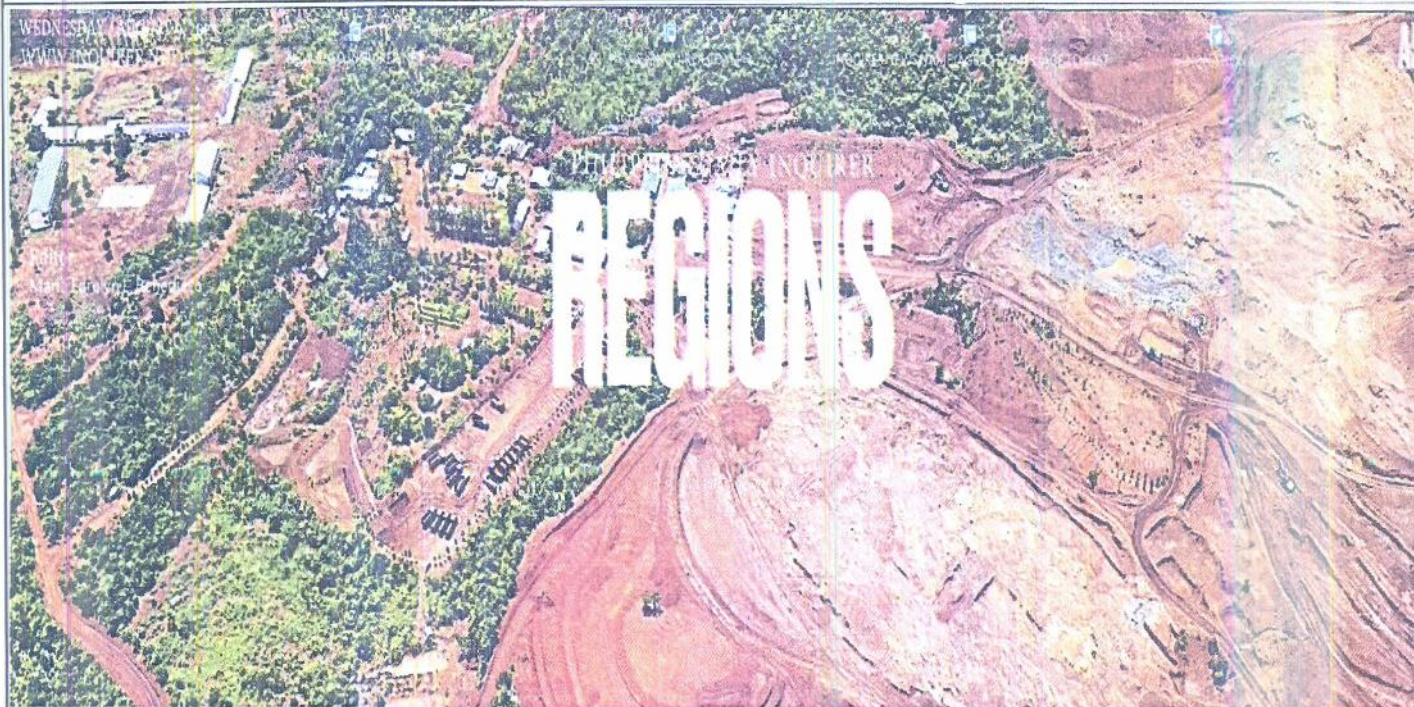
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ALTERED LAND Mining activities have drastically changed the landscape of the historic Homonhon Island in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, as shown in this photo taken early this week. —FR. JAMES ABELLA/CONTRIBUTOR

Bishop leads protest vs mining in Eastern Samar

Priests, nuns, lay groups assail the destruction of historic Homonhon Island

By **Joey Gabieta**
@joeygabiettaINQ

TACLOBAN CITY—At least 2,000 people joined a Church-led prayer rally on Monday in Eastern Samar's capital of Borongan City to oppose mining operations on Samar Island, particularly on the historic Homonhon Island.

The prayer rally, dubbed "Jericho Walk," was led by Bishop Crispin Varquez at the church grounds of the Cathedral Parish of the Nativity of Our Lady in Borongan.

In a statement, Varquez called on the Eastern Samar provincial government and the

Department of Environment and Natural Resources to disapprove all mining applications and cancel the existing ones in the province, particularly in Homonhon, which is part of Guiuan town.

Varquez urged government officials to take into consideration the "horrific effects" of mining operations in Homonhon, adding: "Destroying the earth is never part of God's plan. As Pope Francis puts it, the earth is our common home."

Residents of Homonhon, which has vast deposits of nickel and chromite, have been protesting the open-pit mines that have been operating on

the island since the 1990s. Four companies are operating on the island: Cambayas Mining Corp., Techiron Resources Inc., Emir Mineral Resources Corp., and Mt. Sinai Exploration and Development Corp.

'Prayer for the earth'

The Diocese of Borongan has been leading campaigns to preserve and protect the remaining biodiversity of the island, which plays an important role in Philippine history as it was where Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan first landed on March 16, 1521.

Varquez, in an April 11 statement, had raised concerns over

the "escalated" mining operations in Homonhon but his appeal for authorities to stop these activities on the island had fallen on deaf ears.

Fr. James Abella, social action director of the Diocese of Borongan, said the actions against mining but in other parts of Samar were supported by Bishops Emmanuel Trance of the Diocese of Catarman (Northern Samar) and Isabelo Abarquez of the Diocese of Calbayog (Samar).

He said that Monday's prayer rally was a culmination of their seven-day movement against mining. INQ



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Plastic litter in oceans overestimated, study suggests

PARIS: There is less plastic littering the ocean than scientists previously thought, but what is there could persist for a long time, a new study said Monday (Tuesday in Manila).

The modeling study estimated that pieces of plastic bigger than 25 millimeters (1 inch) make up over 95 percent of plastic floating on the ocean.

While most plastic particles in the ocean are very small, the total mass of these microplastics — defined as less than 5 millimeters (0.2 inches) — is relatively low.

The preponderance of larger floating pieces suggests that the total amount of plastic in the ocean is "much lower" than previously thought, according to the study published in the journal Nature Geoscience.

Plastic pollution in the ocean has been estimated at more than 25 million tonnes, with a quarter of a million tonnes floating on the surface.

But the study said that the amount of plastic on the ocean surface is much higher, at about 3 million tons.

That the plastic is floating around in large pieces could help with cleanup efforts.

"Large, floating pieces on the surface are easier to clean up than microplastics," the study's co-author Erik van Sebille of Utrecht University in the Netherlands said in a statement.

The results are based on a 3D model of the ocean using a huge amount of observational data and measurements taken from surface water, beaches and the deep ocean from 1980 to 2020.

AFP