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All bay reclamation projects suspended

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE AND JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

ALL 22 reclamation projects in Manila Bay were suspended and will be reviewed for their possible "environment and social impacts," Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said Thursday.

During a press briefing in Malacañang, Yulo-Loyzaga said the suspension took effect after it was ordered by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Monday.

"The declaration is really that all of these projects are suspended at this point. So all are under review, we have to take our time, really beginning with those that are ongoing because they're in fact already impacting the areas and then we will graduate to all those still not yet begun," Loyzaga said.

The President had said all reclamation projects in Manila Bay except one were suspended due to problems in their implementation.

Marcos did not specify which projects have been suspended, but he lamented that the sea along Roxas Boulevard could soon disappear.

"So we're here at the point where the President has that issue: the suspension of reclamation projects in Manila ready to look into number one, the environmental impacts but also the social impacts of these activities," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

She said the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will find out if the conditions specified in the projects' Environmental Compliance Cer-

tificates (ECCs) have been met.

She brushed aside Sen. Cynthia Villar's claim that she was "afraid" of pressure from influential personalities backing the reclamation projects.

"I don't know many of you, but you can ask people who do know me, I am not easily scared," the DENR chief said.

Yulo-Loyzaga said she was "very grateful" to Villar for her concern, "but we're here to do our job."

"We will do it slowly but deliberately because we want to make sure that we stay within the bounds of the law," she said.

She also made it clear that the Manila Bay reclamation projects were approved under the Duterte administration.

"Nangyari po ito (It happened) before I joined the government, so I will not say what happened there. The role of the DENR is to stay within our mandate. We do have a mandate under the mandamus which is to rehabilitate Manila Bay to the point where people can actually swim and fish and that is an order we take very seriously," she said.

Yulo-Loyzaga said companies whose reclamation projects are not compliant with environmental regulations will be given time to



MARIA ANTONIA YULO-LOYZAGA
Secretary, Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia 'Toni' Yulo-Loyzaga
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

implement corrective measures.

She refused to comment on the US Embassy's concern that a Chinese construction company blacklisted by Washington three years ago is one of the reclamation project contractors.

"Our role in the DENR is to focus on environmental compliance. As you know, the proponents of the projects are the local government units and they do have their own partners," she said.

The fisherfolk advocacy group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalayaka) called on the DENR to cancel the ECCs of the 21 reclamation proponents.

"To solidify the announcement of President Marcos, the DENR must review the 21 environmental compliance certificates (ECC) of reclamation in Manila Bay," Ronnel Arambulo, Pamalakaya vice chairman said in a statement on Wednesday.

Arambulo said the companies

responsible for the adverse effects of reclamation activities to fishing areas and fishers must be held accountable.

"The 300 families forced to leave in Bacoor, Cavite because of reclamation must be able to return," he said. He added that mangroves destroyed must also be rehabilitated.

The group also urged the Marcos administration to "certify as urgent" a bill declaring Manila Bay as a reclamation-free zone.

Filed by the Makabayan bloc last year, House Bill 2026 bans all forms of reclamation activities in Manila Bay.

The bill is pursuant to the 2008 Supreme Court continuing mandamus to rehabilitate, clean up, and restore the bay for recreational use and fishery resources development.

Last month, the DENR identified the major reclamation projects in the National Capital Region amounting to P330.6 billion.

It includes the 287-hectare Parañaque Reclamation Project with an estimated project cost of P76.7 billion; the 260-hectare Pasay City Reclamation Project worth P72 billion; and the Navotas Coastal Bay Reclamation Project worth P58 billion.

Other projects were also mentioned which the department said could "spur economic development."

Pamalakaya said reclamation projects with approved ECCs include the 420-hectare reclamation in Bacoor, Cavite; 360-hectare Pasay Reclamation Project; 318-hectare Manila City Waterfront Project; as well as the 419-hectare Horizon Manila Project.



TITLE: _____

PAGE _____

DATE _____

DENR TO ORDER 'STOP-WORK' FOR MLA BAY RECLAMATION

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

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ENVIRONMENT Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said an order stopping all land reclamation activities in Manila Bay will be issued shortly in compliance with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s suspension order.

At a press conference in Malacañang on Thursday, the chief of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources also clarified that all 22 land reclamation projects are suspended pending a cumulative review to determine the soundness of the projects.

"We have been obligated to do [the review] by the Supreme Court. We need to do the review of these projects," said Loyzaga.

She said 22 land reclama-

tion projects were approved during the Duterte administration before she took the helm of the DENR, which regulates the issuance of ECC for environmentally critical projects like land reclamation in environmentally-critical areas such as Manila Bay, an economically important water body and major fishing ground in Luzon.

Manila Bay straddles cities and municipalities from the provinces of Cavite, Bulacan, Pampanga, and Bataan, and covers the entire National Capital Region (NCR).

The suspension order, which took effect upon Marcos's verbal order and public pronouncement during a site inspection in Bulacan, will be communicated to the project proponents, the DENR chief added.

SEE "DENR," A2

DENR...

CONTINUED FROM A1

"The DENR does not have the authority to suspend [the reclamation projects]," Loyzaga explained.

All 22 reclamation projects at Manila Bay will remain suspended pending the result of the DENR review on their compliance with environmental regulations, Yulo-Loyzaga said. The agency

has started sending suspension orders to contractors of the said projects.

Loyzaga said they expect to complete within August the members of the scientific team, which will conduct the cumulative assessment on the economic, social and environmental impact of the projects.

She said projects found to have a negative impact on the environment or violated government regulations, will be given time to implement corrective measures.

"There is due process here now... If they do not comply. It's possible for the ECCs [environmental compliance certificate] to be suspended," Loyzaga said.

Afraid of influential people?

IN a Senate hearing earlier this week, Senator Cynthia Villar claimed Loyzaga was "afraid" of the influential people behind the ongoing reclamation projects.

Loyzaga, however, said she is "not

easily scared" by such influential people and she is ready to implement the mandate of DENR, especially on the reclamation projects.

"I'm very grateful to Senator Villar for her concern. But we are here to do our job. And we will do it slowly but deliberately because we want to make sure that we stay within the bounds of the law," the DENR chief said.



All 22 suspended Manila Bay reclamation projects OK'd during Duterte admin – DENR

By RAYMUND ANTONIO

The 22 Manila Bay reclamation projects that were ordered suspended by President Marcos were approved during the Duterte administration, Environment Secretary

Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said on Thursday, Aug. 10.

President Marcos had earlier said one project was allowed to push through. But upon clarification with the President, Loyzaga said all current projects ►10

All 22 suspended Manila Bay reclamation projects OK'd during Duterte admin – DENR 1◀

at Manila Bay are under review.

"The declaration is really that all of these projects are suspended at this point. So, all are under review. We have to take our time, really beginning with those that are ongoing, because they are in fact, already impacting the areas. And then, we will graduate to those that have not yet begun," she told reporters during a Palace press briefing. "As soon as the President speaks, I think that will be in effect," she added when asked if the order is in effect since there are still reclamation projects in the bay.

Loyzaga revealed that these projects were approved during the Duterte administration.

"Lahat po ito (All of these) had been previously approved under the PRA (Philippine Reclamation Authority) in the previous administration," she said.

Asked if she was referring to former president Rodrigo Duterte, the official answered, "Yes."

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is currently in the process of assembling a team of scientists and experts for a cumulative assessment of the environmental impact of the reclamation activities at Manila Bay in view of the flooding that happened in Bulacan and Pampanga recently.

Loyzaga said the contractors for the 22 projects will be made aware of the "compliance review," with some of them already notified by the agency.

"So, regardless of whether suspended sila or hindi, gagawin namin ang review for compliance 'no (So, regardless of whether they are suspended or not, we will conduct the review for compliance)," she added.

Various environmental groups recently called on the DENR to stop the reclamation projects in the Manila Bay, noting potential negative long-term and irreversible impacts to the environment.

In a statement, international environmental group Oceana said it "is clear that these [reclamation] projects have already started, and resulted in an alarming degradation of the environment—destroying the mangroves, denying fisherfolk of their fishing livelihood and sources of food, and the destruction of seagrass and the seabed by dredging, thus impeding better habitats and spawning grounds of fisheries resources. This is simply unjust and unacceptable."

Joining the call to halt the reclamation

projects was fisherfolk group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya), which claimed that the recent flooding was due to Manila Bay reclamation projects.

Citing findings of geological experts, Pamalakaya chairperson Fernando Hicap said they are "certain that these reclamation projects worsened the flooding in the northern part of Manila Bay."

"It was recalled that it was no less than the renowned geologist Dr. Kelvin Rodolfo who raised the geophysical hazards of specific reclamation projects in Manila Bay," he stated. "Dr. Rodolfo has identified three geological hazards of reclamation that are relevant to the country's situation; namely, the danger of land subsidence, danger of storm surge and strong waves caused by typhoons, and danger from seismically induced liquefaction."

'I'm not easily scared'

Meanwhile, Loyzaga said she is one who is not easily scared.

Her reaction was in response to Senator Cynthia Villar, who claimed Loyzaga is afraid of influential people pushing for the Manila Bay reclamation projects.

"Well, I don't know many of you, but you can ask the people who do know me. I am not easily scared," Loyzaga told reporters during the Malacañang media briefing.

In a Senate hearing, Villar said she had a talk with Loyzaga wherein she was told by the DENR chief that she's afraid of those behind the reclamation projects as they are influential people in the country.

"Sabi ko, h'wag kang matakot. 'Pag mali, mali. Kung tama, tama (I told her not to be afraid. When it's wrong, it's wrong. If it's right, it's right) the senator reportedly told Loyzaga during their conversation. (With a report from Jel Santos)



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TITLE :

PAGE

DATE

DENR says all 22 reclamation projects in Manila Bay suspended

By Gabriellea Pariño, Vito Barcelo and Charles Dantes

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resource said Thursday all 22 reclamation projects in Manila Bay are under review and are deemed suspended—even the one that President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. mentioned was allowed to continue.

"Actually, upon clarification with the President and you will see in the suspension, all are under review," DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said in a press briefing in Malacañang.

Meanwhile, a lawmaker said the public interest must come first as the government reviews "a mountain of reclamation applications" for the Manila Bay area and

Next page



MANILA BAY THEN AND NOW. In this aerial footage shown in a television report on Friday, a portion of Manila Bay is a sea of gray, full of sand from some of the 22 reclamation projects ongoing in the area, which the government has suspended pending review. About 85 years ago, only the Manila Hotel was prominent in the bay in a 1938 photograph taken by Major George M. Tweedy. Now, militant groups are protesting the projects' probable cumulative and long-term impacts, even as they welcomed President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s announcement halting all such work in the bay (inset photos). Manny Palmero



DENR...

From A1

their ecological impact that may affect future generations.

President Marcos earlier this week said all reclamation projects in Manila Bay except one have been suspended due to problems in their implementation but did not say what the exception was.

"Until we can get a very good sense of

what scientifically is going to happen in this area, and until we can get a very good sense of how the rule of law can be followed in this area, we want to proceed with much caution," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

"The declaration is really that all of these projects are suspended at this point. So all are under review, we have to take our time, really beginning with those that are ongoing because they're in fact already impacting the areas and then we will graduate to all those in fact still not yet begun," Loyzaga said in a

Palace press briefing.

Meanwhile, House Deputy Speaker and Batangas Rep. Ralph Recto said:

"Every policy has a reverse gear. By pausing Manila Bay reclamation activities, the President, as of the moment, merely placed it on neutral."

"It is safe to assume that this is not in Manila Bay alone—the dumped sand you see there is just the tip of the iceberg—but all over the country," Recto said in a statement. (See full story online at manilastandard.net)



TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

18 Manila Bay reclamation projects were granted ECCs

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA @jonmayuga

A TOTAL of 18 land reclamation projects in Manila Bay were able to secure environmental compliance certificates (ECC) and are in various stages of development.

Combined, these dump-and-fill projects cover a total of 5,795.84 hectares, an area bigger than Caloocan City with a total of 176 barangays and over 1.6 million population based on the 2020 census of population and housing.

A document from the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), a copy of which was obtained by the BUSINESSMIRROR, identified the projects, the status of implementation, including dates the ECCs were issued.

The list does not include SMC's international airport project in Bulacan, Bulacan. The document showed the city of Manila has 4 projects with ECCs, Navotas has 2, Pasay 2, and Paranaque 1 - all in the National Capital Region.

Another land-reclamation project straddles the territorial jurisdiction of Las Piñas and Paranaque.

In Cavite Province, Bacoor has the

most number of land-reclamation projects with ECCs at 4; Kawit has 1; Noveleta, 1; and Rosario, 1.

Another land reclamation project that straddles the territories of Kawit and Noveleta lists the Province of Cavite as the proponent.

Cities or municipalities were listed as proponents of the projects, with private sector partners.

Of these projects with approved ECCs, the Manila Bay Land Reclamation of the Province of Cavite and Coastal Road Corp/Cavitex Holdings, Inc. is the largest, with a total land area covering 844 hectares.

Another big land-reclamation project is the Paranaque & Las Piñas Coastal Bay Land Reclamation & Dev Project, which lists both the cities of Paranaque and Las Piñas as proponents and Alltech Contractors, Inc. as its private sector partner. It covers a total of 635.14 hectares.

Most of the projects are not yet im-

plemented, except for three ongoing land reclamation projects in Navotas and 2 in Pasay City.

The ECC for the 4KM Coastal Dike with Detention Pond, Pumping Station, and Reclamation Project of Navotas and Argonbay Construction Company, Inc. with a total area of 576.7 hectares was issued in March 2021. It was granted conditional notice to proceed from the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA).

The Pasay Harbour Reclamation Project of Pasay City and Philkairos Inc, Pasay Reclamation Project, and SM Prime Holdings, Inc. are both ongoing.

Pasay Harbour covers a total area of 265 hectares and the ECC was issued in November 2018, while the Pasay Reclamation Project covers a total area of 360 hectares and ECC was issued in October 2017.

Both projects have been issued conditional notice to proceed by the PRA.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. earlier announced the suspension of all but one land reclamation project in Manila Bay due to various violations, prompting environment groups to call for transparency and challenging Malacañang and the DENR to name the "one that got away" reportedly because it has passed a rigid review process.

Sources at the DENR said they are not privy to the President's order.

Over the past few months, the DENR under Secretary Maria Anto-

nia Yulo-Loyzaga has been conducting stakeholders' consultations to gather valuable inputs from nongovernment organizations, people's organizations, the academe and scientific communities, as well as the private sector as part of an ongoing review.

She also cited DENR's role as one of the 13 agencies tasked by the Supreme Court in 2018 to rehabilitate Manila Bay and restore its water quality to its pristine state. While recognizing the benefits of land reclamation, the country's chief environmental steward insists on probing the cumulative impact of land reclamation projects in Manila Bay before deciding on the fate of the ongoing development.

Meanwhile, environmental groups also urged the DENR to stop processing ECC applications pending a cumulative impact assessment with a broad stakeholders' participation, and immediately revoke the ECCs of those with approved permits. They also demand accountability for the economic displacement of affected communities.

Land reclamation is a way of expanding coastal territories through the process called dump-and-fill. The process, which involves the scraping of mangrove forests and dumping of filling materials in coastal areas, is being condemned by environmental groups as environmentally destructive and would lead to irreversible damage to coastal and marine ecosystems.



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Marcos suspends all Manila Bay reclamation projects

By ALEXIS ROMERO

The government has suspended all 22 reclamation projects in Manila Bay pending a review of their compliance with environmental regulations, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said yesterday.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said President Marcos has issued the suspension so agencies could look into the environmental and social impact of the projects. She added that the DENR would look into the projects' compliance with the conditions under which the environmental compliance certificates and area clearances were issued.

"The declaration is really that all of these projects are suspended at this point. So, all are under review," Loyzaga said at a press briefing in Malacañang.

"We have to take our time, really beginning with those that are ongoing, because they are in fact, already impacting the areas. And then, we will graduate to those that are in fact, still not yet begun," she added.

Loyzaga said the suspension is already in effect. "As soon as the President speaks, I think that will be in effect. And so he actually declared this over last couple days, I think, when he was in the Bulacan area for the flood incident, and we now have a formal (order)," she said.

During a typhoon situation briefing in Bulacan last Monday, Marcos revealed that all Manila Bay reclamation projects have been suspended except one. He said the government saw a lot of problems in the implementation of the projects.

According to Marcos, the sea along Roxas Boulevard could disappear because of the projects. The projects were approved during the time of former president Rodrigo Duterte.

Loyzaga said a scientific team would be formed to conduct a community impact assessment. The team will be composed of a physical scientist, oceanographers, geologist, climate scientist and social scientist.

Asked about DENR's target, Loyzaga said, the DENR would know once the scientific team converges and the work program is laid out.

The environment chief also denied that

she is afraid of influential persons behind the reclamation projects, as claimed by Sen. Cynthia Villar.

"For those who - well, I don't know many of you, but you can ask the people who do know me - I am not easily scared," Loyzaga said. "I'm very a grateful to Senator Villar for her concern, but we are here to do our job and we will do it slowly but deliberately because we want to make sure that we stay within the bounds of the law."

The suspension came days after the US embassy had expressed concern that the Manila Bay reclamation projects have ties to the China Communications Construction Co. (CCCC), which was blacklisted by Washington in 2020.

The Chinese firm has been included in the US Department of Commerce's Entity List for its role in helping the Chinese military construct and militarize the artificial islands in the South China Sea.

According to the US embassy, the CCCC had also been cited by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank for engaging in "fraudulent" business practices.

Asked to comment on the embassy statement, Loyzaga replied: "Our role in the DENR is to really focus on environmental compliance. As you know the proponents of the projects are the local government units and they do have their own partners.

"We are not actually able to comment on the choice of contractors or the activities that may have gone on in order for them to engage these contractors. We are here to actually implement environmental laws," she added.

Environmental group Oceana urged Marcos to permanently stop all reclamation projects in the country after he ordered their suspension pending review by the DENR.

"While we welcome the suspension, our call is to permanently stop the reclamation projects. The impact of these projects was already felt after the flooding in Bulacan. The damage is irreversible," Oceana legal and policy director Rose Osorio said, adding that they have monitored at least 30 reclamation projects in Manila Bay. - With Ramon Efren Lazaro, Evelyn Macairan, Bella Cariaso, Sheila Crisostomo



Save Manila Bay, save towns from flooding

Something is wrong with Manila Bay. For a long while, environmentalists and the public, in general, have been harping on a number of reclamation projects in Manila Bay, for its adverse impact on marine ecosystem, and the destruction of mangroves and wetlands that threaten the livelihood of fishermen and those living in surrounding communities.

But their cries appear to have landed on deaf ears as shown by the growing number of approved reclamation projects.

Not even the continuing mandamus issued by the Supreme Court on Dec. 18, 2008, directing 13 government agencies "to clean up, rehabilitate, and preserve Manila Bay, and restore and maintain its waters to SB level (Class B sea waters per Water Classification Tables under DENR Administrative Order No. 34 [1990]) to make them fit for swimming, skin-diving, and other forms of contact recreation" has deterred the unabated abuse of Manila Bay. The agencies covered by the continuing mandamus are the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Education, Department of Health, Department of Agriculture, Department of Public Works and Highways, Department of Budget, Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine National Police-Maritime Group, Philippine Ports Authority, Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, and Local Water Utilities Administration.

It took the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to put a stop on all of these approved reclamation projects, albeit temporarily being a mere suspension. However, this is a step in the right direction, considering the importance of Manila Bay, not just for its world-famous sunset but also for being a source of livelihood for a multitude of Filipinos. The famed bay was once a rich fishing ground, but reclamation projects, indiscriminate

dumping of waste, and other abuses have caused the destruction of its marine ecosystem.

Manila Bay is also an important catch basin for water that drains from 178 localities from Metro Manila, Bataan, Bulacan, Cavite, Pampanga, Laguna, Nueva Ecija, Rizal, and Tarlac. Water from 17 key river systems — Angat River, Bocaue River, Sta. Maria River, Marilao River, Meycauayan River, Meycauayan-Valenzuela River, Pasig River, Parañaque River, Imus River, Ylang-Ylang River, Rio Grande, Cañas River, Obando River, Navotas-Malabon-Tinajeros-Tullahan River, Talisay River, Guagua River, and Pampanga River — also drains to Manila Bay.

Disturbing the catch basin is certain to cause adverse consequences. We need not look far. The recent flooding in large parts of Bulacan and other coastal areas is one proof of these adverse consequences. With water level in Manila Bay rising due to reclamation, water from inland can no longer drain to the bay.

With Marcos' suspension of the reclamation projects, concerned government agencies will have all the opportunity to conduct a review to determine if all these comply with the law and environment policies of the state.

Crucial in this review of the reclamation projects is the 2008 continuing mandamus issued by the Supreme Court. The order to the 13 government agencies is very clear — "to clean up, rehabilitate, and preserve Manila Bay, and restore and maintain its waters to SB level."

Were all these projects approved in compliance with the SC's continuing mandamus and existing environment laws and policies?

We hope the concerned agencies will act promptly before any catastrophic event takes place.

We also join the nation in keenly waiting for the results of the review. May it be fair and beneficial to all stakeholders.



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6
PAGE

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PAGE 1
STORY

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08-11-23

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2/2

PAGE _____

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PAGE

DATE

DENR affirms proposal to transfer Mati City turtle hatchery 'to a better location'

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has found no reason to object to the decision of a local government unit (LGU) to transfer a two-decade-old marine turtle hatchery in Barangay Dahican, Mati City "to a better location."

The transfer, however, comes with the assurance that the DENR and LGU partnership with its operator, a community-based group that has sustained conservation and ecotourism activities that provides income and livelihood to the communities will be sustained.

In a telephone interview, Anson Tagtag, chief of the DENR's Wildlife Resource Division (WRD) of the Biodiversity Management Bureau, said initial findings from the Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) based in Mati City revealed the proposed transfer of the hatchery from its current location is "appropriate" to pave the way for the development plans of the of Mati City LGU. (*See <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/08/02/conservation-advocates-hit-mati-city-lgu-order-to-shut-down-marine-turtle-hatchery/>*)

"For sound management of the marine hatchery, the transfer of the said facility from the Amihan sa Dahican to Menzi

Visitor's Information Center in Dahican is deemed appropriate," a report from CENRO Mati, which was forwarded to the DENR Central Office stated.

However, Tagtag said the DENR Regional Office in Davao and CENRO Mati has formed a local task force to conduct a deeper investigation to look into the concerns raised by the Amihan sa Dahican-Balod sa Paglaon Inc. (ASDBPI) that the proposed transfer will pave the way for the LGU-Mati City's takeover of the conservation activities that will eventually lead to the economic dislocation of members of the group.

Volunteers of Amihan sa Dahican earn a living through ecotourism—serving as tourist guides on Amihan Beach, the main attraction of which include water sports like surfing and surfboarding.

According to CENRO-Mati, the LGU of Mati City has the management jurisdiction over the Dahican Beach, particularly the area where it owns some 3,000 square meters of land. Being its owner, it also has the authority or jurisdiction over the allocation of such property taking into consideration environmental and, or conservation concerns, which the LGU Mati observed with due diligence, the report added.

Jonathan L. Mayuga



Mayor in hot water over water permit

BALILIHAN, Bohol Mayor Maria Pureza Veloso-Chatto has taken to task for "politicking" complainants who had filed a case against her before the Office of the Ombudsman over her issuance of a water permit.

In a Facebook post on Thursday, Aug. 10, 2023, Chatto said the case was filed against her by Bohol Clean Water Alliance chairman Emmanuel "Willy" Ramasola and president Erastus Leopando.

Ramasola and Leopando said the permit for a water project issued by the local government applied to Barangay Santo Nino in Balilihan, but the complainants said it is Barangay Magsaysay in the town of Sevilla.

Allegedly, the town mayor of Sevilla was not notified of the project.

Apart from Chatto, other government officials from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the National Economic and Development Authority were also included in the complaint.

Chatto said she is yet to receive a copy of the complaint, but it has already spread on social media.

"I have not yet received a copy of the complaint from the Ombudsman, yet the document has already been circulating on social media. I am disappointed that Mr. Ramasola

has chosen to release this document to the public before it has been properly delivered by the Ombudsman to the respondent," she wrote.

"I want to assure the people of Balilihan that I am fighting for water rights for our town. I have always been transparent about my efforts to secure a reliable water supply for our people, and I will continue to do so," the mayor said.

Chatto also said the case filed against her smacked of politics.

"The complaint against me is baseless and politically motivated. Both Mr. Leopando and Mr. Ramasola are known associates and allies of a private water company, which has left no stone unturned in forcing their business interests no matter the consequences to the town of Balilihan," she added.

Chatto said she believes that one of those who filed the complaint is supported by her political opponents.

"It is clear that Mr. Ramasola, likewise supported by our political opponents, is trying to harass me and distract me from my work. However, I will not be intimidated by his tactics," she also said.

Chatto added: "I am confident that I can overcome this harassment and continue to serve the people of Balilihan."

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STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
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SERVICE

08-11-29

PAGE

DATE

Iloilo City and its Greener Footprint

The Iloilo City Government mounted an inspiring forum last July 14. Titled "Towards a Greener Footprint for Iloilo City," it was a multi-stakeholder forum carrying the slogan of "We Cannot Do Everything, But Everyone Can Do Something." The keynote speech was delivered by Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonia "Toni" Yulo-Loyzaga. Other speakers included Engr. Liza Silerio of SM Supermalls, and architects Paolo Alcazaren and Michaela Santos-Tayag - and of course, there was Iloilo City Mayor Jerry Treñas, hosting, orchestrating, and making all this happen.

Held at SM City Iloilo, the forum was a lively discussion and exchange of ideas that showcased how a multi-pronged approach could best serve this shift towards a greener consciousness. Via the multi-stakeholder format, attention was paid to best practices, and how to effectively turn intent into action. Too often, environmental action gets mired in red tape, administrative issues, and/or lack of follow-through. Through this forum, Iloilo - a pioneer smart city, was making its case for how success can be achieved and sustained, and how they were ready to lead the charge and share these learnings.

One invaluable learning is to find strategic partners who will share the load. Following the slogan of "Not trying to do everything," the forum showcased how the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Iloilo is working with SM Supermalls to fast-track particular municipal initiatives such as the city public markets - a win-win situation for both the LGU and the private sector partner.



Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonia "Toni" Yulo-Loyzaga (third from left) was the Guest of Honor at the recent multi-stakeholder forum, "Towards a Greener Footprint for Iloilo City," organized by Iloilo City Mayor Jerry Treñas (center). The city also welcomed (L-R): Broadcast Journalist Ces Drilon, United Architects of the Philippines (UAP) Committee on Green Architecture Movement Architect Michaela Santos-Tayag, PGAA Creative Design Principal Designer Architect Paolo Alcazaren, SM Supermalls Program Director of Environment and Sustainability Engr. Liza Silerio, and UAP Chapter President Architect Carlo John Pulg Debaja.

In her message, DENR Sec. Yulo-Loyzaga acknowledged how "Iloilo is the most modern version of the beautiful coastal garden city. The Esplanade and other features that have been invested in overtime are known internationally, and the

conservation of her built heritage highlights the elegance of her culture."

The greenery of her footprint though, requires accepting that the city is flood-prone, with many low-elevation areas such as the former salt beds. Despite the abundant water

resources, the city is short of accessible safe water. Sanitation and solid waste are issues being addressed by the progressive city government but remain formidable issues they have to overcome.

Sec. Yulo-Loyzaga proceeded to spell out a 13-step program that could help disaster resilience. Noteworthy for being specific to the issues that Iloilo faces, and providing potential solutions to help realize the resilience that Mayor Treñas has made in his administration's mission vision. It's founded on coherence, convergence, and synergy across all sectors, with a 'whole-of-society, as well as whole-of-government' approach - ensuring that no ecosystem, no community, and no one is left behind.

On behalf of SM Supermalls, Engr. Silerio spoke about the company's journey towards sustainability and resilience, and how they adapt to climate change as a member of the private sector. As an integrated property management company, building shopping malls, residential condominiums, offices, leisure resorts, hotels, and convention centers, it's always about innovation and a sustainable lifestyle - offering convenience and safety to their customers and the general public.

The big idea for Engr. Silerio, their guiding mantra, is "Build It Right, Build It Well". Because that always

means a better outcome, and finding practical solutions by designating a significant portion of their Capital Expenditures (CAPEX) to incorporate resiliency, sustainability, and green technology in their infrastructure designs.

SM City Marikina, SM City Masinag, and SM Mall of Asia were the three concrete examples of how this strategy finds a footing in reality and becomes part of the value proposition of any SM property and/or development. SM City Marikina, located close to a river with a history of severe flooding, is built on stilts. SM City Masinag has a rainwater catchment facility, with a 17,681 cubic meter water capacity, equivalent to 7 Olympic-size swimming pools. With SM Mall of Asia, a seawall elevated by 4.5 meters protects the mall from storm surges of rising sea levels. There's also a wave return and drainage channel system.

These are just some examples of resilient design and technology and how it changes based on the property's specific issues. And that's why the ongoing collaboration with Iloilo City, a convergence of private sector know-how with good governance, holds much promise for this vision of a greener Iloilo. It's a game plan for Iloilo's near future, and it's aligned with the vision of Mayor Treñas.



SM Supermalls Program Director of Environment and Sustainability Engr. Liza Silerio. Photo from DENR.



08 - 11 - 23

TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

Editorial

Collective push needed to save Amazon rainforest

A TWO-DAY summit in Brazil earlier this week focused on charting a course to protect the Amazon rainforest from the scourge of deforestation. At the end of the summit, the eight countries that are home to the Amazon could not agree on the particular course to take.

They managed, however, to set up a common front in fighting illegal mining and pollution. They also appealed to industrialized countries to make good on their pledge to provide financial support to Amazon countries struggling to protect their corner of the rainforest.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva stressed the urgency in saving the Amazon rainforest, saying "it is our passport to a new relationship with the world, a more symmetric relationship, in which our resources are not exploited to benefit few, but rather valued and put in the service of everyone."

At 5,500,000 square kilometers, the Amazon is the world's biggest forest. Long described as the planet's "lungs" for its role in converting carbon dioxide into life-sustaining oxygen, scientists say it is more precise to refer to the Amazon as a giant sink that drains heat-trapping CO2 from the atmosphere. The Amazon rainforest mirrors what is happening in many of the world's tropical forests. In recent years, a number of countries like Brazil, Malaysia and Indonesia have notched significant gains in replacing destroyed trees.

Brazil has boasted that Amazon deforestation fell by 33.6 percent in the first six months of Lula da Silva's term, compared with the same period last year.

Indonesia and Malaysia, which have converted vast swaths of jungle into palm oil plantations, have since been successful at replenishing forest cover, notes Global Forest Watch (GFW). Indonesia slashed its forest loss by 64 percent, and Malaysia by 57 percent.

The Philippines has also been making headway in slowing down deforestation, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

At the beginning of the last century, 70 percent of the country was forest. By 1999, only about 18.3 percent of the forest cover remained due to agriculture encroachment and large-scale logging. Also contributing to the massive forest loss were fires, typhoons, floods and landslides, FAO said.

By 2000, the Philippines was among the top 10 deforested countries, contributing to 17-20 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions from global forest loss.

The National Greening Program, a massive government reforestation drive launched in 2011, helped reverse the trend. In the next five years, over 1.3 billion seedlings of assorted tree species were planted in more than 1.6 million hectares of degraded forest land, far more than what the government had accomplished in 50 years.

A lot more needs to be done. The FAO said the reforestation efforts "need to be sustained in the long term," since the greening program's "sustainability and ability to deliver multiple benefits has been questioned."

This week's summit in Brazil is no different from the dozens of environmental conferences that have fallen short of their goals because collective action was missing. The ambitious target of ending or reversing deforestation by 2030 looks to be out of reach.

The reforestation efforts of Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines deserve merit, but they are not enough to make a difference globally.

Already the world is beginning to feel the impact of forests unable to act as carbon sinks. Temperatures have soared to record heights; July was the hottest month ever. The UN secretary-general has warned that we are entering an era of "global boiling."

Still, Carlos Nobre, a leading climate scientist in Brazil who has warned that the Amazon is close to a tipping point, sees a small window of opportunity to protect the world's forests.

"I can see a greater political movement all over the world to reduce deforestation — Indonesia, some countries in Africa, many countries in the Amazon. In Brazil, there was a significant reduction in deforestation in June," he said.

We're fast running out of time and opportunities. One Brazilian minister draws this grim outlook: "If 20 percent or 25 percent of the forest is destroyed, the forest will enter a process of savanization ... and that would represent the death of the forest."



Diokno bullish on Mindanao's mining, energy potential

By CHINO S. LEYCO

The Department of Finance (DOF) said the government wants to use Mindanao's natural advantages to transform the region into a driving force for sustainable development.

Finance Secretary Benjamin E. Diokno said Mindanao has a lot of potential when it comes to mining of critical minerals and utilizing renewable energy sources like hydroelectricity, geothermal, wind, and solar power.

"The government will harness this geographical advantage by ensuring the sustainability of the extractives sector and transforming it into an engine for sustainable development," the DOF quoted Diokno in a statement.

Mindanao is known for its abundant mineral resources, including lead, zinc, iron, copper, chromite, magnetite, and gold. Notably, the region holds nearly half of the country's gold reserves.

Mindanao is also seen as a crucial part of the country's renewable energy future. With its diverse natural resources and diverse terrain, the region is ideal for generating energy from sources like water, heat

from the earth, wind, sunlight, and biomass.

To further drive the progress of the region, Diokno said the government intends to bolster the infrastructure development in Mindanao by investing in key areas such as roads, bridges, railways, and airports.

About 76 of the 194 key infrastructure projects of the Marcos administration will be implemented in Mindanao, amounting to a total cost of ₱2.4 trillion.

Among the notable projects earmarked for Mindanao are the Davao Public Transport Modernization Project, Mindanao Railway Project, Samal Island-Davao City Connector Bridge, Davao City Expressway, and Panguil Bay Bridge.

In addition, Diokno said there is an urgent need to enhance airport capacity in Mindanao, as it plays a crucial role in reinvigorating the tourism industry and driving economic growth in the region.

Based on a report from S&P Global, international tourism expenditure was projected to reach ₱549 billion, whereas domestic tourism expenditure was estimated to be around ₱3.1 trillion.



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PAGE

DATE

Plastic litter in oceans overestimated, study suggests

By LINNEA PEDERSEN

PARIS, France (AFP) – 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.

The modelling study estimated that pieces of plastic bigger than 25 millimeters (one 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 five 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 tons, with a quarter of a million tons floating on the surface.

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

That the plastic is floating around in large pieces could with help clean-up 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



THE PREPONDERANCE of larger floating pieces suggests that the total amount of plastic in the ocean is ‘much lower’ than previously thought. (AFP)

measurements taken from surface water, beaches and the deep ocean from 1980 to 2020.

The model also found that less new plastic finds its way to the ocean every year than previously thought – about half a million tons instead of four to 12 million tons – stemming largely from coastlines and fishing activity.

However, the combination of

more surface plastic and less new plastic suggests that the litter will likely remain in the ocean for much longer than previously believed.

“It means that it will take longer until the effects of measures to combat plastic waste will be visible,” the study’s lead Mikael Kaandorp said.

“If we don’t take action now, the effects will be felt for much longer,” he added.

And the amount of plastic pollution in the world’s oceans is still growing.

Without further mitigation and clean-up, the lingering plastic litter

could double within two decades, according to the study’s authors.

Concern over the impact of plastics on the environment and human well-being has surged in recent years.

Plastic debris is estimated to kill more than a million seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals each year, according to the United Nations Environment Program.