

24 September 2022, Saturday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



# Rizal lawmakers want House probe on Masungi Georeserve issue



**ENSURING SAFETY.** Police officers guarding the Masungi Georeserve in Baras, Rizal on Friday (Sept. 23, 2022) to ensure peace and order in the area. Lawmakers in Rizal province filed a resolution Friday calling for an investigation on the issues surrounding the Masungi Georeserve which they said has disrupted the peace and order situation in the province. *(PNA photo by Joey Razon)*

**MANILA** – Lawmakers in the province of Rizal, led by 2nd District Rep. Emigdio Tanjuatco III, on Friday filed a resolution calling for an investigation on the issues surrounding the Masungi Georeserve which they said has disrupted the peace and order situation in the province.

House Resolution 411, which is co-authored by Reps. Michael John Duavit (1st District), Jose Arturo Garcia Jr. (3rd District), and Juan Felipe Nograles (4th District), specifically urged the House Committee on Natural Resources to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, on the alleged unauthorized and unlawful activities at the Masungi Georeserve.

“I thank my colleagues from Rizal for supporting our call to investigate the series of suspicious activities in Masungi Georeserve ranging from alleged land-grabbing, illegal fencing to alleged violation of environmental laws,” Tanjuatco said.

The Masungi Georeserve is a conservation area situated in the Southern Sierra Madre range in the municipalities of Baras and Tanay, Rizal that surrounds the geological formations of the Masungi Rock, and is part of the Marikina Watershed Reservation. It is home to hundreds of species of flora and fauna.

A management contract was awarded by DENR to Masungi Georeserve Foundation Inc. through a memorandum of agreement.

**READ: DILG awaits DENR guidance on Masungi row**

Upon brief review of the MOA, it granted perpetual trust over parcels of land covered by Presidential Decree No. 324 and the Greater Masungi Karst in favor of the corporation. This raises questions in relation to Sec 2 Article 12 of the 1987 Constitution and has shown various inconsistencies with E-NIPAS (Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System) Act.

In calling for the House probe, Tanjuatco cited incidents of violence in July 2021 and February 2022, wherein Georeserve Forest Rangers were attacked while carrying out their duties.

Last Sept. 18, more than 30 armed men, allegedly associated with a private security agency, encamped along the Marikina-Infanta Highway, between the Kaliwa and Marikina Watersheds.

Tanjuatco also noted that the reported construction of illegal fences along the premises of Masungi has restricted the rightful access of farmers and residents, affecting their livelihood and day-to-day activities.

“More alarmingly, indigenous peoples in the area have allegedly been displaced due to these illegal construction activities,” the lawmaker said.

Since the incident, Tanjuatco has been regularly monitoring the Masungi situation and closely coordinating with the Rizal provincial government, environmental agencies, local government units and the Philippine National Police.

*“Kaya nanawagan kami na magtulungan tayong bigyang liwanag ang mga issues sa Masungi. Siguruhin nating nasusunod ang batas para sa proteksyon ng kalikasan at mamamayan (That is why we are asking for a collective effort to shed light into the issues surrounding Masungi. Let’s ensure that the laws are being followed to protect the environment and the people),” Tanjuatco said. (PNA)*



## DENR exec admits it may take time to resolve 'complex' issues plaguing UMRBPL, Masungi

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

**W**ITH a new secretary recently taking over the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), it may take some time for the agency to thresh out the complex issues surrounding the overlapping claims in the Upper Marikina River Basin Protected Landscape (UMRBPL) and its surrounding areas, a senior official admitted on Thursday.

"It may take a month, at least, for the new Secretary to resolve the issues surrounding UMRBPL. As you may know, Secretary [Maria Antonia] Yulo [Loyzaga] is just new and she will need time to thoroughly study the matter," DENR Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and International Affairs Jonas Leones told the BUSINESSMIRROR.

### Tight police security at Masungi

THE Philippine National Police (PNP), meanwhile, said it will maintain a 24-hour patrol at the Masungi Georeserve for a sustained police presence in the area following the reported presence of armed private security guards hired by a land claimant.

On Friday, Interior and Local Government Secretary Benhur Abalos and PNP chief General Rodolfo Azurin Jr. went to Masungi to personally check on the situation there.

"Our security is tight. We are also constantly coordinating with the DENR and local government unit," Azurin said in reference to the developments at the Masungi Georeserve.

"An investigation is also underway to identify possible violations of the group responsible for the alleged deployment of the

armed men. What we are advocating for is to avoid any tension or violence from arising," the PNP chief said.

### Overlapping claims

LEONES added issues surrounding the UMRBPL and even areas outside its boundaries, are highly complex because of overlapping claims and tenurial instruments issued to various stakeholders that currently occupy portions of the watershed.

In a news release dated September 21, the Masungi Georeserve appealed to President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. and Secretary Yulo-Loyzaga, DILG Secretary Abalos, and PNP chief Azurin to look closely into what it describes as "invasion" and attempt to "take over vast tracts of land" by some 30 armed men.

Masungi also called for the immediate arrest, prosecution, and removal of the "invaders" for trespassing, forcible entry, illegal possession of firearms, and violations of the National Protective Areas System (NIPAS) law.

It also called on the DENR to assign "a competent, trustworthy, and passionate Project Manager" from its end to help us resolve the persistent challenges in conserving the Masungi landscape in a sustainable manner.

Sought for comment, Leones said that over the years, a number of Presidential Proclamations, Executive Orders, Presidential Decrees, and Joint Venture Agreements have been issued to various stakeholders that have overlapping or conflicting claims over the area.

"There's also a CADT [Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title] issued in that area so it is really

hard to thresh out the problem. And there are a lot of stakeholders in the area that we need to consider," Leones explained.

Even the case of Masungi Georeserve Foundation Inc., which is claiming the right to manage, protect and conserve around 3,000 hectares of land in the area, by virtue of a memorandum of agreement signed by the late and former DENR Secretary Regina Paz L. Lopez days before the Commission on Appointments (CA) rejected her appointment in 2017, is being looked into by the DENR.

Nevertheless, he said the DENR chief is on top of the situation and is studying the issues surrounding the various overlapping and conflicting claims that are starting to cause controversy and chaos because of alleged land-grabbing, encroachment, or invasion attempts by certain groups.

The latest incident triggered by a Facebook post of Masungi Georeserve compelled the DENR and the PNP to conduct parallel investigations into the alleged "invasion" of Masungi Georeserve by 30 armed men who turned out to be security guards of another claimant to the land.

"As per the PNP report that we obtained, the security guards have licensed firearms that will expire in 2024, so no arrest took place," said Leones.

Leones earlier said that contrary to the claims of the Masungi Georeserve Foundation Inc. which runs Masungi Georeserve, an award-winning, low-impact ecotourism site in Baras, Rizal, the security guards were encamped outside any protected area or even the Lot 10, which is titled the Republic of the Philippines. *With Rene Acosta*



# MASUNGI GETS 24/7 PNP PATROL AFTER ABALOS VISIT

By Dexter Cabalza  
and Dempsey Reyes  
@Team\_Inquirer

Interior Secretary Benhur Abalos and the Philippine National Police were hailed as “champions” by an administrator of the Masungi Georeserve after they inspected the site in Rizal province on Friday.

As expected, there were no armed men in sight in Lot 10, the roadside area they reportedly occupied last week along Kilometer 48 of the Marikina-Infanta Highway.

The Masungi Georeserve Foundation (MGF) had posted photos on social media showing at least eight parked vehicles supposedly belonging to those men. According to the MGF, they were personnel from Sinagtala Security Agency Services who had set up camp with the intention of taking over huge tracts of land.

Abalos on Friday said he found no such encampment. But according to Lt. Col. Rodolfo Guillermo Santiago, the Tanay municipal police chief, 14 men were earlier seen in the area but they left “voluntarily” before Abalos arrived.

According to Abalos and Santiago, the vehicles in the photos posted by the foundation were actually in a queue at a car repair shop along the highway—contrary to the MGF’s suspicions.

Abalos, who was joined in the inspection by PNP Chief Gen. Rodolfo Azurin Jr. and officials of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) led by Environment Undersecretary Jonas Leones, ordered the police to keep all areas of Masungi free of illegal occupants.

“Security or armed forces are not allowed to enter the area without permit from the PNP, especially in a location



SECURED A battle-ready policeman surveys the conservation site on Friday.

—NIÑO JESUS ORBETA

where there is a contest on the claim of land,” he stressed.

Any security agency illegally deploying men in the area would lose its license from the PNP, he warned.

Meanwhile, Brig. Gen. Jose Melencio Nartatez Jr., acting regional director of the Calabarzon police, ordered the Rizal provincial command and municipal police of Tanay and Baras to conduct patrols in Masungi 24/7.

## ‘Our forest won’

“Today, our forests won, like a long drought welcoming its first drops of rain,” MGF trustee Billie Dumaliang said in a statement.

Dumaliang said the foundation was looking forward to working with Abalos “to bolster our efforts in reforesting and defending our conservation sites.”

But her father, Ben Dumaliang, foundation president, said the trespassers could still return because they were backed by police officials, both active and retired.

“How do we expect the common people to follow the law when the supposed enforcers of the law were the first ones to break it instead of setting a

good example,” he said during the meeting with Abalos and other officials.

Azurin assured him by saying: “We will file cases against them, but we need the cooperation of the complainants so the cases would prosper. I assure you that we do not care if the active police officers [get] dismissed because of their involvement.”

Hoping that Friday’s inspection was “just the beginning,” Billie Dumaliang said “we know that we will continue to sustain various forms of attacks after this, so we seek your continued support to help us through.”

## ‘Good model’

“How we protect Masungi will show how serious we are in protecting our forests and addressing the climate crisis and enforcing our existing laws,” she added, noting that the watersheds around the forest serve as water source for surrounding communities.

The 430-hectare conservation site and wildlife sanctuary—almost the size of the University of the Philippines Diliman campus—hosts endangered endemic species like the Philippine Hawk-Eagle, the Indigo-Banded Kingfisher and the North Luzon Giant Cloud Rat.

Masungi is surrounded by 2,700 ha of forest, which the MGF is tasked to protect under a 2017 agreement with the DENR, signed when it was headed by Gina Lopez.

“Masungi and its challenges are a microcosm of the situation of forests across the country and the solutions that are exercised here will be a good model for others,” Dumaliang said. “Let us continue to push back and speak truth to power not only in Masungi but in other threatened sanctuaries in the Philippines.” —WITH A

REPORT FROM INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ



# Masungi Georeserve standoff ends

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

After a two-week standoff, the security guards who occupied an area at the Masungi conservation site in Tanay, Rizal have left.

The security guards of Sinagtala Security Agency, who camped out along the Marikina-Infanta highway in Barangay Cuyambay, vacated the area before a team of government officials arrived for an inspection yesterday.

Interior Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr., who was accompanied by officials of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and Philippine National Police (PNP), was supposed to lead negotiations for the security guards to leave the property.

He warned security agencies against deploying armed personnel in disputed properties.

*"Hindi kayo pwedeng pumasok sa isang lugar. Kailangan nyo ng permit ng chief of police kung ang isang lugar ay may contesting claims,"* Abalos said.

He said he ordered an investigation of Sinagtala Security Agency.

The Masungi Georeserve administration said up to 30 armed men had camped out in a portion of the conservation site since last week.

Tanay police chief Lt. Col. Rodolfo Santiago II said the security guards voluntarily left to avoid violence.

*"Ayaw sa kanila, nagtatrabaho lang sila. Ayaw po nila ng kaguluhan kaya voluntary na silang umalis,"* he told reporters in an interview.

PNP chief Gen. Rodolfo Azurin Jr. ordered sustained police presence by putting up a detachment at Masungi Georeserve to prevent a similar incident.



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MASUNGI CED REVENUE GRANT OFF ENDS

"Our security is tight. We are constantly coordinating with the DENR and local government unit," he said in a statement.

Azurin said an investigation is underway to determine any possible violation by the group responsible for the deployment of the security guards in the area.

The PNP said it would look into allegations that an active police general has put up resorts at the conservation site.

Ben Dumaliang, Masungi Georeserve Foundation president, claimed during the inspection that Brig. Gen. Remus Medina, former Quezon City Police District head, has several resorts in the protected area.

Azurin said the PNP would look into the matter even as he appealed to Dumaliang to provide probers more information.

"We will investigate, but we need the cooperation of the complainant for this case to prosper," he said.

### DENR guidance

Meanwhile, Abalos said the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) would wait for the guidance of the DENR and local courts on the property dispute.

"It is the task of the DENR to make sure *na yung pumuwesto na illegal ay mapatanggal na at madamanda*. They are the proper authority to do so because *sila ang stewards nito*," he said.

Abalos said the DILG would not tolerate any illegal construction at the conservation site.

- With Romina Cabrera



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# No armed men encampment at Masungi Georeserve: DILG



PHOTOGRAPH BY AL PADILLA FOR THE DAILY TRIBUNE @tribunephil\_al

POLICE personnel man the perimeters of the Masungi Georeserve in Tanay, Rizal following the ocular inspection of Interior and Local Governments Secretary Benhur Abalos who requested the Philippine National Police to keep a tight watch of the protected area against poachers and trespassers.

BY NEIL ALCOBER  
AND GLEN JACOB JOSE

Interior and Local Government Secretary Benjamin "Benhur" Abalos Jr. on Friday denied the presence of armed men allegedly encamping within the vicinity of the conservation site of the Masungi Georeserve Foundation in Tanay, Rizal.

Abalos said the armed men are not from a private armed group but security guards from Sinagtala Security Services Inc. who have been hired by one of the claimants — identified as Beatriz Sonquival but have voluntarily left the area upon knowing the situation. They claimed to be only working and they don't want to be involved in any conflict.

"There was no encampment of armed men in this place. What was seen here were cars parked along the streets because this has been used as a car workshop and our policemen have already removed it," said Abalos, who personally inspected the site.

He said policemen, together with DILG and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, will make sure that there is peace and order at the site.

Abalos said they are awaiting the guidance of the DENR regarding the ongoing row at the Masungi

Georeserve.

"We can't just act as we could be charged by the courts," he told reporters.

The Masungi Georeserve is a privately-run conservation area in the Philippines located in Baras, Rizal near Tanay, Rizal. It centers on the geological formations of Masungi Rock, at an elevation of 640 meters.

He also warned security guard agencies that they cannot enter a disputed area as this would create tension.

"That's why I'm here today and I already ordered to investigate this security agency (Sinagtala). You cannot deploy in areas that have a conflict of claims," Abalos said. "What is important right now is that we have status quo. We will not allow other people and armed men to occupy this area until the court and the DENR settle it."

He said they already sent a letter to the Sinagtala Security Agency to explain their side on the issue.

Philippine National Police chief, General Rodolfo Azurin Jr., said he will deploy police officers to man the conservation site and to ensure peace and order in the area.

"Our security is tight. We are also constantly coordinating with the DENR and local government unit," Azurin Jr. said.

He added that an investigation is also underway to identify possible

violations of the group responsible for the alleged deployment of the armed men.

"What we are advocating for is to avoid any tension or violence from arising," Azurin said.

Included in the probe is the alleged harassment and assault on one of Masungi Georeserve's caretakers.

## Not contested, but DPWH expansion

Azurin, however, clarified that the contested area at Km. 48 along Marilaque Highway occupied by the security guards, is not part of the contested area but part of the expansion of the Department of Public Works and Highways.

"So, it is very clear that there is deception on the part of those who posted the photos on social media to make an issue, for us to be here now," Azurin said, referring to Masungi Georeserve Foundation.

The DENR said the sketch plan shown by Masungi Georeserve Foundation president Benjamin Dumaluang to reporters is not a valid claim.

"It is not an approved subdivision plan. Anybody can do the sketch plan. They could hire a surveyor but this must be approved by the DENR," said Nilo Tamoria, Regional Executive Director of DENR CALABARZON.

Tamoria added: "So, any claim

or any survey plans submitted to the DENR will go to the process of evaluating the veracity if this can graduate into the next level of titling."

## Government property

"This is the plan for the property where security guards were recently deployed. In this plan is the signature of lone owner Beatriz Sungibal. The real owner is the republic," Dumaliang said.

He questioned why DENR allowed a private person to sign instead of the land owner. So they have the courage to sell. In fact, it's all sold. We need to investigate why this is happening," he added.

Dumaliang said the entire project is 3,000 hectares — all protected areas and all owned by the government.

"This is for our children and not for Masungi. They have been distorting facts portraying us as land grabbers when in fact we're doing this to bring it back to the government. They have been claimed and occupied by individuals, businessmen, and other people for themselves," he said.

He said it is the patrimony of the nation, and what is happening is recovery and restoration because it was lost before.

We're just bringing it back slowly and painstakingly," he added.

Masungi Georeserve Foundation straddles three protected areas: Upper Marikina River Basin Protected Landscape, Kaliwa River Forest Reserve, and Presidential Proclamation 1636.

"So, it is a protected area it should be consistent with the National Integrated Protected Area System. It's a law. So, the hierarchy of the laws should be properly observed and even the National Integrated Protected Area System respects prior rights. That's why we cannot avoid that there are claimants because there are prior rights. Remember NIPAS was passed in 1992 and it was further amended in 2018," Tamoria said.

"Then we cannot also deny the fact that in 1974 or 1973 there was a Presidential Decree 324 the 1,300 hectares of land in Marikina Watershed were excluded for agricultural exploitation for possible disposition under a Commonwealth Act. So, those are the things that we should be careful about while we welcome the conservation effort. That's why there should be a review," he added.





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## DILG to follow DENR's lead in Masungi row

By CHITO A. CHAVEZ

Interior and Local Government Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. said the department will act with prudence and wait for the advice of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) before making any move with regard to the Masungi Georeserve fiasco in Tanay, Rizal.

"We can't just act, as we could be charged in court. I am also warning the security agency that they can't just enter any place as they need to get a permit from the chief of the police," Abalos told reporters during his visit to the protected area.

Abalos together with the officials of the DENR and Philippine National Police (PNP) visited the Masungi Georeserve in the wake of the row between the protected area's caretakers and Sinagtala security agency.

On Sept. 17, the Rizal police responded to a complaint that 30 armed men encamped in the vicinity of the Masungi Georeserve allegedly with the attempt to occupy a huge portion of the land inside the protected area.

Personnel of Sinagtala Security Agency claimed to have a survey plan under the name of one Beatriz Sonquival that was reportedly issued by the DENR regional office in the early 2000.

But the opposing group insisted that the survey plan is not a proof of ownership.

Abalos said they already sent a letter to Sinagtala Security Agency to get its side on the issue.

"The police is here to make sure there is peace and order. The DENR is here to give us direction and of course, members of the media are here to give attention to what really is happening here. Thus, no one should illegally occupy this area. Let's help one another," Abalos said.

The Philippine National Police will implement a sustained police presence at the Masungi Georeserve, PNP chief Gen. Rodolfo Azurin Jr. assured.

An investigation is being conducted to determine the possible violations of those responsible for the alleged deployment of the armed men, Azurin said.

The probe also includes the alleged harassment and assault on one of Masungi Georeserve's caretakers.

The Masungi Georeserve was declared a protected area in 2011 under Proclamation No. 296 but a number of settlements were put up, including houses and resorts.

There are reports that some individuals and groups are interested in the area due to its mining potential.

Located around 47 kilometers east of Metro Manila, the Masungi Georeserve is a conservation area and is known for its rustic rock garden that is part of the Upper Marikina River Basin Protected Landscape (UMRBPL) in Rizal province.

Covering 26,126 hectares, the UMRBPL in Rizal province is vital in regulating the flow of water towards Metro Manila.



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## PNP chief orders tight security in Masungi area

**PHILIPPINE** National Police chief Gen. Rodolfo Azurin Jr. yesterday ordered the Rizal Police Provincial Office to fully secure the Masungi Georeserve Area and enforce all ordinances pertaining to the forest land in Tanay municipality.

"Our security is tight. We are also constantly coordinating with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and local government unit," said the top cop as he instructed Police Regional Office 4-A director Brig. Gen. Jose Melencio Nartatez Jr. and Rizal Police Provincial Office director Col. Dominic Bacay to strictly enforce his directives.

According to the PNP chief, an investigation is also underway to identify possible violations of the group responsible for the alleged deployment of the armed men in the area.

"What we are advocating for is to avoid any ten-

sion or violence from arising," he said.

Included in the probe is the alleged harassment and assault on one of Masungi Georeserve's caretakers.

Azurin and Interior and Local Government Secretary Benjamin "Benhur" Abalos Jr. visited the area to conduct an inspection as the DILG chiefs said they are coordinating their actions with the DENR.

"We are under the guidance of the DENR," Abalos said as he reiterated that security personnel can't just rush going to the area, where there is an ongoing land dispute, as they need to secure a permit first from the PNP.

Abalos also ordered the police force to help demolish all illegal structures in the area as soon as possible.

Teams of PNP personnel will be deployed to conduct 24-hour patrols in the protected area.

The Rizal police is strictly enforcing a closure order issued by the Baras local government unit on all resorts operating within Sitio San Roque where tension has been noted.

Azurin said that the Rizal police force will be augmented by troops from the PRO4-A Regional Mobile Force Battalion. He added that certain names mentioned by complainants will be investigated, whether they are active or retired police or military officers and men.

Abalos confirmed that the fact that there have been many claimants in the Masungi area makes it "more complicated," with the DILG and the DENR needing to partner with each other, to resolve the issue.

However, he admitted that forest conservationists have played a major role in protecting the area.

"Kung walá sila, puro restaurants na ito," Abalos said. Alfred Dalizon



## PNP to secure Masungi Georeserve in Rizal

By AARON RECUENCO

Gen. Rodolfo Azurin, Jr. chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP), said yesterday that a police detachment will be set up at the Masungi Georeserve in Baraas, Rizal in order to maintain peace and order amid the reported violence that stemmed from claim of ownership in the 400-hectare land that was already declared as a protected area of the national government.

Azurin said he had already instructed the police provincial

director of Rizal to deploy elements of the Provincial Mobile Forces Company and for the regional director of the Police Regional Office 4A to augment the manpower to secure the Masungi Georeserve.

"Initially, we will put up a detachment for the PNP in the contested areas. My guidance is to ensure that peace is ensured in this area," said Azurin in an interview during the inspection at the Masungi Georeserve on Friday.

The inspection stemmed from the reported presence of at least

30 armed men in a portion of the Masungi last week.

Last year, two forest rangers were shot in the area and in a separate attack, armed men allegedly mauled seven forest rangers in February this year.

The Masungi Georeserve, home to various flora and fauna that include the endangered ones, was declared a protected area in 2011. It has become a tourist attraction in Rizal and was also part of the reforestation project of a private entity in partnership with the national government.



## 'Georeserve' sa Rizal binalahura, pinasisilip sa Kamara

Ipinasisilip ni 2nd District Rizal Rep. Emigdio "Dino" Tanjuatco III sa Mababang Kapulungari ng Kongreso ang umano'y illegal na aktibidades na nagaganap sa Masungi Georeserve sa lalawigan ng Rizal.

Si Tanjuatco at iba pang mga mambabatas sa lalawigan ng Rizal ay naghain ng House Resolution No. 411 na nanawagan ng imbestigasyon sa umano'y pambalahura sa Masungi Georeserve.

### NI JOY CANTOS

"I thank my colleagues from Rizal for supporting our call to investigate the series of suspicious activities in Masungi Georeserve ranging from alleged land-grabbing, illegal fencing to alleged violation of environmental laws," anang mambabatas.

Ang Masungi Georeserve ay isang conservation area na matatagpuan sa Southern Sierra Madre range sa pagitan ng munisipalidad ng Baras at Tanay, Rizal na pumapalibot sa "geological formations" ng Masungi Rock at

bahagi rin ito ng Marikina Watershed Reservation.

"It is home to hundreds of species of flora and fauna," anang Kongresista kung saan ang kontrata ay ini-award ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) sa Masungi Georeserve Foundation Inc. sa pamamagitan ng Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).

Tinukoy ng solon ang insidente ng karahasan noong Hulyo 2021 at Pebrero 2022 kung saan ang mga forest rangers ng Georeserve habang

ginagampanan ang kanilang tungkulin sa pagbabantay sa lugar ay intake ng mga armadong kalalakhian.

Nabatid na Setyembre 18, mahigit 30 na armado rin na umano'y mula Sinagtala Security Agency Services ang nag-camping sa Marikina-Infanta Highway sa pagitan ng Kaliwa at Marikina Watersheds.

Samantala, pinuna rin sa nasabing resolusyon ang napaulat na konstruksyon ng mga illegal na bakod sa premises ng Masungi na nakakasagabal sa access o daanan ng mga magsasaka sa lugar.



**EDITORIAL**

## Masungi's continuing story

In this age of fake news, can fake rallies be far behind?

The Masungi Georeserve Foundation (MGFI) has denounced as a "bogus action" a protest staged the other day by a group of residents of Baras, Rizal, who accused the foundation of "land grabbing" within the ecotourism park.

Masungi, which sits inside the Upper Marikina River Basin Protected Landscape, is one of 94 protected areas under the Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System law enacted to preserve areas under threat of illegal takeover and development. In 2017, the MGFI signed a memorandum of agreement with the environment department for conservation efforts within the area covering 2,700 hectares. It has become a prominent and popular destination ever since the foundation turned it into an ecotourism and environmental education site.

In a statement, the foundation said the "fake rally" was nothing new, describing it as "part of a systemic disinformation against genuine environment defenders." It accused "those involved in corrupt activities, the illegal construction of big resorts and rest houses inside the watershed, and quarrying" as being behind the disinformation effort.

More alarmingly, Masungi is currently in the headlines after more than 30 armed men encamped on the roadside of the Marikina-Infanta Highway within the site's boundaries. The MGFI described the group's arrival as an "invasion," and the men themselves as employees of Sinagtala Security Agency Services, supposedly owned by a retired police official.

Astonishingly, both law enforcers and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) officials have reacted to the news with studied neutrality and inaction, if not indifference.

True, Tanay police said they had "confiscated" firearms, including shotguns and revolvers from the encamped men. Despite the discovery of the firearms, a Tanay police official said these were merely "taken" and "not necessarily confiscated but put into custody for verification (of their) licenses." No arrests were made, not even for trespassing, and the offenders were merely fined P1,000 each.



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EDITORIAL

## MASUNGI'S CONTINUING STORY

The foundation urges the DENR, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, as well as the Philippine National Police, "to take immediate action... and to stop this ongoing invasion, and remove the invaders." The only action taken so far, aside from the confiscation of weapons, according to Billie Dumaliang, the foundation's advocacy officer, has been the DENR's assurance that a report has been forwarded to "appropriate offices for immediate action." How "immediate" is difficult to discern, since the armed group arrived at Masungi more than a week ago.

Fears that the arrival of the armed men from a private security agency would lead to an escalation of conflict are not unfounded. Even before Masungi was declared a protected area in 2011, a report says, private settlements and establishments had already been constructed within its boundaries. Just last year, two stationed forest rangers were shot by unidentified assailants, just over a week after the DILG recommended the filing of criminal and administrative charges against a government official and private entities for violation of environmental laws. Before this, Masungi's forest rangers had received threats for reporting illegal activities in the watershed.

Then last February, seven forest rangers were eating at a food stall when around 30 individuals ganged up on them, leading to the hospitalization of two rangers. The suspects, said the report, were believed to be working for owners of allegedly illegal resorts in the area.

The story of Masungi begins in the late 1990s, by which time the georeserve and its surrounding areas were deforested and "overridden by an epidemic of land-grabbing activities." In a briefer, the foundation says "illegal logging was prevalent and threats of large-scale quarrying were present. Environmental offenders were many and took a heavy toll on the project, as we dreamt to restore its forests and transform it into a development where nature is a priority and man interacts with his surroundings mindfully."

Noting how Masungi has become "a place we have grown to love," the foundation has secured the distinctive rock formations, restoring and rehabilitating the area. "Trees are now growing taller, the wildlife is slowly but surely getting richer, and genuine concern for the environment is becoming an integral part of living for everyone involved."

We said the story of Masungi began in the late 1990s, but in actuality, it began long before humans inhabited this landscape. Protecting and preserving it is to protect not just our past but our present and future. The story of Masungi is continuing, and how it will be resolved is up to all of us who claim to love this land.



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A TALE OF TWO CITIES : CDO AND NAGA AS VICTIMS OF  
DISASTERS



**In photo from L to R, SM Supermalls VP for Corporate Compliance Group Liza Silerio, Former DILG Undersecretary for Public Safety Nestor Quinsay Jr., EVP for Zuellig Family Foundation Austere Panadero, Naga City Public Safety Director Rene Gumba, former NRC President and incumbent DENR Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyza, NRC Experts Pool and Project Leader for Coastal Cities at Risk in the Philippines Dr. Emma Porio, SM Prime Holdings Consultant for Disaster Resilience VAdm. (ret.) Alexander Pama, and SM Supermalls Vice President for Corporate Marketing Grace Magno**



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## 130,000 bamboo, trees planted on BBM birthday – DENR

MORE than 130,000 bamboo culms and native tree seedlings of different species were planted in a simultaneous bamboo and tree planting activity nationwide on the 65th birthday of President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. last September 13, according to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Marcos led the kickoff ceremonies in an old sanitary landfill being rehabilitated by the DENR in Barangay Pintong Bocaue in San Mateo, Rizal, which is within the Upper Marikina River Basin Protected Landscape. The old sanitary landfill was closed in November 1989.

Planted at the site were some 1,613 seedlings including various species of bamboo and fruit-bearing trees.

Tree planting activities were simultaneously held in 111 sites in the country covering an aggregate area of 681.5 hectares

planted mostly with bamboo culms and indigenous timber tree seedlings such as agohe, kalumpit, *yakal*, molave, narra, *bignai* and *banaba*.

The event also coincided with the celebration of Philippine Bamboo Month pursuant to Presidential Proclamation 1401, Series of 2022.

Marcos has directed the Environment department to boost the country’s resilience to natural disasters by expanding forest cover and accelerating efforts toward forest protection.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said the nationwide tree planting symbolized the administration’s commitment to address climate change, mitigate its effects, and alleviate the risk of vulnerable communities and ecosystems.

Maria Antonia YULO-LOYZAGA  
BELLA CARIASO





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## Tree planting marks PBBM's birthday

By CORY MARTINEZ

MORE than 130,000 bamboo culms and native tree seedlings of different species were planted in a simultaneous bamboo and tree planting activity nationwide during the 65th birth anniversary of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. (PBBM) last Sept. 13, 2022.

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga said that the nationwide activity symbolized the new administration's direction and national commitment to address climate change, mitigate its effects, and alleviate the risk to vulnerable communities and eco-

systems.

During the activity with the theme "Buhayin ang Pangangalaga ng Kalikasan," President Marcos Jr. led the kickoff ceremonies in an old sanitary landfill (SLF) being rehabilitated by the DENR at Barangay Pintong Bocaue in San Mateo, Rizal, which is within the Upper Marikina River Basin Protected Landscape. The old SLF was closed in November 1989.

Planted at the site were some 1,613 seedlings, including various species of bamboo and fruit-bearing trees.

Tree planting activities were also simultaneously held in 111 sites in the coun-

try, covering an aggregate area of 681.5 hectares planted mostly with bamboo culms and indigenous timber tree seedlings such as agoho, kalumpit, yakal, molave, narra, bignai, and banaba.

The event was also in line with the celebration of "Philippine Bamboo Month" pursuant to Presidential Proclamation No. 1401, series of 2022, and in support of the President's directive to boost the country's resilience to natural disasters by expanding forest cover and accelerating efforts towards forest protection.

The DENR, together with the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) organized the event.



## NEWS BRIEFS

### Seabed quarrying

The Diocese of Imus has expressed concern over the seabed quarrying in Cavite as it warned against its destructive effect on marine life in the area. Imus Bishop Reynaldo Evangelista said they are creating public awareness on the environmental effects of seabed quarrying. "We have released a video in all the parishes which is shown before the holy mass to help create awareness on the dangerous effects of seabed quarrying. The diocese hopes to do its share in environmental preservation," the bishop said over Radio Veritas. "All the members of the clergy of the Diocese of Imus are united to stop the seabed quarrying in Cavite. We are in the process of educating the residents on its negative effects and its consequences particularly to communities that rely on the sea for their livelihood," the Church leader added. A signature campaign against the project will also be conducted by the diocese, the bishop said. The seabed quarrying project will affect more than 8,000 hectares of seabed in the towns of Noveleta, Rosario, Tanza, Naic, and Ternate in Cavite.  
(Christina Hermoso)

# Watsons clean-up activity in support of International Coastal Clean Up Day attended by employees and supplier-partners

ON September 17, a big group of Watsons employees and supplier-partners trooped to the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habit and Ecotourism Area (LP-PCHEA) for an ocean clean-up drive.

The initiative, which was on International Clean Up day, is part of Watsons' commitment to DO GOOD for the Oceans. It was a partnership between the health, wellness, and beauty retailer and CORA (Communities Organized for Resource Allocation), a non-profit organization dedicated to creating sustainable programs to help solve global issues, including climate change and plastic pollution.

"We were surprised at the number of volunteers. Our supplier-partners said yes right away and so did our employees," said Viki Encarnacion, PR and Sustainability director at Watsons Philippines.

Ramil Horario, one of the employee-volunteers, is Functional Finance Controller at Watsons. This is his first clean-up activity with the company but his fifth as an environmentally conscious individual. "I grew up in Cavite and I have seen how our waters have transformed from clean to moderately clean to polluted. I am very proud to work for a company that is committed to doing its part for the environment," said Horario.

As a company that cares for the planet,

leading health, wellness, and beauty retailer Watsons is always looking for opportunities to make a positive impact on its customers and the communities. The activity hoped to raise awareness and inspire the volunteers to make changes in their lifestyles. For instance, because some of the collected waste during the activity was plastic bottles, the volunteers noted how important it was to bring a reusable tumbler for drinking.

Mismanaged waste ends up in our oceans and shores, resulting in pollution and the endangerment of marine life. Ocean trash is not just dangerous for animals but also for humans. Plastics, for instance, never fully disappear; they just break down into smaller, and smaller pieces called microplastics. These microplastics can enter the human body through inhalation and absorption and accumulate in organs. Because of the pandemic, there has also been a rise in waste coming from plastic bottles, face masks, plastic bags, Styrofoam, cutlery, and straws (source: UN Environment Program).

The Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habit and Ecotourism Area, is a group of structures in Las Piñas that helps to communicate to the public the importance of conservation and wise use of the mangrove and other wetland areas in the 175 hectares that make up a protected area. "The

coastal clean-up activity is part of Watsons DO GOOD efforts for the ocean. As in all our sustainability programs, we learned that we cannot do this alone. That is why we have partnered with CORA and the local government and we involved our employees and supplier-partners. We need to help each other to DO GOOD," said Viki Encarnacion, PR and Sustainability director at Watsons.

The #CORAcleanUps Program helps remove plastic pollution from our Philippine seas and provides livelihood for the "Bakawan Warriors" waste workers that recover marine debris from Manila Bay and surrounding areas, as well as maintain the biodiversity of the LPPCHEA.

Celebrity and humanitarian Antonette Taus is the founder and executive director of CORA. Designated a Goodwill Ambassador by the United Nations Environment Program, she has dedicated her life to using her platform to advocate against hunger and poverty, climate change, mental health, plastic pollution, and other global issues. "We are very happy to see a retailer like Watsons be a responsible citizen of the planet and work with us on this clean-up drive. Plastic pollution and mismanaged waste are serious environmental concerns," said Taus.

Event participants included members of media, bloggers, and influencers, and



■ Antonette Taus, CORA Founder and Executive Director; Jared De Guzman – Watsons Philippines Customer Director; and Viki Encarnacion - Watsons Philippines PR and Sustainability Director.



■ Watsons Do Good for the Oceans Volunteers celebrate the International Coastal Clean-up Day by cleaning and picking up trash in the coastal stretch of Freedom Island in Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Eco-tourism Area.



■ Watsons Do Good for the Oceans Coastal Clean-up Activity was visited by DENR Officers (from left) Watsons Philippines Officers Patrick Yu and Viki Encarnacion together with DENR Regional Directors Jacqueline Caanca and Engr. Ignacio Almira Jr with Antoinette Taus from CORA Philippines.



■ Watsons Philippines volunteers pick up the trash in Freedom Island coastal stretch at Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Eco-tourism Area (LPPCHEA).

Watsons employee-volunteers and trade suppliers. The participants took part in a dance fitness warm-up as part of Watsons' Get Active program before finally getting down to the business of cleaning up. After that, the trash collected was weighed and awards were given to the participants. "The Get Active program encourages not just our employees but also our customers to do some physical

activity and what better way to do that than with a clean-up drive on a weekend," said Jared de Guzman, Customer Director at Watsons Philippines.

"The activity is also Watsons' way of encouraging our customers to take care of their health and the health of the planet as well. It's really Doing Good for you and the planet," said Encarnacion.



# Protected seascape status for West PH Sea pushed

**Expert says the WPS has 'unique and irreplaceable ecological, economic benefits' that must be safeguarded 'at all cost'**

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY—Citing the global significance of the ecosystem and marine biodiversity of the West Philippine Sea (WPS), an expert on environmental policy and governance has recommended that this area be declared a protected seascape.

Dr. Ben Malayang III, professor emeritus of Environmental Policy and Governance Institute of Environmental and Marine Science at Silliman University in Dumaguete City, said the WPS ecosystem services must be protected "at all cost."

"[The WPS ecosystem services] generate unique and irreplaceable ecological, economic, and social benefits (and values) that are natural heritage—a universal commons—of Filipinos, of others around the South China Sea (SCS), and of the world," Malayang said when he spoke about the heritage value of WPS during the second Marine Protected Area Summit held in this city on Monday and Tuesday.

Palawan province's Kalayaan town, with Pag-asa Island as its seat of local govern-

ment, is located in the WPS, which comprises around 30 percent of the Philippine seas and around 20 percent of the total area of SCS.

Only on Sept. 8, the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) adopted Resolution No. 2022-827, declaring the 7.93-hectare Lawak Island, which is part of the Kalayaan Group of Islands claimed by the Philippines in the WPS, as a protected area.

The PCSD, an attached agency of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, cit-

ed the threatened resident birds, and a potential green sea turtle nesting site on Lawak Island, which is home to at least six bird species and other wildlife.

## Beyond territory

Malayang said the Philippine government was affirming its legitimate jurisdiction over the WPS as "a clear and uncompromisable national interest of all Filipinos" despite contending territorial claims in the SCS.

But he said protecting the ecosystem services of the WPS from the perspective of science

is "a concern more foundational to human beings than territory."

"While others are looking at WPS for its territorial jurisdiction, we look at its ecosystem services. It is a concern of all who value WPS and SCS as maritime domains," Malayang said.

He added: "On this ground, it is recommended that, using existing mechanisms and procedures, WPS or any of its parts, like the Kalayaan Island Group and Bajo de Masinloc (in Zambales province), be declared as a Philippine protected seascape."

He also said the government should move for the inclusion of the WPS ecosystem services in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Heritage Park Protected Area system, and in the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's World Heritage List.

Malayang explained that based on a framework of heritage evaluation, the WPS qualifies as an important seascape under Republic Act No. 7586, or the National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 1992.

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# Healthy coastal wetlands for sustainable development

THE Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (1972 Ramsar Convention) defines wetlands as "areas of marsh, fen, peatlands or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine waters, the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters." Except for Qatar's mangroves and salt flats, wetlands in the Philippines, Fiji and the Solomon Islands include estuaries and deltas, mangroves and intertidal mudflats, coastal lagoons, freshwater lakes and marshes, swamp forests, rivers and streams and coral reef systems.

Despite the impact of global warming and the threats of sea-level rise, identified marine and coastal wetlands in those countries are being managed to the best of capabilities in order to maintain their functions and values for subsistence and well-being of their respective inhabitants. Some of the countries' experiences and lessons learned are herein narrated for whatever they may be worth in the free market of ideas to achieve effective marine and coastal wetland management.



AMBASSADORS' CORNER  
**AMADO S. TOLENTINO JR.**

## The Philippines

A model project in the Coastal Resource Management (CRM) program of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is the coastal *barangay* (village) of Lawis in Pangangan Island in Bohol province. The island is under the administrative jurisdiction of the municipality of Calape, where inhabitants rely heavily on fishing.

The DENR takes pride not only in involving all members of the Calape community in the management of marine resources but also in establishing marine sanctuaries to serve as spawning grounds for fishes and to rehabilitate the degraded marine resources.

A 3.8-kilometer causeway connects Lawis to the Calape mainland. Constructed by the residents themselves, the causeway leads to the cottages of the Lawis Farmers and Fishermen's Association (LAF-

FA). Participatory coastal resource assessment techniques were taught resulting in their realization of the importance of coastal resources in their day-to-day undertakings.

The DENR-led program also provided training and capacity-building on enterprise development, coastal law enforcement, resource assessment and protection, mangrove management, establishment of marine protected areas and ecotourism. Some members of LAFFA became actively involved in their *barangay's* efforts in protecting their coastal resources from illegal fishing as members of Bantay Dagat (Sea Guardians). Bantay Dagat is a collaborative coastal law enforcement arm of the DENR, Bureau of Fisheries, Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine National Police and the local government units.

Livelihood programs were likewise introduced by CRM. Cooperatives gave loans for livestock raising, hog dispersal, seaweed culture, cottage and boardwalk renting. Their latest venture, lobster culture, became a most promising endeavor considering the high price lobsters command.

Fish harvest also increased after the establishment of a 13.5-hectare marine sanctuary in the area.

Indeed, Pangangan Island is now a refuge for species of fish, a place that can give sustainable livelihood opportunities for the poor marginalized fishermen living in the coastal areas.

## Fiji

Attracting much attention are the coral reefs of the South Pacific as a source of novel chemicals that may hold the cure for cancer, AIDS and drug-resistant bacteria. Those same corals, which are traditionally part of the Pacific islanders' environment, are the object of the growing interest of pharmaceutical companies to prospect for substances with medicinal potential. They are a new source of significant economic returns from marine resources.

Verata, a county near the Fiji capital of Suva which consists of eight villages, is renowned worldwide for its blue-green coastal lagoons and abundance of marine resources. The residents of Verata

► TolentinoA5



# Healthy coastal wetlands for sustainable development

joined with the University of South Pacific (USP) to establish a unique bioprospecting agreement with the Strathclyde Institute of Drug Research, a pharmaceutical research group in Scotland. The project began by helping the communities to develop and implement bioprospecting agreements according to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. People are naturally interested in having their medicinal plants evaluated, receiving financial benefits for their efforts.

Villagers collect and do the preliminary processing of samples. Instead of simply selling the plant or animal samples to a pharmaceutical company, extracts are prepared at USP and then licensed for evaluation by the Scottish group to other pharmaceutical companies for evaluation. Payments or income to the villages are derived from the licensing of the samples.

Since Fiji is a small country, and the project participants have close contacts with the appropriate government officials, the project has also been well-positioned to influence government policy regarding prospecting at the national level. Additionally, the practice gives the realization that local communities

can make the decisions necessary to manage their biological diversity, especially in the Pacific where most traditional people have clear tenurial rights over their resources.

The Verata model of a bioprospecting agreement has proved that communities can be effective partners in marine conservation provided that their knowledge and skills are acknowledged and respected. An understanding of traditional management practices is useful as it is generally easier to adapt to something people already know than to introduce an entirely new concept.

## Solomon Islands

In the Solomon Islands, an assisted fishing enterprise demonstrated valuable use of modern conservation efforts alongside traditional fishing customs of imposing traditionally created sacred *tabu* (taboo) areas for fishing in certain areas at certain seasons.

In its Arnavon Islands of white beaches, lagoons and coral reefs live an extraordinary diversity of marine mammals, including the endangered hawksbill turtle. They also support commercially viable species such as beche-de-mer (sea cucumbers); tro-

chus, black and gold lip pearl oysters and giant clams as well as different reef fish. In the 1990s, shellfish prices went up and so did the temptation to overharvest them. One by one, the stocks were depleted.

The government immediately set up the Arnavon Islands Community Marine Conservation Area in which there are prohibitions on the taking of key species of commercial importance. The project involves implementing a management plan in the *tabu* area as well as a sustainable deepwater finfish enterprise in two sites to provide the communities with alternative food and income while taking the pressure off the reef species. This conservation area marks the first time communities in the Solomon Islands have created a marine sanctuary as well as the country's first comparatively managed marine conservation area.

Today, turtles nest in peace on the small islands of the Arnavon group. Mangroves are growing back both naturally and in response to a replanting effort by conservation officers. Even the previously depleted stocks of marine invertebrates returned to their natural numbers. And there is a noticeable upsurge in the resident bird population.



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## Qatar

Qatar is a sovereign and independent state in West Asia, specifically the Arabian Gulf. It has 700 kilometers of coastline. The coastal zone is characterized by "sabkha," or salt flats, in many parts. Within the last decade, vast areas of the coast have been built up endangering the fish production, habitat for wildlife, recreation and buffer zone values of mangrove areas.

As a fast developing country with a small local or native population, many expatriates compose the needed manpower. Among those are Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankas, Indonesians, Filipinos, Thais, Palestinians, Egyptians, etc. There are currently an estimated more than 37,000 overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in Qatar. The increase in OFWs is attributed to more recruitment undertaken especially for the purpose of constructing modern sports facilities as Qatar hosts the 2022 World Cup in December.

Under the auspices of the Philippine Embassy in Doha, the Filipino community embarked on mangrove sapling/tree planting in the wetlands of the municipalities of Al Khor and Al Dhakira. It was the first environmental project undertaken by

an expatriate community in Qatar. That the Filipinos thought of such a project was well appreciated by the host government. The growing environmental concern in the country was given a big boost by the Filipino effort. Thereafter, Qatar-based multinational companies took a liking to sponsoring environment-related projects not only because of its novelty but more because of the project's lasting benefits to the coastal environment and what it means to the people.

The continuing project brings to fore the cultural value of mangrove areas in Qatar. Most important is the awareness it generated among locals and the expatriate community on the functions and values of wetlands as an ecosystem which ought to be protected and conserved for sustainable development.

### Best practices, knowledge tools

As scientists predict the acceleration of sea level rise in the 21st century leading to more frequent and deeper flooding of wetlands and shoreline; accelerated erosion of coastal areas; destruction of coral reefs and coastal mangroves,

and the intrusion of saltwater into coastal freshwater resources, marine and coastal wetland managers are relentlessly pursuing efforts at their effective management through education, i.e., sharing of experiences and lessons learned while there is still time to enjoy the benefits and resources from the marine and coastal wetlands. In the meantime, marine and coastal wetlands should be managed effectively for sustainable development. For this reason alone, the experiences of the Philippines, Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Qatar are thereby shared.

*Before his stint as chief of mission in Qatar, the author served as Philippine ambassador to Papua New Guinea and nonresident ambassador to the Solomon Islands and Kiribati in the Pacific subregion. His consultancy work on environmental law at UNEP (Nairobi) and UN Escap (Bangkok) exposed him to experiences he shared in the foregoing article. He was also executive governor (for developing countries), International Council of Environmental Law, a Bonn-based public interest organization with consultative status at the UN.*





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## ARTA expects report card survey results by November

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The Anti-Red Tape Authority (ARTA) expects to get the results of its report card survey (RCS 2.0), which measures the quality of service of government agencies, by November.

On Thursday, the ARTA formally launched the pilot implementation of RCS 2.0. According to ARTA officer-in-charge and Undersecretary Ernesto Perez, People Dynamics, Inc. (PDI), its third-party provider will conduct an on-site survey starting this month.

He said that in November, the ARTA would provide the feedback to the agencies with respect to the results of the survey.

In December this year, the ARTA will conduct an awarding ceremony for the agencies that will garner high scores in the RCS.

Perez said the RCS would focus on measuring the quality, efficiency and adequacy of government services through evaluation of the streamlining initiatives of government agencies and local government.

Among the tools of measurements to be used by the survey include compliance reports, survey questionnaire and inspection checklist, client satisfaction measurement, and agency awards and recognition.

The RCS was previously implemented by the Civil Service Commission.

Perez said that with the new version, "there is a need to look into customer satisfaction of external customers and should also be complemented with the satisfaction of internal customers, thus the need to incorporate internal services of the government agencies in the RCS."

"Under RCS 2.0, all of the government services will be covered. As for the services, not only the external (frontline) services will be covered in RCS but the internal services will be measured too," Perez said.

He said the RCS would still be used as one of the basis in granting rewards and incentives to government agencies.

The implementation of the RCS is in line with the government's goal

to elevate its service delivery to new heights, as well as to shape a better life experience for Filipinos.

"The development of this Report Card Survey 2.0 and Harmonized Client Satisfaction Measurement is rooted in the aspiration to transform how the government serves the people," Perez said.

"And I hope that, with this all-encompassing tool, we will continue to embrace the transformative efforts we are pursuing to improve government service delivery and see it as an opportunity to perform more effectively and better serve Filipinos," he said.

Perez emphasized that effective service requires well-defined processes, a simplified system, and prompt delivery, not to mention the pleasant demeanor of the service provider.

"When we visit a facility, such as a hotel, a resort, or an attraction, we normally consider their accommodation costs, their amenities, the timeliness of their service delivery, and, of course, the manner in which the service is rendered," Perez said.



## Sustainable finance key lever for net-zero transition and social stability

**A**GAINST the backdrop of global uncertainties, volatile markets and the rising cost of living threatening a post-pandemic recovery, the role of finance in addressing the climate crisis and ensuring social stability has become more important than ever.

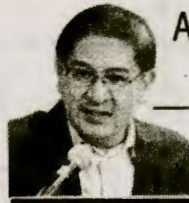
I attended the fifth edition of Unlocking Capital for Sustainability themed, "The role of sustainable finance in a disrupted world," together with about 500 leaders across government, finance, business and civic society.

Organized by Eco-Business, in partnership with United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the annual forum delved into wide-ranging issues from the outlook for sustainable finance in the region, ESG integration and valuation, an Asian sustainable finance taxonomy, the role of carbon markets, financing the net-zero transition and mainstreaming impact investing, among others.

The latest UN report on the Sustainable Development Goals — a collection of 17 interlinked targets adopted by all nations for a more sustainable future by 2030 — revealed that Covid-19, and the continued regression on climate action and resource use have caused the biggest slowdown in pace since the targets were set in 2015. Southeast Asia and the Pacific are particularly lagging.

Meanwhile, the world faces a growing triple planetary crisis — climate, nature and pollution — which underlines the urgent need to align all financing flows with sustainable development, and to achieve the shared goals of a greener, more inclusive and resilient recovery.

Experts observed that while global capital markets are already supporting green finance, there needs to be more support for transition finance — where financial institutions are helping



### ALL ABOUT CHOICES

LUDWIG O. FEDERIGAN

companies in high emission or hard to abate sectors are provided with financing to transition to a low carbon business model.

Speakers also emphasized that a "great finance divide" has emerged between developed and emerging markets, and that financial institutions in the region should be more active in the latter. More catalytic capital and blended finance tools are needed to mobilize capital to fund the projects and address and share the political and financial risks that come from investing in emerging markets.

At the opening of the forum, Minister Grace Fu, Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment, Singapore, observed that "sustainable development is no longer a matter of regulatory compliance or government policies. The financial sector must bring heightened awareness to issues of sustainability, whether through funding of research and development of low carbon solutions, or supporting businesses in their green transition."

"The IEA has estimated that emerging and developing economies around the world need over US\$1 trillion a year in clean energy investment by 2030 to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. This has yet to include the cost of adaptation, which the UNEP estimates to be at least US\$140 billion a year. This far exceeds the resources of governments around the world.

We will need technology and innovation to deliver needle-moving solutions, and private sector finance will hold the key to unlock this potential," she added.

Steve Howard, chief sustainabil-

ity officer of Temasek, also noted that the global net-zero transition is an "unprecedented challenge because it is about restructuring everything."

"It is reimagining industry, reimagining our energy systems, mobility, the built environment, or food systems. But it is also a fantastic opportunity as it will drive new businesses and innovation. So it's both a critical threat and opportunity," he added.

Noting the tough macroeconomic environment, Jessica Cheam, founder and managing director at Eco-Business, noted that "in these tough times, it is very tempting to revert to short-termism and think of only what lies in the immediate term, but that puts us in a dangerous place because long after these crises are over — we will still be faced with the existential crisis of climate change and of rising inequality which is threatening the long-term security of our natural ecosystems and societies."

"This is why conversations like today's gathering are important — to continue to build on the momentum achieved in the capital markets on responsible investments and to take it even further," she added.

### Regional progress

This year's forum featured more than 50 speakers across the globe, beginning with four regional virtual dialogues spanning Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and India, and culminating in a two-day hybrid event held in Singapore.

As a pre-event curtain raiser, Eco-Business, in partnership with the Bank of Singapore, also hosted a closed-door dialogue Through the lens of impact and return: Investing in Asia with family offices and investors on September 20 at Raffles Arcade.



Delegates also attended a breakfast briefing hosted in partnership with Rebound Plastics Exchange on "Innovations and investable opportunities in recycled plastics."

Mike Ng, Sustainability Office head, Global Wholesale Banking, OCBC Bank, said, "Now more than ever, the world is experiencing the impact of climate change — droughts, floods, heat waves and extreme weather. The recent energy crisis and the restarting of activities as economies open up have resulted in emission spikes. Against this light, it is important that the sustainable finance agenda does not lose momentum, and green finance needs to be at the forefront of a global economy facing years of climate and financial uncertainty."

This forum has served as a timely platform for industry players to take stock of their progress, from the successes and challenges of mobilizing capital for a more sustainable world, to sharing ideas on how to support and accelerate sustainability efforts. As a leading Asian bank, we are very mindful of our role as a catalyst for positive change — through financing renewable energy and other green infrastructure projects, and promoting sustainable investments, among others. Together with our customers and other like-minded organizations, including those who participated in this forum, we will continue to make a unified push for a sustainable future."

Eric Lim, chief sustainability officer, United Overseas Bank (UOB), said: "As a leading financial institution in Asia, UOB has a responsibility to support our customers in the real economy as they transition to a net-zero economy. It is not about chasing numbers; we are focused on working together with our customers to create genuine and meaningful impact. This way, we can help

bridge financial capital with the region's needs for investments to drive sustainable development and forge our net-zero future."

Atty. Federico Tancongo, senior vice president and chief compliance officer for sustainability of BDO Unibank, noted that since 2010, the bank has been on the lookout for renewable energy projects and "have actively engaged with project proponents who bring their renewable energy projects to us, since we consider this a priority sector in financing."

"It is for this reason that we are strategic partners for this event. We see our participation in global conversations as a way to champion sustainable development for the Philippines through sustainable finance, and two, to publicly announce BDO's approach to energy transition finance," he added.

Liew Wei Chee, managing partner, South and South East Asia, ERM, noted that "the relentless pace of ESG imperatives is infiltrating companies' playbooks, from strategy, finance, mergers and acquisitions to operations."

"CFOs, the financial institutions, the investors and private equity firms are in an immense position of change to take charge, to identify material opportunities and risks to optimize ESG performance, advance with ESG-first approach across its transactions and accelerate sustainable finance."

The forum is timely to convene all the stakeholders to exchange insights and work toward securing a sustainable yet equitable future," he added.

Jack Lin, president of MioTech, emphasized the critical role of data to make better decisions: "As a leading ESG data and technology provider in Asia-Pacific, we are excited to bring AI-powered data solutions to solve the data-related sustainability challenges many corporations and finan-

cial institutions face. Amid the global and regional shift in green financial and carbon markets, we recognize new opportunities arise for industry players to pioneer innovative solutions. Witnessing the growing demand, we made the recent move to expand in Singapore. We look forward to bringing ESG data management and analytics to accelerate sustainable finance in the region."

Closing the forum, Selwin Charles Hart, special adviser to the Secretary-General on Climate Action and Just Transition, Executive Office of the Secretary-General, United Nations, said: "We need to urgently address risk perception around finance for renewables in the developing world. High risk perceptions means higher premiums, and this increases the cost of capital for renewable energy investments in the developing world. This, in turn, delays the transition of energy systems. We need to break this cycle."

"Shareholders have the power to make [government and multilateral development banks] fit for purpose. They must give management the mandate to change business models, to take more risks and be more creative in developing and delivering the support and investments needed. This also means bolstering their toolbox of instruments and expanding their capital base to mobilize private finance at pace and scale."

*The author is the executive director of the Young Environmental Forum and a nonresident fellow of Stratbase ADR Institute. He completed his climate change and development course at the University of East Anglia (United Kingdom) and an executive program on sustainability leadership at Yale University (USA). You can email him at ludwig.federigan@gmail.com.*



# Progressing toward a greener tomorrow

By Patricia Taculao

**T**ECHNOLOGY has adapted to people's demands for a better and more accessible life. While these developments benefit society, they have overlooked the circumstances of the environment, often compromising its overall quality.

Nowadays, when people talk about technology, they also consider its sustainability efforts apart from its efficiency. Such consideration for green technology spanned from private companies to public sectors, especially governments, to encourage more people to switch to sustainable technology.

Several companies and government agencies in the Philip-

pines already implement green technology in their daily operations. Yet the thing about technology is that it never ceases to innovate, especially with new ideas formed every day.

Advancing the country's sectors

Besides coming up with developments within the Philippine setting, various local governments also partner with their

foreign counterparts to ensure maximum efficiency to increase the country's production in various sectors.

Last May, the Department of Agriculture welcomed a South Korean-based company to promote smart farming technologies in the country. The company believes that smart farms are "the future of mankind." It prides itself on producing smart greenhouses that create the optimum environment for agricultural, livestock, and fishery production.

The company specializes in high-tech greenhouses with a vertically-integrated structure applicable for businesses, like smart farms, plant factories, renewable energy, and urban landscaping.

Former DA Secretary William Dar supported the promotion of smart farming in the Philippines, especially with food shortages and a significant demand to provide Filipinos with quality food and a sustainable livelihood. He advised the South Korean firm to create a business model in the Philippines to allow members of the agriculture sector an opportunity to witness a modern farming approach.

Having a fresh perspective on technology will allow stakeholders to discover areas where their sector needs development.

Meanwhile, several local companies also apply sustainable technology of their own volition, especially those involved in sectors that damage the environment significantly.

A local steel company will soon operate the country's first industrial-scale melt shop in 2024, using the latest green technology. The plant will use local scrap metal to produce high-



## PROGRESSING TOWARD A GREENER TOMORROW



With government mandate and private effort, the Philippines is well on its way to transitioning the local technology landscape that combines green efforts with intelligent advancements. (SAP photo)

grade billets as raw material for buildings, port construction, and shipbuilding, other projects.

The envisioned melt shop will formalize and organize the collection, consolidation, and recycling of scrap metal throughout the country, creating a business sub-sector with opportunities for individuals and small businesses. It also aims to keep the local government from spending dollars to import billets from foreign countries.

Several institutions also tapped into the potential of research and development in intensifying the implementation of sustainable technology in the Philippines. For instance, the University of Mindanao recently inaugurated its Center of Green Nanotechnology Innovations for Environmental Solutions (CGNIES), the first nanotechnology center in

Mindanao funded by the Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Council for Industry, Energy, and Emerging Technology Research and Development (DOST-PCIEERD), through the Infrastructure Development Program (IDP).

CGNIES will highlight sustainable approaches to developing nanomaterials from local resources and their integration into micro and macro structures for developing technological solutions to environmental problems.

Moreover, it envisions developing sustainable, scalable, and economical approaches to functional nanostructured materials while providing solutions that will benefit the environment and humanity.

### FOCUSING ON ENERGY ALTERNATIVES

Every leader knows that a

country requires energy to function smoothly. However, with only a limited resource for energy supply, the Philippines hasn't yet tapped into renewable sources that could sustain their activities in the long run without the extra cost.

President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. recently spoke with United States (US)-based companies that deal with renewable energy.

He first met with the top managers of NuScale Power, an American energy firm that provides advanced nuclear technology. It offers scalable advanced nuclear technology to produce electricity, heat, and clean water.

According to researchers, nuclear energy is sustainable, with a chance to become renewable if the uranium source changes from mined ore to seawater.



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## Gateway Gallery art exhibit focuses on wildlife protection

**GATEWAY** Gallery, the art museum of Araneta City, is currently hosting the stirring art of Punjabi artist Jaspreet Kaur in an exhibition called *Extinction*, which opened last September 10.

The exhibition features incredibly life-like paintings of different endangered species such as birds of prey and big cats such as lions and tigers, and was formally opened by various artists such as Fernando Sena, Pol Mesina, Romeo Gutierrez, Kannan Chockalingam—the First Secretary to the Ambassador of India, Ismael Esber, Gerard Alferez, Carmi Roton, and Rapunzel Francisco.

"I chose this theme for my exhibit because of forest degradation and because endangered species are at risk of going extinct in a matter of years. I know that I could not stop it, but I can paint them alive on my canvas, especially tigers and other big wild cats," Kaur said.

*Extinction* is Kaur's third solo show and is a potent display of the artist's strong conviction towards the protection of wildlife and the preservation of forest habitats. "Humans are killing amazing endangered species to get their fur and destroying their habitat by fires or illegal logging. We need to stop all this madness."

Kaur is a celebrated artist both in the Philippines and in India. Her art, mainly done through various media



**PUNJABI artist Jaspreet Kaur with big cat paintings**

such as oil, pastel, acrylic, and charcoal, has been exhibited in various locations in the Philippines and in Punjab.

*Extinction* is in the Small Room of the Gateway Gallery and will be shown until September 24.

Gateway Gallery is the art museum of Araneta City. It is open daily from 10 am to 6 pm. It is located at the 5F of Gateway Tower, Araneta City, Quezon City.

Admission to the museum is free.

To know more about the exhibit and other museum programs, please call +632-8588-4000 local 8300, or email [gatewaygallery@aranetagroup.com](mailto:gatewaygallery@aranetagroup.com).



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# Awareness Days daze and environmental burnout

**It is impossible to single-handedly eliminate all ecological issues—  
—pause, and recognize that you are not alone**

**By Alexa Theodoropoulos**  
@Inq\_Lifestyle

“Bzzz!” my alarm sounded. It was a typical Saturday morning.

I scrolled through my Instagram feed. A ceaseless barrage of posts from environmental nonprofits—World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace and SavePh-Seas—greeted me.

“It’s #internationalcoastalcleanupday!” one post read. “Today, we harvested 80 kilograms of plastic. Let’s keep our oceans clean together!”

In 2022, International Coastal Cleanup Day fell on Saturday, Sept. 17. It was an occasion that was welcomed and celebrated by nongovernmental organizations across the globe. Posts, reposts and projects were advertised across platforms. Legitimate projects went into force, including a mass cleanup drive along the

coast of the polluted Manila Bay.

As an internationally recognized environmental day, Coastal Cleanup Day is not alone. Earth Overshoot Day 2022 was July 28, and Zero Emissions Day was Sept. 21. Society makes waves for these designated “environmental days.” Social media erupts with conviction. People band together with calls for action.

Then a week passes. Silence.

After these occasions, the fires of environmental passion seem to die out as quickly as they were lit.

So, is there a point to these campaigns? Why is the fortitude of activism attenuated?

### Activism breeds hope

These “awareness days” are ubiquitous. Every day, it seems like there are multiple campaigns going on. We dou-

ble tap, repost and call it a day. Sometimes, we engage with them. Sometimes, we genuinely try to take action. We set a goal for the day, ground ourselves in the nobility of our cause and get working. We continue our work with the tenuous hope that our actions make a difference.

Yet, each awareness day is an ephemeral light that distracts society from the more somber status quo. The planet is warming. Constantly. The climate crisis is imperiling our livelihood as a species. A hashtag won’t change that. Awareness is futile when society is stagnant. Reality is frustrating because it is devastatingly familiar.

Despite over 100,000 protesters at COP26 in 2021, little binding legislation was enacted. This development was nothing



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## AWARENESS DAYS DAZE AND ENVIRONMENTAL BURNOUT

special. The cycle of ineffectual activism is constantly repeating.

This is my thought process when reflecting on the current state of environmental activism. Despite immense efforts, it often seems futile. And, this ideology is not unique: The American Psychiatric Association has dubbed the term "eco-anxiety," "the chronic fear of environmental doom." It often affects social activists and members of Gen Z due to their constant exposure to environmental news and disasters. We breed fear because we are surrounded and consumed by physical threats to our existence.

### What can we do?

The scale of the threat we face calls for a global, systems-level solution, based on radically reforming our current fossil fuel-based economy into

one that is genuinely sustainable. It requires multilateral cooperation between governments and corporations across the globe. Cooperation breeds transformation.

Thus, it is impossible to single-handedly eliminate all ecological issues.

Here's a tip: Pause, and recognize that you are not alone. You are a piece of a much larger puzzle, a collective movement of individuals who want to see society thrive. They share your passion and purpose, and they too want to effect change.

Allow yourself to take a break from carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders. Through daily reminders, whether on your walls or your phone, concentrate your thoughts on what you have control over.

With focus on the potential

of your actions (rather than the catastrophization of global affairs), you will be able to ensure an intrinsic sense of sustainability, one that regards both personal well-being and the state of the physical environment with equal value. As you work towards your cause, this sense of balance will allow you to maximize your own impact while enjoying the life afforded to you by nature's gifts.

"Bzzz!" my alarm sounded. It was a typical Sunday morning.

I scrolled through my Instagram feed. A ceaseless barrage of posts from environmental nonprofits greeted me.

I scrolled down a bit more. I saw a quote by Jana Stanfield.

It read, "You cannot do all the good the world needs, but the world needs all the good that you can do." —CONTRIBUTED

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