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IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



Phl can't do anything drastic vs Chinese provocations

By **ALEXIS ROMERO**
and **JANVIC MATEO**

The Philippines cannot do anything "drastic" against Chinese provocations in the West Philippine Sea, Malacañang stressed yesterday after the official or-

ganization of Filipino lawyers and some fishermen asked the Supreme Court to compel the government to do something about Chinese environmental depredation in Philippine waters.

The Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) and fishermen from Palawan and

Zambales have asked the high court to issue a Writ of Kalikasan directing the government to enforce Philippine environmental laws, including fisheries laws, in the West Philippine Sea.

Respondents in the petition include Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu, Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol and Coast Guard chief Admiral Elson Hermogino.

The petitioners claimed that the government has failed or is unwilling to enforce an arbitral ruling that voided China's claims in the West Philippine Sea and South China Sea.

The ruling, issued by the Permanent Court of Arbitration based in The Hague in July 2016, also stated that parts of South China Sea "fall within areas where only the Philippines possesses possible entitlements to maritime zones" under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo said negotiation is still the "best" way to address the dispute.

"The petitioners must consider that there are serious considerations that must be taken up and talked off. You just don't do drastic things; you have to do it cautiously," Panelo told ANC. "If we try to use armed action against those people, they might retaliate," he added.

Panelo said the only way to prevent environmental damage at Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal is to deploy more Coast Guard personnel in the area.

A recent television report said Chinese ships have been harvesting giant clams at the shoal, a traditional Filipino fishing ground off Zambales. The shoal is within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

"The only way you can do that is to have coast guards there so that you can watch over the

property, avoid or prevent people from doing damage to the corals," the presidential spokesman said.

"That is why precisely we filed that protest. Perhaps if they will not respond to that affirmatively then we have to do something more aggressive, which may provoke, as I said, armed hostilities," he added.

Asked about the government's next possible move if China continues with its environmentally destructive activities in Philippine waters, Panelo said: "Otherwise, we will be forced at the risk of an armed conflict, even if minimal."

"Again I will repeat: the best way is still negotiation. Negotiation is the best avenue by which we can solve any conflict in any area the South China Sea," he added.

In their petition, the IBP and the fishermen said foreign poaching as well as land reclamation and island-building activities have caused massive environmental damage in Philippine waters.

They noted that China destroyed coral reefs, harvested endangered species including giant clams, engaged in illegal fishing and built artificial islands.

The petition said Philippine environmental laws should be enforced at the Ayungin Shoal, Panganiban Reef and Panatag Shoal, all within the Philippines' EEZ.

No thanks

Meanwhile, Foreign Affairs Secretary Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. said the Chinese should not be lauded as heroes for reportedly restoring the coral reefs they had destroyed in South China Sea.

In a series of tweets on Saturday, Locsin said China is "emerging as the poster boy of environmentalism" for trying to restore the reefs that it damaged.

"Now I have seen propaganda lapped up by tree huggers that China is massively restoring the

environment they damaged like they are heroes for that. Like a doctor who patches you up after shooting you," he wrote.

"I've heard military men mention that with admiration; like praising the doctor who shot you for taking out the bullet and patching you up," he added.

Earlier this year, China was reported to have started restoring the coral reef system supposedly damaged by its reclamation activities in the West Philippine Sea.

The Chinese ministry of natural resources said facilities to protect and recover corals were installed on Kagitingan (Fiery Cross), Zamora (Subi) and Panganiban (Mischief) reefs, which are now artificial islands.

Also on Saturday, the foreign affairs chief denied deleting his controversial remarks about the poaching of giant clams.

"I deleted nothing. There goes my daughter again. Did I use a bad word? She won't allow it in any context thereby stifling my freedom of deep thought and vivid expression," he wrote.

He earlier drew the ire of netizens, including singer Regine Velasquez, for saying he would not go to war for clams as these are "just f**king food."

"I am not going down in history as a clam defender, OK? It's a complaint; we're looking into it; but these are just f**king food; no one goes to war for clams (maybe Oysters of Locquemariaquer) but they just happen to be OUR food. They should pay for them like in fish market," he wrote on April 16.

"We had no idea there were clams there and really I will not let this country go down to war or lose a useful economic partner just over environmental concerns for a world I care nothing about," he added in a separate post on April 18.



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In her now viral tweet, Velasquez slammed Locsin for his remark, saying "these people" – apparently referring to the Chinese – were not just taking food but were destroying the seas and even invading the country.

But in his latest posts, the secretary maintained that he will not be known as the "clam and coral guy," saying it is the opposition that equates the country's territory with food.

"No, you think it is just about clams (*kasali* coral by the way). It is I who do not think it is only about clams and coral. Criticize the idiot who got all wrought up over the clams," he added.

The secretary also stressed that Panatag Shoal is not part of the Philippine territory but is within the country's EEZ as set by

UNCLOS.

A 2009 law, Republic Act 9522 that amended the Philippine Baselines Law, determined Panatag Shoal and the Kalayaan Island Group as "Regime of Islands" over which the country exercises sovereignty and jurisdiction.

Locsin earlier said that the country filed a diplomatic protest over the reported harvesting of giant clams.

The DFA chief also bared supposed attempts to compromise the country's Sabah claim.

"Some jerks are proposing we compromise our historical claim to it with diplomatic moves of implicit surrender," he said in response to a netizen.

"In fact keep your eyes fixed, nay more nailed, on Sabah. And stay on your toes over the Spratlys," he added.



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*Sa kabila ng pagbabawal ng mga otoridad ang pagligo sa Manila Bay, dahil sa tindi ng init ng panahon ay hindi napigilan ang mga residente sa Baseco sa Tondo, Maynila ang magtampisaw at mag-swimming sa naturang look nitong nagdaang Sabado de Gloria.
-Kuha ni KJ Rosales-*



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Inaugural lecture on environment Environment Secretary Roy Cimatu (right) hands over the plaque of recognition to former Supreme Court Chief Justice Reynato Puno for giving an inaugural lecture to more than 100 participants from the DENR as part of the secretary of Environment and Natural Resources Distinguished Lecture Series in support of the Manila Bay and Boracay rehabilitation projects. The first leg of the lecture series was held at the Seda Hotel, Vertis North in Quezon City last 15 April 2019.



Trusted Since 1898

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Editorial Gerrymandering Palawan

THE INK has barely dried on the bill — now law — dividing the archipelagic province of Palawan into three separate provinces: Palawan del Norte, Palawan Oriental and Palawan del Sur. But questions are being raised on the legislation, passed ostensibly to make the job of governing the country's biggest and most biodiverse province a lot easier.

First, it was passed with apparent undue haste in a bicameral legislature notorious for its slow-grinding mill.

There was, in fact, no counterpart bill in the Senate, which merely adopted the bill passed by the House of Representatives at the end of August 2018.

By October 2018, merely weeks later, the local government committee of Sen. Edgardo "Sonny" Angara was already sponsoring a committee report on the charters of the three new provinces. How many public hearings did he hold?

The bill suddenly hurdled third reading in a little over a month, with all senators voting in favor, except Sen. Risa Hontiveros, who was prevailed upon by volunteers and activists caught by surprise at the speed by which the measure was going through Congress.

There is always something suspicious when politicians seek to redraw political boundaries. The Americans named this practice "gerrymandering," after Massachusetts Gov. Elbridge Gerry, who carved out a salamander-shaped territory in Boston in 1812 to give his allies an electoral advantage.

In the gerrymandering of Palawan under Republic Act (RA) 11259, the justification is the supposed difficulty of administering a province with an area of nearly 15,000 square kilometers, from Busuanga near Mindoro to the north all the way to Balabag and Bataraza down south and near Borneo.

In short, the answer to the problem of the ineffective bureaucracy, according to politicians, is even more bureaucracy.

RA 11259 means two more sets of (and payrolls for) provincial executives and legislators, provincial officers and provincial councils for law and order and others that will only be of questionable efficiency and effectivity.

The seeming rush to split Palawan is out of sync with the Duterte administration's efforts to shift to a federal system of government, which involves a real devolution of powers, prerogatives and resources to local governments.

It also comes amid a heightened territorial dispute with China over the Kalayaan (Spratly) Island Group, which is technically a municipality of Palawan. Does it make sense to divide Palawan and make it easier for the Chinese or their surrogates to conquer the smaller provinces?

That the city of Puerto Princesa will be left out of the process of ratifying the law via plebiscite next year also raises eyebrows.

Puerto Princesa is the provincial capital, and yet its status as a chartered city means it is independent of the rest of the province, and by law need not give its assent to its dismembering.

Opponents of RA 11259 will have to shift their efforts against the gerrymandering exercise to the 2020 province-wide plebiscite.

It is still possible to defeat this rather unconvincing piece of legislation through reason and sound argumentation, unless the politicians behind the move pull another fast one on the people and province they supposedly find difficult to govern.



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EOs on zero-hunger, water management issued soon

By ARGYLL CYRUS QEDUCOS

Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles said that the executive orders (EOs) on water supply management and eradicating hunger have been approved in principle by President Duterte and

would be issued soon.

In a media forum, Nograles said that Duterte has approved a draft creating a task force that seeks to eradicate hunger in the country by 2030.

According to Nograles, like any parent, Duterte cares about making sure that children get to eat three square

meals a day.

"This is why the President will soon be issuing an executive order creating a Zero-Hunger Inter-Agency Task Force composed of members of the Cabinet that will seek to eradicate hunger in the country by 2030," he said.

"This is being done because the President and the members of the Cabinet recognize that we have to adopt additional measures to combat hunger given how data shows that it is a problem that cannot be ignored," he added.

The former lawmaker said that the government cannot turn a blind eye while 2.4 million families experience moderate to extreme hunger, while 13.7 million Filipino children are undernourished, while a fifth of children under the age of five are underweight.

"The Duterte Administration is committed to find a way to properly feed our people, just as it has taken decisive steps to address the water crisis. The EO on water has been approved in principle and should be released soon," he said.

According to Nograles, the Zero-Hunger task force will rationalize existing domestic laws, decrees, policies and issuances pertinent to the alleviation of hunger and poverty, consistent with international laws and treaty obligations; and identify and ensure the institutional responsibilities of concerned government agencies.

Nograles will chair the task force with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Department of Agriculture (DA) designated as vice chairs. It will be composed of 36 officials.

Meanwhile, the EO on water supply management will seek a review of concession agreements with water distributors while addressing issues on sewerage and sanitation, irrigation, flood management, watershed management, financing, and policy formulation and co-

ordination.

Duterte earlier ordered a review of all government contracts entered into and remove onerous provisions that might be detrimental to the lives of Filipinos.

According to Nograles, Duterte is still studying the fate of officials of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS), but will reveal his decision on them on Monday.

"Magre-reflect muna siya (The President will reflect first). He needs more time for reflection. It will give him a chance to study everything. Yung April 15, April 22 na po (The April 15 deadline is now April 22)," he said.

MWSS is under Duterte's scrutiny due to the water crisis experienced in some parts of Metro Manila last month. On Tuesday night, Duterte threatened to replace all MWSS officials if the water supply continues during El Niño.



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UPLB holds talk on climate-resilient communities

The Graduate Seminar (CED 299) class of the University of the Philippines-Los Baños, College of Public Affairs (CPAF) is conducting a seminar entitled "Role of Science and Technology Education in Building Climate Resilient Communities" on 30 April.

According to the 2016 Global Climate Risk Index, the Philippines is among the top five most affected countries by extreme weather events from 1994 to 2016. These extreme weather conditions along with the impact of slow-onset events have caused losses and damages in the country, most particularly among vulnerable communities.

Education is the best tool for dissemination and the hope is that information will be cascaded up to the community level through academic institutions. This is the response of graduate students of CPAF majoring in community development, extension education and public affairs. The seminar aims to highlight the important role of science and technology knowledge utilization toward building better communities in the light of changing climatic conditions.

According to the 2016 Global Climate Risk Index, the Philippines is among the top five most affected countries by extreme weather events from 1994 to 2016.

Dr. Alfredo Mahar Francisco Lagmay will be the guest speaker. He is currently the director of the University of the Philippines Nationwide Operational Assessment of Hazards (UP NOAH), a research center established to conduct research, development and extension services on natural hazards, disaster risk reduction and climate change actions. He is also the executive director of the UP Resilience Institute. He received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from UP and holds a Ph.D. degree in Earth Sciences from the University of Cambridge. He is also an academician of the National Academy of Science and Technology and a professor at the National Institute of Geological Sciences in UP.

The seminar will be held at CPAF rooms 303 to 304 from 1 to 4 p.m. at the UPLB.



Eleksiyon, gawing waste free—EcoWaste

Hinimok ng isang environmental group ang Commission on Elections (Comelec) at lahat ng kandidato na magkaisa sa pagtiyak ng bawas-kalat na mid-term polls sa Mayo 13.

Hinikayat ng EcoWaste Coalition ang Comelec at lahat ng kandidato na patunayan ang pagiging makabayan at “rally behind a waste-free exercise of grassroots democracy”.

Sinabini Aileen Lucero, ng EcoWaste, na hindi dapat na dagdagan pa ng halalan

ang lumalala na ngang problema ng bansa sa basura, kaya mahalagang mangampanya ang mga kandidato sa paraang environmental friendly para mabawasan ang nalilikhang basura.

“We request Comelec to use its legal and moral authority to sway candidates and their supporters to campaign in an environmentally-responsible and non-toxic way as this is beneficial for our nation and people,” saad sa pahayag ng EcoWaste Coalition.

Ibinigay na halimbawa ng EcoWaste ang pagsasayang at pagkakalat ng mga kandidato sa nakalipas na mga eleksiyon, tulad ng walang habas na paggamit ng leaflets—na tumatambak lang naman sa mga polling precincts pagkatapos ng botohan—at plastic propaganda materials, bukod pa sa makakalat na public assembly at pagsusunog ng mga campaign trash.

Chito A. Chavez