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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



TITLE :

PAGE

DATE

US, PH deplore damage to coral reefs in West PH Sea

By JOSEPH PEDRAJAS

The Philippines and the United States have expressed concern over the harvesting of corals at Rozul (Iroquios) Reef and Escoda (Sabina) Shoal in the West Philippine Sea—believed to have been conducted by personnel of foreign vessels—as they said the livelihood of the people is at stake.

The Department of Foreign

Affairs (DFA) also called on everyone concerned “to act responsibly” and “cease all activities that can damage our precious maritime environment” after the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) discovered extensive marine environment damage in the areas frequented by Chinese militia vessels.

Marine environment in the said features “appeared lifeless, ► 5



US, PH deplore damage to coral reefs in West PH Sea 1◀

with minimal to no signs of life,” PCG spokesman Jay Tarriela described the area after the agency conducted surveys.

Prelude to reclamation?

Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. wants to investigate the reported coral reef destruction in Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal to determine if it is linked to possible reclamation of artificial islands in the West Philippine Sea.

Teodoro said the Department of

National Defense (DND) has coordinated with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) for the filing of appropriate diplomatic protest against the Chinese government as the destruction of the marine environment in Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal was observed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) amid the swarming of Chinese militia vessels as early as July.

“We have to validate it because according to the arbitral award, that

is a violation of an international treaty—the destruction of maritime life, particularly if the coral destruction is a cause of, or used for reclamation of artificial islands,” Teodoro said on the sidelines of the blessing of the brand-new Philippine Air Force (PAF) Cessna 208B (C-208B) Grand Caravan EX ISR aircraft at Clark Air Base in Mabalacat City, Pampanga on Tuesday, Sept. 19.

The Philippines “is seriously concerned” about the development, considering the affected reefs are part of the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone, which China continues to contest despite international law and arbitral award.

China’s embassy in Manila still has

no comment on the issue, although a post on its X (formerly Twitter) account said people “should be alarmed by the spreading of such disinformation,” when Japanese Ambassador to the Philippines Koshikawa Kazuhiko also expressed concern about the purported Chinese activities.

“The Philippines has consistently raised the alarm over ecologically harmful activities, conducted by foreign vessels, in our maritime zones, an issue extensively discussed in the 2016 Arbitral Award on the South China Sea,” DFA said.

“The well-being of millions of people who depend on the South China Sea for their livelihood is at stake,” it added.

‘Habitat damage harms ecosystems’

Meanwhile, US Ambassador to the Philippines MaryKay Carlson said it was “troubling” to hear such a report.

“Habitat damage harms ecosystems and negatively affects lives and livelihoods,” Carlson said.

As the Philippines and the US beefed up efforts to fight illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing to protect the fisherfolk’s livelihood, Carlson said Washington is also working with its allies to also protect the country’s natural resources. (With a report from Martin Sadongdong)



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND
INITIATIVES
SERVICE

09-20-23

1/3

PAGE

DATE

US alarmed by coral destruction in WPS

By PIA LEE-BRAGO

The United States – through its top diplomat in the Philippines – has expressed alarm over the destruction of corals in the Rozul Shoal near Palawan, widely believed to have been perpetrated by the Chinese.

“Troubling @CoastGuardPH and @TeamWESCOM reports on coral destruction around Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal. Habitat damage harms ecosystems and negatively affects lives and livelihoods,” US Ambassador MaryKay Carlson said yesterday in a post on social media platform X.

“We are working with our #FriendsPartnersAllies to protect Philippines natural resources,” she said.

On Saturday, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Western Command reported the plunder of corals in Rozul Reef, with the Chinese suspected to be behind it.

On Monday, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) issued a statement expressing serious concern over the destruction of the corals, but without mentioning China.

“We are seriously concerned about reports of the destruction of corals in Rozul Reef, a maritime feature located in the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone,” the DFA said.

The DFA said the Philippines has consistently raised the alarm over ecologically harmful activities conducted by foreign vessels, an issue extensively discussed in the

Turn to Page 6



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND
INITIATIVES
SERVICE

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

1
PAGE

UPPER

LOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

BANNER
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

09-20-23

US.....

2/3

PAGE

DATE

US From Page 1

2016 Arbitral Award on the South China Sea.

"We, therefore, call on everyone concerned to act responsibly and cease all activities that can damage our precious marine environment. The well-being of millions of people who depend on the South China Sea for their livelihood is at stake," the DFA said.

In Zamboanga, President Marcos said his administration is eyeing a fishing ban in some areas to address overfishing and to secure the country's fish stocks.

A militant fishers group earlier reported a 70 percent drop in fish catch, citing Chinese harassment as well as the destruction of breeding grounds for fish as main reason.

"Sometimes, you should not catch all the fish so that there will be supply in the next season," Marcos said in an interview with reporters.

"There are places that should not be regarded as fishing areas because they are for breeding... to increase the population of the fish," he added.

Marcos cited the need to improve the fishery and the livestock sectors, noting that they are part of developing the country's agriculture.

"Fisheries form part of our development plan...the catch of our fishermen has decreased because

the areas where the fishes grow have been destroyed," he said.

"After that, we will come up with an area for processing. That is our plan for fisheries," he said.

Alarming news

On Sunday, Japanese Ambassador Kazuhiko Koshikawa said the harvesting of corals in Rozul Reef is "alarming."

"Very alarming news. Our oceans are the lifeblood of our planet & coral reefs are its colorful heartbeats. Let's preserve & protect these vital ecosystems for generations to come," Koshikawa said in a post, also on X.

"In the territorial waters & EEZ around Japan's Ogasawara Islands, a large-scale poaching of precious corals by foreign vessels occurred 10 years ago, causing marine environmental & economic damages to Japan, leading to diplomatic issue and strict JCG (Japan Coast Guard) controls," Koshikawa said, also on X.

According to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, multiple vessels believed to be Chinese coral vessels have been operating since September 2014 in the waters near the Ogasawara Islands.

Yesterday, Philippine Coast Guard-West Philippine Sea (PCG-WPS) spokesman Commodore Jay Tarriela said they have deployed two vessels around Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal to conduct patrol and make another underwater survey.

"As we speak right now, the Commandant of the Philippine Coast Guard Admiral Artemio Abu has deployed two Coast Guard vessels to conduct another maritime patrol in these two areas," Tarriela said on Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon program.

The vessels, he said, would also "follow up on the underwater survey, for us to have a clearer understanding of the extent of the damage."

He said the PCG has submitted reports regarding the coral destruction to the National Task Force on WPS, the Department of Justice and the DFA.

"So whatever legal and diplomatic actions that are needed, I know for a fact that these agencies would do well in performing their responsibilities," he added.

He also explained that while they have no concrete proof of Chinese role in the plunder of corals, PCG monitoring showed Chinese ships had been around the area for months prior to the discovery of the coral destruction.

"Based on the Coast Guard's monitoring of the Chinese maritime militia, this has been happening for months already. It was last April when we started, together with the Armed Forces of the Philippines, monitoring the swarming of the Chinese maritime militia in these areas," he said.

New patrol aircraft

Meanwhile, Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro led yesterday the



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND
INITIATIVES
SERVICE

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

1
PAGE

UPPER
 LOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

RANNER
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

09-20-23

US.....

3/3

PAGE

DATE

formal turnover to the Philippines of a Cessna-208B Grand Caravan EX Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance aircraft from the chief of the Joint US Military Assistance Group-Philippines Col. Edward Evans.

"It will be used for all operations, all types of operations," Teodoro told reporters during turnover ceremonies at the Clark Air Base in Mabalacat City, Pampanga.

AFP chief Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr. said the aircraft would definitely be used to patrol the West Philippine Sea.

"Yes definitely, this aircraft will boost our capability of patrolling our maritime seas and, as mentioned by the Commander of Western Command, Vice Admiral (Alberto) Carlos, our ability to protect our sovereign rights in our exclusive economic zone depends highly on the equipment that we have," he stressed.

"So definitely this aircraft will help us, will boost our capability in making sure that we secure our territory and our sovereign rights," Brawner said.

Philippine Air Force chief Lt. Gen. Stephen Parreño called the new aircraft "a very welcome addition to our intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance capability."

"It will also boost our capability in missions of law enforcement, terrorism and maritime domain awareness. *Sinabi kanina ng ating* (secretary of

national defense) that it will be used for all types of missions depending on the need, and during humanitarian assistance and disaster response," he added.

Teodoro also said the Philippines is now "hearing a chorus of nations" supporting its stand on the maritime row with China.

"Because of the fact that we have international law and order, which includes freedom of navigation and an international airspace as justification for what we are doing, we hear a chorus of nations supporting us because we are in the right," he stressed.

He said a review of the AFP modernization program is critical.

"So this cannot be delayed and we are working day and night to try to establish our own systems and whatever capabilities that we can get from our treaty partners and other allies, we're trying to converge this into interoperable systems, its critical, highly critical that we get it now," he added.

"Another national security goal, which is of paramount importance now, is the ability to secure the territorial integrity of our country, to secure our sovereign rights and our jurisdiction," he emphasized.

"National peace cannot be sustained if we cannot secure our sovereign rights in areas which rightfully belong to the Filipino people," he said. — **Michael Punongbayan, Alexis Romero, Evelyn Macairan**



TITLE:

DATE

Gov't taps experts to verify reef damage

By Jerome Aning
and Frances Mangosing
@Team_Inquirer

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) said it has reached out to marine experts from the University of the Philippines to study samples of destroyed corals in an area frequented by Chinese maritime militia in the West Philippine Sea so the government can establish a clearer picture of what happened there.

Nevertheless Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla said, also on Tuesday, that he would recommend to Malacañang the filing before the international tribunals of cases against China over alleged harvesting and destroying coral reefs in the West Philippine Sea.

In an interview at "Bagong Pilipinas Ngayon" aired on state television on Tuesday, PCG spokesperson Jay Tarriela said the agency had requested the assistance of the UP Marine Science Institute (UP-MSI) to ascertain the death of corals at Escoda (Sabina) Shoal and Rozul (Iroquois) Reef and to study samples of dead corals gathered from Escoda.

Video taken by PCG personnel at Escoda showed that live corals had disappeared and were replaced by crushed and bleached ones.

To be validated

"What is puzzling is that at Escoda Shoal, the cleaned and processed corals were dumped again. [The video] doesn't explain why they harvested them and dumped them back again," Tarriela said.

Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. also said the reported coral destruction needed to be validated if it was linked to possible reclamation activities.

"We have to validate because according to the Arbitral Award, it's a violation of the international treaty, the destruction of maritime livelihood particularly if the coral destruction is a cause of, or

used for reclamation of artificial islands," he told reporters in Clark Freeport, where he attended the turnover of a surveillance aircraft from the United States to the Philippine Air Force on Tuesday.

Gathering evidence

The Armed Forces of the Philippines and the PCG were still gathering evidence on whether the presence of Chinese vessels near Escoda and Rozul was linked to the destruction of coral reefs.

"We have to validate it and then we'll coordinate with the Department of Foreign Affairs so that we can file the appropriate action," Teodoro said.

On fears that the destruction of the corals at Escoda and Rozul could be a prelude to reclamation activities by China, as raised by some senators, Tarriela said: "We don't want to speculate. We believe that we need expertise of our marine scientists to really explain what is happening, why [the] cleaned and processed corals are dumped once again in Escoda Shoal."

He said the PCG had submitted its report on the incident to the National Task Force on the West Philippine Sea. He added that the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the UP-MSI could assess the cost of damage to the corals at Escoda and Rozul.

For his part, Remulla said, "We are recommending the filing of such cases against the perpetrators of this evil act, which is the destruction of the environment."

The justice chief said he would discuss the matter with Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin.

"With or without a territorial dispute, the destruction of the environment is a sin against humanity," Remulla added.

He noted that the destruction of the coral reef in the West Philippine Sea has been happening for many years.

"We believe it can be done.

We will pursue these cases against China because it's no longer acceptable. We have a lot of evidence," he added.

Because of this, the justice secretary pointed out it's a very strong case to file on behalf of the Philippines "for the sake of humanity itself."

'Troubling'

On Monday, US Ambassador to the Philippines MaryKay Carlson took to X (formerly Twitter) to assure its treaty ally that Washington was working to protect the country's resources.

"Troubling ... reports on coral destruction around Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal. Habitat damage harms ecosystems and negatively affects lives and livelihoods," Carlson said.

While Carlson never mentioned China's supposed involvement in the issue, she said "we are working with our [friends, partners and allies] to protect [the Philippines'] natural resources."

Japanese Ambassador to the Philippines Koshikawa Kazuhiko shared Tokyo's similar experience with China from 10 years ago.

"In the territorial waters [and] EEZ (exclusive economic zone) around Japan's Ogasawara Islands, a large-scale poaching of precious corals by foreign vessels occurred 10 years ago, causing marine environmental [and] economic [damage] to Japan, leading to diplomatic issue and strict JCG (Japanese Coast Guard) controls," Kazuhiko said in a post on X on Monday.

According to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at least 200 Chinese coral vessels were spotted in the vicinity of Ogasawara from September to December in 2014. Many of these ships were harvesting corals as well, which led to the arrest of at least 10 Chinese captains and to the filing of several diplomatic protests against Beijing. —WITH REPORTS

FROM TINA G. SANTOS AND JACOB LAZARO INQ



TITLE :

PAGE

DATE

PH boosts WPS watch with new US aircraft



■ AIRCRAFT FROM A1

BY FRANCIS TUYAY AND FRANCO JOSE C. BAROÑA

THE United States government on Tuesday handed over a surveillance aircraft to the Philippines for monitoring increasing incursions by China in the West Philippine Sea, particularly its alleged harvesting of corals in one of the areas that lie within the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

The turnover of the US aircraft came days after China's alleged large-scale destruction of corals and other marine life in the Rozul (Iroquois) Reef and Escoda Shoal in the West Philippine Sea caught the world's attention.

It also comes as a satellite image, which was released on Tuesday, showed at least suspected Chinese ships massing once again at Rozul Reef, which is 125 nautical miles from Palawan and

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PH boosts WPS watch with new US

situated at the southwest edge of Reef (Recto) Bank.

Ray Powell, SeaLight director, said their imagery partners at Planet Labs provided "clear visual evidence" of at least 35 Chinese fishing and maritime militia vessels operating at Rozul Reef.

Powell told *The Manila Times* that although they cannot determine by these particular images that those ships were those of the Chinese maritime militia, "history, the size of the vessels, and their behavior tell us these are Chinese."

Historically, he pointed out that People's Republic of China (PRC) vessels have been monitored "consistently" in that particular area.

Likewise, Powell noted that neighboring Southeast Asian countries do not have fishing ships as large as those in the satellite image.

The "swarming/rafting" behavior of the ships in the satellite image is also noticeable, he said, which is a common tactic employed by Chinese vessels.

For all operations

The Cessna-208B (C-208B) Grand Caravan EX Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Aircraft was turned over by the US government, represented by Col. Edward Evans, USAF, chief of the Joint US Military Assistance Group (Jusmag)-Philippines to Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr., at simple rites at the Clark Air Base in Pampanga.

"It will be used for all operations, all types of operations," Teodoro said, including in the West Philippine Sea.

The new aircraft will be an addition to the Philippine Air Force's (PAF) inventory of air assets, including US-made C-130 cargo transport planes, FA-50 jet fighters, and other mobility aircraft while the government acquires sophisticated planes.

Armed Forces Chief of Staff, Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr., said the plane will surely enhance the military's capability to increase its air maritime patrol in the WPS to closely detect real-time activities by China in so far as sovereign right is

concerned.

"Yes definitely, this aircraft will boost our capability of patrolling our maritime seas and our ability to protect our sovereign rights in our exclusive economic zone," Brawner said.

Philippine Air Force Chief, Lt. Gen. Stephen Parreño said the Cessna aircraft will be another asset in gathering information and reconnaissance missions in law enforcement in the maritime domain.

"This brand new aircraft is a very welcome addition to our intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance capability. It will also boost our capability in missions of law enforcement, terrorism and maritime domain awareness," Parreño said.

In a query as to the next government action against China's activities vis-a-vis the coral destruction, Teodoro said he sought the advice of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA).

"We have to validate it because according to the arbitral award that is a violation of an international treaty, the destruction of maritime life, particularly if the coral destruction is a cause of, or used for reclamation of artificial islands, etc. Now we have to validate it and then we'll coordinate with the Department of Foreign Affairs so that we can file the appropriate action," Teodoro said.

Aside from maritime issues, Teodoro said the US aircraft will also provide humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

"The aircraft will also be useful, particularly in the aftermath of disasters and Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA) so that we could assess the damage during calamities," Teodoro said.

Known for its rugged utility and flexibility, which can operate up to 912 nautical miles and stay airborne for 5 hours and 30 minutes, the C-208B Aircraft, with an advanced ISR capability, will be operated by the 300th Air Intelligence and Security Wing (AISW) headed by BGen. Edgar C. Torres PAF.

So far, the PAF has three similar planes in its inventory, acquired as grants from the US government.

Illegal

Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos) and the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling, a coastal state granted an exclusive economic zone enjoys the rights to the resources within that zone, Powell said.

"China's exploitation of

the marine resources at Iroquois Reef is therefore not only highly destructive of the marine ecosystem, but also illegal under international law," said Powell, who is also the Project Lead for Project Myoushu at Stanford University's Gordian Knot Center for National Security Innovation.

Over the weekend, Vice Admiral Albert Carlos, commander of the AFP Western Command (Wescom), reported that the weekend corals that grow in abundance in the shallow waters close to Rozul Reef have disappeared, apparently due to massive coral harvesting.

Carlos said this was discovered by military divers who were asked to conduct an underwater survey after Chinese maritime militia vessels left the area.

These Chinese vessels were monitored by Philippine military air assets on September 6 and 7 "swarming" off Rozul Reef and at least two other areas in the West Philippine Sea: Escoda (Sabina) Shoal and Baragatan (Nares) Bank.

"When they left, we sent our divers to do an underwater survey, and... we saw that there were no corals left. The corals were destroyed," Carlos said in Filipino.

He said the increased presence of Chinese militia vessels in these areas raises concerns regarding the potential implications for the Philippines' maritime security, fisheries conservation, territorial integrity, and preservation of the marine environment, aside from being a source of tension in the WPS and instability in the region.

Powell said SeaLight has already documented the presence of Chinese militia ships at Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal of these West Philippine Sea features throughout the year via Twitter/X feeds.

SeaLight is a web portal created by a team of volunteers at Stanford University's Gordian Knot Center for National Security Innovation, which uses entrepreneurial methods to solve difficult defense and security challenges.

Likewise, the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) documented how up to 30 Chinese vessels were spotted at Iroquois Reef throughout much of 2021.

The AMTI is an interactive, regularly updated source for information, analysis, and policy exchange on maritime security issues in Asia.

"SeaLight has posted evidence of similar numbers throughout 2023," said Powell, a 2021 Fellow at Stanford's Distinguished Careers Institute.

No clear proof

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) admitted on Tuesday, however, that it does not have clear proof to directly pinpoint Chinese maritime militia vessels as the ones responsible for the "harvesting" and destruction of the corals in Rozul Reef.

Commodore Jay Tarruela, PCG spokesman on the WPS, said the allegations are based only on circumstantial evidence since Chinese ships were monitored in the area before the disappearance of the corals was discovered.

"But what is certain is that from August 9 to September 11, we were able to monitor Chinese maritime militia vessels that were there in that particular area," said Tarruela during a public briefing.

"Right after they (Chinese maritime militia) left, that was the time we conducted our underwater survey. So, in the past weeks they were the only ones there, and when we went there (the corals) were already destroyed. Their presence in the area may be a contributing factor," he added.

Tarruela said they will still coordinate with marine scientists and experts to understand what happened to the corals in the area.

He said PCG Commandant Admiral Artemio Abu has ordered the deployment of two patrol ships to return to Rozul Reef and the other areas in the WPS to conduct another underwater survey to have a clearer understanding of the extent of the damage.

Concern

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on Monday expressed concern about the reported destruction of corals in Rozul Reef.

"The Philippines has consistently raised the alarm over ecologically harmful activities, conducted by foreign vessels, in our maritime zones, an issue extensively discussed in the 2016 Arbitral Award on the South China Sea," the DFA said.

"We, therefore, call on everyone concerned to act responsibly and cease all activities that can damage our precious marine environment," the Foreign Affairs department said in a statement on Monday.

The DFA added, "The well-being of millions of people who depend on the South China Sea for their livelihood is at stake."

Senate President Juan Miguel "Migz" Zubiri expressed outrage over the destruction of the marine ecosystem in the WPS as the continued incursion of Chinese vessels into the Philippines' EEZ threatens global food security.

He said the coral reefs belong to the "whole world because the species of fish that breed there are not only being harvested by Filipino fishermen but also harvested by Malaysian fishermen, Vietnamese fishermen, even Chinese fishermen."

"So it is for the good of the world if our coral reefs are protected. That's why I'm really very mad," Zubiri added.

He said the Senate is working closely with the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources in setting up marine ranger stations in key coastal areas nationwide to safeguard the country's marine resources in the WPS.

Zubiri said he has spoken with Sen. Juan Edgardo Angara, chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance, to earmark P600 million for the initiative.

He also vowed to fight for bigger allotments for the PCG and the Philippine Navy in the national budget for 2024 to help them in purchasing additional patrol boats and other equipment.

Under the proposed P5.768-trillion 2024 national budget, the PCG has been allocated P24.014 billion, an increase of nearly 10 percent from its allotment of P21.92 billion this year.

On the other hand, P40.97 billion has been set aside for the Navy, up from its current budget of P34.98 billion.

WITH A REPORT FROM BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO



'Arbitral ruling also stresses marine protection'

**By Rey E. Requejo and
Macon Ramos-Araneta**

THE Philippines emphasized before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) in Hamburg, Germany that the 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration that denied China's expansive claims to the South China Sea also cites the "obligation to protect and preserve the

marine environment."

The statement came as reports indicated widespread damage done by Chinese fishing boats in the Rozul (Iroquois) Reef and Escoda (Sabina) Shoal in the West Philippine Sea.

Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary Maria Angela Ponce, who posted about the Philippine statement before the ITLOS on the X social media platform, said the 2016 arbitration ruling "is legally

binding international law."

"It pronounced legal doctrines that could help determine the outcome of these proceedings. It is legally binding international law. Its validity cannot be assailed," she said.

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has called on all concerned to act responsibly and stop all activities that damage the maritime environment.

Next page

'Arbitral...

From A1

The Philippine Coast Guard earlier said the marine environment in the Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal showed "minimal to no signs of life" when it surveyed the area.

The DFA said the Philippines "is seriously concerned" about the development, considering the affected reefs are part of the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, which China continues to contest despite international law and the arbitral award.

China's embassy in Manila had no comment on the issue.

"The Philippines has consistently raised the alarm over ecologically harmful activities, conducted by foreign vessels, in our maritime zones, an issue extensively discussed in the 2016 Arbitral Award on the South China Sea," DFA said, in a statement.

"The well-being of millions of people who depend on the South China Sea for their livelihood is at stake," it added.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo earlier asserted that the award already "settled the status of historic rights and maritime entitlements in the South China Sea."

The award also "declared without legal effect claims that exceed entitlements geographical and substantive limits set" by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Manalo added.

The arbitral ruling issued by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) on July 12, 2016 rejected China's claim, on the basis of its historic "nine-dash line," over the West Philippine Sea, and affirmed the Philippines' position over the water that is part of its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) based on UNCLOS.

"The award has since facilitated the

plotting of new paths and trajectories, reflecting the rich maritime heritage of our country and our people, firm in the conviction that our rights over our maritime jurisdictions are indisputable," Manalo said.

Manalo said the Philippines is honored that the award is now standing "as a beacon whose guiding light serves all nations." He also took pride in the "path of principle" that the country took when it decided to file a case for arbitration against China to peacefully settle the dispute.

"It is a settled landmark and a definitive contribution to the progressive development of international law. It is ours as much as it is the world's," he said.

"Just as lighthouses aid vessels in navigating the seas, the award will continue to illuminate the path for all who strive towards not just the peaceful resolution of disputes but also the maintenance of a rules-based international order," he added.

Manalo said the Philippines "will continue to translate" the positive outcomes of the award into positive gains for the sake of the Filipino people as well as to secure legitimate interests in the maritime domain, and to promote peace, security, and prosperity in the region.

Manalo also welcomed the growing number of countries backing the

Philippines' position on the West Philippine Sea as Manila commemorated on July 12, the 7th anniversary of the 2016 Arbitral Award on the South China Sea.

Several nations—including the United States, United Kingdom, India, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Austria, Romania, Slovakia, Finland, and Sweden—have openly supported the Philippines' territorial integrity over the water that is being unilaterally and illegally claimed by China. *(See full story online at manilastandard.net)*



EDITORIAL

Protecting our marine environment

ALARMING, to say the least, that fishing banks in the West Philippine Sea will “collapse” and greatly impact the country’s food security.

This is the distressing precis raised by experts, which coincided with what Philippine Coast Guard spokesperson Commodore Jay Tarriela described as “severe damage” inflicted on the marine environment and coral reef in the seabed of Rozul Reef (also known as Iroquois Reef) and Escoda Shoal.

If indeed the area, which contributes between 27 percent and 30 percent of the country’s fish catch, is damaged the sustainability of nearby areas, like the inter-island waters of the Philippines to which the WPS is ecologically and biologically connected, will also suffer.

In a statement, Tarriela said “The surveys in Escoda Shoal revealed visible discoloration of its seabed, strongly indicating that deliberate activities may have been undertaken to modify the natural topography of its underwater terrain.”

Earlier on, BRP Sindangan and

“ We cannot over-emphasize the importance of protecting and preserving our marine environment ”

BRP CABRA held maritime patrols after 33 and 15 Chinese maritime militia vessels were spotted in Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal, respectively, from August 9 to September 11.

According to Tarriela, the corals appeared possibly harvested, processed, and returned to the seabed.

“The presence of crushed corals strongly suggests a potential act of dumping, possibly involving the same

dead corals that were previously processed and cleaned before being returned to the seabed,” he said.

If indeed, as Tarriela said, the marine ecosystem in the two WPS features appeared lifeless, with minimal to no signs of life, then there is need for the government to gear up and protect the area.

We need to listen to Tarriela who said the continued swarming of Chinese maritime militia vessels for alleged illegal and destructive fishing activities “may have directly caused the degradation and destruction of the marine environment in the WPS features.”

We cannot over-emphasize the importance of protecting and preserving our marine environment, which plays a critical role in sustaining marine life and supporting local communities.

Then we hear the Armed Forces of the Philippines’ Western Command saying there have been cases of massive coral harvesting along Rozul Reef, which is within the country’s exclusive economic zone.

Something must be done at full tilt.

POST	NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE	EMAIL
1501
1502
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1504
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1519
1520



VP Duterte, schools, gov't offices, NGOs release turtle hatchlings at Cleanergy Park in Davao City



Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte-Carpio (center), along with Davao Light and other Davaoëños, watch over the youth as they release hawksbill sea turtle hatchlings at Aboitiz Cleanergy Park.

ABOITIZ Power Corporation (AboitizPower) subsidiary Davao Light and Power Co., Inc. (Davao Light), with the participation of Vice President (VP) and Education Secretary Sara Duterte-Carpio, oversaw the release of 152 hawksbill sea turtle hatchlings at Aboitiz Cleanergy Park in Punta Dumalag, Matina Aplaya, Davao City.

The released turtle hatchlings came from the third of five nests found this year at the park. In total, over 7,993 hatchlings have been released from the area since 2014.

Besides the Office of the Vice President, the distribution utility was joined by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the Philippine Coast

Guard, non-governmental organizations or NGOs, and schools and universities, who had their students do the releasing.

"Most adult turtles that we get from the seas have problems because they inadvertently consume plastic [waste]. That is why it is important to have children understand the life cycle of turtles and the difficult lives they have," Duterte-Carpio explained.

While only a few will survive into adulthood, conservation efforts and proper waste management remain important to ensure that these endangered creatures can thrive in the oceans.

According to the World Wildlife Fund, sea turtles help maintain the health of seagrass beds and coral reefs. In particular,

hawksbill sea turtles live on coral reefs and eat the overgrown sponges that suffocate slow-growing corals, resulting in a healthy reef. They also help prevent the overpopulation of jellyfishes in the ocean.

"We are honored that VP Sara joined the event and showed her support to pawikan (turtle) conservation efforts," said Davao Light Reputation Enhancement Department Head Fermin Edillon.

Edillon added that it was Duterte-Carpio, when she was still Mayor of Davao City, who signed a joint memorandum of agreement with DENR - Region XI and Davao Light establishing Aboitiz Cleanergy Park as a pawikan rescue center in the Davao region.

Currently, there are seven rescued adult pawikans of varying species under the care of Aboitiz Cleanergy Park. These include five hawksbill sea turtles, as well as a green sea and an olive ridley turtle. They are provided with veterinary care and are being observed at the facility until they are fully recovered and can be released back into the wild.

The eight-hectare ecological preserve and biodiversity conservation site is managed by Davao Light and Aboitiz Foundation Inc. Since its launch in 2014, it serves as a protected nesting ground of the critically endangered hawksbill sea turtle and a home to more than 100 species of endemic and migratory birds and other marine life.

Aboitiz Cleanergy Park also actively promotes decarbonization in an urban area, showcasing a mangrove reforestation site, nursery, and botanical garden for the propagation of multiple native tree species.



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND
INITIATIVES
SERVICE



B1
PAGE

UPPER
 LOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

BANNER
STORY

EDITORIAL

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09-20-23

TITLE: _____

PAGE _____

DATE _____

DENR to streamline mining applications, permits

By DANESSA RIVERA

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is embarking on a digitization effort to streamline processing of mining applications and permits.

Meanwhile, it is also adding another layer of compliance for mining companies that will promote sustainability and resilience in their operations.

During the first day of the Mining Philippines Conference yesterday, DENR Undersecretary Carlos Primo David said the agency is investing in the digitization of all mining-related information and the processing of applications and permits.

"We have substantially completed migrating all data onto a single platform, with the exception of data from one last division in the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB). Digitization should address making our procedures more efficient, leading to shorter and more transparent processing permits and applications," he said.

A more efficient and transparent system will be rolled out in the MGB next year, which aims to significantly cut down the processing time from at least six months, David said.

"For the industry, we hope that the digitalization will fasttrack and hasten the processing. The processing of papers right now is admittedly still quite slow," he said.

For this endeavor, the DENR has tapped PwC Philippines to review the processes and systems of the MGB and Environmental Management Bureau (EMB).

"They will be supporting our department-wide process as we ensure that the bureaus and their people and technologies are fit for

purpose," David said.

The DENR and PwC Philippines forged a memorandum of understanding (MOU) last June to identify the gaps in the bureau's processes and functions.

Under the partnership, PwC Philippines is conducting a comprehensive assessment using appropriate governance, risk management and compliance tools in its review.

It will also provide technical partnership and assistance, as well as develop a five-year transformation roadmap with corresponding action plans and recommendations to strengthen DENR processes.

Meanwhile, the DENR has pilot-tested a new process called Negotiated Sustainability and Resilience Agreement (NSRA) for mining companies, which is eyed for full implementation next year.

David said it would be an additional layer in the environmental certificate compliance (ECC) process, but will only take 90 minutes to complete.

Under the NSRA, the DENR and the mining company negotiate to identify shared goals, such as reduced environmental impacts, renewable energy adoption, and community resilience for the overall improvement of their quality of life.

"The NSRA goes beyond compliance. It is a partnership based on agreed values, principles and specific milestones. When in full swing, the agreed goals will be the hallmark of the evolution of a green mine," David said.

The NSRA process was piloted in two mining projects – a new gold mine in Kalinga and one of the largest copper mines in the Visayas – and a golf course.



TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

PHL mining attracts US, Australia, China, UK

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA
@jonlmayuga

ADVANCED countries like the United States, Australia, China, and the United Kingdom are now looking at the Philippines with keen interest in mining, particularly nickel, an official of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said.

Interviewed at the sidelines of the Mining Philippines 2023 International Conference and Exhibition, DENR Undersecretary for Integrated Science Carlos Primo David said that while a few mining companies are fairly advanced already in developing the processing part of nickel, the DENR saw the need to further develop the downstream processing industry.

"The economics of it arguably should be studied because if it will not be worthwhile, why will we do it? There's already a study—one

SEE "MINING," A2

Mining...

CONTINUED FROM A1

mine in Zambales...has commissioned an extensive study with the government of US," he bared.

He said the study attempts to identify what type of processing, and scale of processing are feasible, as well as the potential partner-companies.

"What is exciting to me [is that], even non-traditional mining companies like the United States are now interested in looking at mining in the Philippines. Of course, there's China and Australia," he said.

Critical minerals development is also attracting the attention of the US, as well as the UK, said David, a licensed geologist and environmental science expert.

"Because everyone now realizes that the next resource that will be

important in energy production would be so mineral-intensive and it goes away from traditional sources of energy like coal and petroleum," he said.

"You will now need these critical minerals and who owns it. We are number 3 in nickel. We have the second largest copper deposits in the world," he stressed.

According to David, the Philippines is a recipient of a US\$1-million grant from the US for the study of nickel processing in Zambales.

Roughly, he said the DENR is eyeing the establishment of three downstream processing facilities within the Marcos administration, on top of the two existing nickel processing facilities.

Target areas include one each in Zambales, Palawan, and Surigao.

In Zambales, he said the supply from five nickel mining companies should be enough. "If they can agree [to consolidate the supply], definitely, the volume that can produce [would suffice.]"



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND
INITIATIVES
SERVICE

Manila Standard



09-20-23

TITLE: _____

PAGE _____

DATE _____

Gov't asks miners to build 3 nickel processing plants

By Othel V. Campos

THE government on Tuesday asked miners to help the government establish three new nickel processing facilities in mineral-rich areas of Zambales, CARAGA region and Palawan.

Environment Undersecretary for integrated environmental science Carlos Primo David said the government would help the private sector carry out the projects by providing the necessary support.

"The goal is to supply the downstream industry. I'm not sure if we can support the EV [electric vehicle] production phase [for EV batteries], but we have been benchmarking with Indonesia. While we are still trying to catch up with their HPAL [high-pressure acid leaching] technology, they have already stepped up to the EV platform," David said at the opening of the 2023 Mining Conference at Edsa Shangri La Manila in Mandaluyong City.

David said Indonesia has been using laterite ores to produce EV batteries—a game changing process that the Philippines should also develop to become a viable player in the EV space.

He noted the Philippines' capacity to support EV battery production with the abundance of critical metals in the country. It has the second biggest copper deposits and the third largest nickel deposits, globally, he said.

Nickel Asia Corp. operates two nickel-processing facilities in the Philippines, but the DENR said the additional three facilities would fast-track local initiatives to create the ecosystem for downstream processing.

Meanwhile, the Department of Envi-

ronment and Natural Resources wants to augment its budget for government-lead exploration. It said the current P60-million budget spread out to 16 regions is not enough to finance extensive exploration.

"It's like a shotgun exploration. What we want to do is to focus on certain areas. Hopefully, when we do the initial exploration, there is enough information for the private sector to get interested and continue the exploration," David said.

He said reviving the government-led exploration is a critical step to get mining companies interested and continue the exploration on their own.

David said the exploration targets critical mineral deposits such as nickel and chromium. He said the government, through the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB), would also follow up on previously explored areas that were eventually abandoned or discontinued.

The DENR also plans to issue either a department administrative order or a memorandum circular to declare a mining area as mineral reservation area to open new revenue stream for the government through profits earned from mining operations, he said.

"Whether it is government-owned or in partnership with a mining company, the government will have a share from the profits earned," David said.



TITLE :

1/3

PAGE

DATE

Pascual urges equitable mining; additional ECC process seen

By JAMES A. LOYOLA



SEC. ALFREDO E. PASCUAL

Trade and Industry Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual invited investors to explore and manufacture the country's mineral resources, but also equally emphasized the need to ensure that the benefits from this sector are shared equitably among investors, commu-

nities and shareholders in a keynote speech at the Mining Philippines International Conference and Exhibition on Tuesday, Sept. 19.

At the same event, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said an additional process in the environmental compliance certificate maybe imposed on mining firms while the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines expressed satisfaction at the government support for the industry.

"We will actively engage our mining companies, communities and stakeholders to ensure that the benefits of mining are shared equitably," said Pascual.

"There are several opportunities in mining and mineral processing, not just an exploration of mineral resources and their extraction, but also green metals processing and other value added downstream mineral activities," he said.

In particular, Pascual cited the abundance of mineral resources for the manufacture of copper, which plays a pivotal role in essential components of electric vehicles like wire harnesses for their strength.

Copper manufacturing, he said, would advance value added activities, and increase the country's participation in the regional and global value chains of electric vehicles, battery technologies and renewable energy equipment.

"The holistic approach demonstrates a genuine commitment to a more environmentally responsible and sustainable future for mining in our government also recognizes the importance of partnerships," he said as he invited foreign investors present at the international mining forum.

"Our country boasts an abundance of natural resources that all from both economic development and sustainable progress. There is a tremendous opportunity to use extractive industries potential prepare to propel long term economic growth," he said.

Pascual further cited the incentives available for preferred activities, which are listed in the Investment Priorities Plan of the Board of Investments of the DTI. Incentives include tax free importation of capital equipment, among others.

He then urged to use these metals wisely and responsibly for the generations to come. He expressed that through collaboration, the mining sector can be transformed into a strategic economic pillar and in the achievement of social development goals.

DENR additional ECC process

Meantime, a new process on top of existing requirements for mining firms securing their environment compliance certificates (ECC) ► **B-4**



Pascual urges equitable mining... B-1

may be implemented by the DENR while pursuing the digitalization of all mining-related information and the processing of applications and permits.

This is according to Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Undersecretary for Environment and Integrated Science Carlos Primo David during the kick-off ceremony of Mining Philippines 2023 International Exhibition and Conference, which gathers the country's mining firms, particularly those listed with the Philippine Stock Exchange.

"We've pilot-tested a new process called Negotiated Sustainability and Resilience Agreement or NSRA and will work towards its implementation next year," he said.

While admitting that "It's an add on to the ECC process," he noted that, "but before you complain, let me tell you that it takes 90 minutes to complete."

This process involves a dialogue between the DENR and the mining company to identify and negotiate shared goals such as reduced environmental impacts, renewable energy adoption, community resilience for the overall improvement of their quality of life.

"The NSRA goes beyond compliance. It is a partnership based on agreed values, principles and specific milestones... When in full swing, the agreed goals will be the hallmark of the evolution of a green mine," David said.

In an interview, David noted that nowhere in the ECC process does it mandates mining firms to shift to the use of renewable energy and they want these firms to include RE in their roadmap for mine development.

To date, two mines have undergone this process -- a new gold mine up in Kalinga and one of the largest copper mines in the Visayas.

Meanwhile, David said, "the DENR is investing in the digitization of all mining-related information and the processing of applications and permits."

"We have substantially completed migrating all data onto a single platform, with the exception of data from one last division in the MGB (Mines and Geosciences Bureau)," he also said, adding that "digitization should address making our procedures more efficient, leading to shorter and more transparent processing permits and applications."

The DENR has engaged the expertise of PWC Philippines which will be supporting the department-wide process "as we ensure that the bureaus and their people and technologies are fit for purpose," said David.

"All-in-all we commit to deliver a more efficient and transparent system in MGB next year as an integral part of our mining governance efforts. All of these are for the expressed purpose of establishing a more professional, responsible and globally competitive mining industry," he added.

In his speech, David said the Philippines can be in a unique position to be an important player in the global clean energy market and provide sustainable

solutions to the climate crisis.

David underscored the links between climate change, environment, biodiversity, inclusive resilience and sustainable development and mineral resource development.

He said today's climate emergency is driving the global clean energy transition, which involves the generation of renewable energy, the need for energy storage and other new technologies such as those related to the supporting infrastructure and manufacture of electric vehicles.

"These projects are highly mineral-intensive and their accelerated adoption of will significantly increase the demand for critical and strategic minerals. These include: copper, chromium, and nickel," said David, a geologist and an expert in environmental science.

He noted that, "what this means is that the Philippines can be in a unique position to be an important player in the global clean energy market and provide sustainable solutions to the climate crisis. This demand for minerals comes at a time when the mining sector is expected to help generate government income to bolster our economic recovery."

Organized by the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP), the event gathered together a diverse assembly of participants, including government officials, private sector representatives, academics, indigenous communities, and mining host communities.

Conference participants are expected to chart a path toward maximizing the potential of the mining sector while addressing market dynamics, industry trends, internal capabilities, environmental concerns, and economic impacts.



TITLE: *Practical...*

3/3

PAGE

DATE

"Mining which was treated for years like a pariah because of its environmental impact is now an indispensable part in the fight against climate change and energy transition," COMP Chairman Mike Toledo said.

However, he noted that change has come. Among the notable positive changes are the lifting of the moratorium on new mining projects and of the ban on open pit mining.

"It took a global contagion before these decade-long policy roadblocks were removed and the importance of mining was recognized," Toledo said.

He added that, "while most other industries were staggering and downsizing at the height of Covid-19, only a few large-scale mining operations experienced temporary closure, and these were due mainly to local government directives. This explains why mineral exports were largely unaffected and employment in mining was generally stable throughout the pandemic."

"With the roadblocks to mining finally removed, three large copper-gold projects that were stymied by the policy roadblocks – Tampakan, Silangan, and King King – are now in a better position to proceed to development," he said.

Government support

Meanwhile, the Philippine mining industry is lauding the government's "clearly expressed" support and its acknowledgement of min-

ing as a priority sector with a high growth potential that will help the Philippine economy recover.

The Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) welcomes this positive change as it kicked off the 2023 Mining Philippines International Conference and Exhibition.

"The industry's potential will grow even more over time. And the Chamber of Mines is extremely hopeful that stability is just around the bend," said COMP Chairman Mike Toledo.

Meanwhile, he said "we have been laying the groundwork – using a deliberately phased approach – to further improve our members' ESG performance by way of the Towards Sustainable Mining (TSM) initiative."

TSM is a set of tools and indicators to drive performance and ensure that key mining risks are managed responsibly, and best practices are used at members' facilities.

It was established by the Mining Association of Canada (MAC) in 2004 and adopted by COMP in 2017, making the Philippines the first in Asia to subscribe to this self-assessment system that is rapidly evolving into the global standard for best practices in sustainable mining. COMP has made compliance with TSM mandatory to all its members.

"Consequently, we are on track to meet our target of making available to the public the 2023 and 2024 externally verified self-assessment reports of our operating members," he said.

Finally, Toledo welcomed the government's move to rejoin the Extractives Industry Transparency Initiative. "We in the Chamber are open to any undertaking that encourages good governance. After all, we cherish our position at the forefront of transparency reporting in the extractives sector," he said.

"As the world advances toward a wider energy transition to meet global carbon reduction objectives in response to climate change, mining's relevance has grown and become even more crucial," he added.

As minerals are an essential part of clean renewable energy technologies and the demand for minerals to produce these technologies is increasing, Toledo said the Philippines must take advantage of opportunities in the energy transition.

To do that, he said mining companies must be able to address the divided public opinion on mining.

Moreover, Toledo underscored the need to resolve other issues affecting the investment climate in the industry, including conflicting local and national laws, our country's high power costs, a protracted permitting process, and a fiscal regime that will not only enhance our country's competitiveness as a mining investment destination, but equally important, reflective of the government's designation of mining from being merely a "beneficial" industry to one that is "essential" and "critical." (Ma. Joselie C. Garcia)



TITLE :

PAGE _____

DATE _____



LETTERS

TOWARD A JUST MINERALS TRANSITION LAW THAT BENEFITS THE POOR,

DOESN'T EXHAUST ECOSYSTEMS

THE threats posed by the climate crisis are well established, and the need to shift from dirty energy to renewable energy, or energy transition, is no longer up for debate. But materials and infrastructure for renewable energy will drive demand for energy transition minerals (ETMs) by 500 percent, according to the World Bank. If coal mining (the principal culprit behind global warming) is disastrous for the planet, the negative footprint of metallic minerals mining is the stuff of lore.

Minerals are considered the building blocks of modern society, no less; they are responsible for many of the systems that hold commerce, transportation,

infrastructure, energy, among others, in place. But mining comes with a long laundry list of impacts on biodiversity, water supply, agriculture, livelihood, health, and so on. Mining is, thus, a necessary evil.

However, the majority of the mining today flows out of the logic of extractivism, which exploits natural resources primarily for export. As such, it includes the mining of gold, which is largely for ornamentation. Eduardo Gudynas proposes a better framework for mining: indispensable extraction, which allows mining only what is absolutely needed for social well-being. This proposal requires the reimagining of the development

model governments use to plan economies, one that doesn't exhaust ecosystems.

Energy transition certainly falls under the idea of indispensable extraction. But the urgent need for the transition does not give corporations an access pass to all areas with minerals, of which the Philippines has abundant reserves in a third of its land area, purportedly to the tune of \$1 trillion. The fifth most mineralized country in the world, the Philippines has at least five ETMs. This makes the country an attractive destination for large corporations and countries with an eye to cash in on so-called green investments. Based on a recent spatial analysis, most

of the ETMs can be found in indigenous and peasant lands in the global South. The production of ETMs, therefore, will foster energy colonialism.

To manage the market demand for transition minerals in the Philippines, and for minerals in general, the government can no longer rely on the present mining law. The 1995 Philippine Mining Act liberalized the mining industry—to disastrous results. Many a complaint lobbed at the industry stems from the weak environmental and social safeguards in the law.

We offer instead the Alternative Minerals Management bill (AMMB). The AMMB is a measure that has been gath-

ering dust in Congress, but whose latest version contains provisions that support a just minerals transition. This refers to the handling of minerals production based on the principles of justice and equity. A just minerals transition is anchored on the abovementioned idea of indispensable extraction. It must also support the transformation of the economy itself so that it benefits all, especially the poor. It must observe stringent protocols in the sourcing of minerals, as well as adhering to circular economy (or closing the loop between the production of materials and waste).

Finally, a just minerals transition provides communities

with decision-making roles, benefits sharing, and access to remedies in cases of violations of regulatory laws. The AMMB is the only viable policy for managing minerals in the country. The catchy "responsible mining" slogan still falls short of the safeguards and principles that must underpin an ecologically invasive pursuit, such as mining. Absent a comprehensive policy, the Philippines will fall prey to investments that will no doubt fuel economic growth or the shift to clean energy, but which will also upset the ecological balance that sustains people and the planet.

MAYA QUIRINO

EPR moratorium needed to give businesses, consumers a breather



Dr. Jesus Lim Arranza

MAKE SENSE

UNDER the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Law of 2022 and its implementing rules issued in January, companies categorized under obliged enterprises now have to account for their plastic footprint and show proof of a minimum 20-percent recovery rate for the year 2023 or face stiff penalties. They can comply in three ways: recover on their own the plastic packaging that they used, join other OEs to form a "Collective", or engage the services of a Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO).

Reporting of the programs initiated by these OEs to recover their plastics—called the EPR Compliance Audit Report—for 2023 will be made in July 2024, vetted by a third party.

These OEs will also be made to reduce their plastic footprint gradually through R&D so they can tweak their product designs and choice of materials.

All these three—recovery of plastic wastes, audit with third-party vetting, and reduction of plastic usage through research and development—naturally lead to one thing that businesses and their customers dread—higher cost. When there is additional cost, what is the first step that enterprises normally take? You're right, they pass it on to con-

sumers. This is inflationary. Every Juan will again see their purchasing power diminished.

An impeccable timing, albeit in the negative sense I should say, with the world just emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic and the continued rise in petroleum products and other goods and services. Fortunately, companies using plastics are still there, employing people, and paying taxes.

So, here is my plea to the government, how about a moratorium for at least a year in the EPR Law implementation. We all need a breather, don't we?

This lull in the EPR implementation will also give OEs more time to study how they can better comply

Isn't it ironic that a garbage problem that the government failed to solve in decades is now being passed to the private sector? How do you expect us in the private sector to do it in three or four years when solving this problem is not really a part of our main competencies?

with the law, perhaps determine which options will be effective at a lesser cost.

Remember that garbage collection as a whole has been the responsibility of the government, and for decades it has failed miserably to effectively implement its Reduce, Reuse, Recycle (3Rs) programs.

Honestly, after failing for decades to address the problem, the government does not have the moral ascendancy to tell or teach the private sector the proper collection of plastic wastes.

Have the concerned government agencies reviewed why they failed to solve solid waste management in the past 20 years? Please, let us know.

Isn't it ironic that a garbage problem that the government failed to solve in decades is now being passed to the private sector? How do you expect us in the private sector to do it in three or four years when solving this problem is not really a part of our main competencies?

However you look at it, the government, which has the right machinery and facilities, training and know-how down to the municipalities, barangays, and sitios, is still the one best suited to do the job.

This is also why we in the private sector are paying taxes, including garbage collection fees, so the government can relieve us of that burden and allow us to concentrate growing our business to create employment.

The fees and taxes associated with the EPR Law are already a form of double taxation.

So, on behalf of my members at the Federation of Philippine Industries, may we request PBBM to suspend the EPR Law's implementation? Perhaps we can also review the law and come up with something simpler other than creating another a private garbage collector on top of the mandated government garbage collector.

We support the circular economy concept, but let's do it right.

Let's review every step involved, from collection to handling and recycling, and study ways that will lessen the impact on business and consumers. We want an effective system that is not inflationary.

Dr. Jesus Lim Arranza is the chairman of the Federation of Philippine Industries and Fight Illicit Trade; a broad-based, multisectoral movement intended to protect consumers, safeguard government revenues and shield legitimate industries from the ill effects of smuggling.



Thousands of Filipino volunteers join Intl Coastal Cleanup 2023

TENS of thousands of Filipinos joined volunteers in over 150 countries across the world for International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) Day on Saturday, September 16, along various coastlines in the country.

ICC is a global initiative by the Washington, D.C.-based Ocean Conservancy that is dedicated to addressing ocean pollution through beach and waterway cleanups.

In the Philippines, ICC is implemented under Presidential Proclamation 470, which declares ICC to be held every third Saturday of September, with the Philippines being recognized as "the cleanup capital of the world."

ICC instills a sense of vigilance among Filipinos in their support of the ongoing global fight against marine litter.

The Philippines has been participating in the ICC since 1994.

The theme "Clean Seas for Healthy Fisheries" is carried out by this year's ICC, which aligns closely with the objectives of the United Nations Ocean Decade Challenge 3, which is to "Sustainably Feed the Global Population."

This challenge recognizes the need to ensure sustainable food production from the ocean to feed the growing global population while safeguarding the health and productivity of marine ecosystems.

In partnership with numerous organizations, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) took the lead in coordinating cleanups in various water bodies across the country. An estimated 35,000 volunteers armed with sacks, rakes and gloves joined forces for the cleanup effort across the country.

Participants included individuals and groups from the DENR workforce, national and local government agencies, academia, the private sector, youth organizations, civic groups, and civil society.

Concurrent coastal cleanups led by various DENR offices and bureaus were held nationwide, including in key areas such as the Las Piñas-Parañaque Wetland Park; the Tullahan River along Barangay San Bartolome in Novaliches, Quezon City; the Baseco Beach in Manila; the Balanga Wetland and Nature Park in Bataan; Barangay Butong Taal in Batangas; the Mactan Channel in Lapu-Lapu, Cebu; the Abatan River and Panglao in Bohol; the Banica River in Dumaguete; Bais City, Negros Oriental; and along the shore of Pagadian Bay in Zamboanga del Sur.

Apart from coastal cleanups mostly led by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and its volunteer group the PCG Auxiliary, the group also conducted underwater cleanups in the National Capital Region.

Beyond waste retrieval, ICC volunteers documented the volume of waste collected, which will be submitted to the Ocean Conservancy and the UN Ocean Decade to contribute to global efforts to combat plastic pollution.

During the 2022 ICC, findings of the Global Ocean Trash Index conducted by Ocean Conservancy showed that the Philippines collected 249,382 metric tons of waste. The collected waste encompassed a spectrum of items, including cigarette butts, beverage bottles, food wrappers, bottle caps, grocery bags, food containers, cups and plates, straws, and stirrers.

YASHIKA F. TORIB



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MORE than 17,000 volunteers across SM Malls nationwide helped create waves of positive change with over 100,000 kilos of trash collected, The biggest haul of trash during the 38th international coastal cleanup

... Continued on Page A3

SM's Biggest Haul at the 38th International Coastal Clean Up: 100,000 kilos of Trash Collected by over 17,000 Volunteers across SM Malls Nationwide

SM Cares continues to drive active participation in ocean conservation by taking part once again in this year's International Coastal Cleanup Day last September 16, 2023, Saturday.

15 SM malls in 12 locations nationwide partnered with the DENR, LGUs and communities to collect 100,432.50kg of trash



SM City Bataan cleans coastal beaches by the Storage Pier and Marine Park



SM City Sorsogon does a clean-up by the pier side of Brgy. Talaya & Wawa

SM's goal was to gather the biggest haul of trash and marine debris. This year's efforts amounted to 100,432.50kg collected with the support of SM's biggest participation since 2015 - 15 SM malls in 12 locations in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. This enabled more volunteers, totaling 17,006 SM employees and members of various sectors to join more clean-ups throughout the country.

SM spearheads numerous cleanup drives throughout the year in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030). In line with this year's UN Ocean Decade Challenge, Sustainably Feed the

Global Population, SM's projects on water conservation, including the recycling and treatment of water from handwashing and rainwater harvesting, highlights the importance of community initiative in minimizing pollution, protecting fisheries and helping maintain potable water sources for everyone.

"We all have a responsibility to help protect and safeguard our marine environment, its resources, and the communities it serves," said SM Supermalls Vice President for Corporate Compliance and SM Cares Program Director for the Environment Eng. Lia B. Silerio. "A cleaner ocean means a better future for generations to come."



SM Supermalls has participated in the International Coastal Clean Up since 2015, becoming an invitee for volunteers to work together towards a cleaner, greener future.



From L to R: Germino Reyes, International Coastal Cleanup Philippines Project Head; Oliver D. Poole, SM Estates SVP; Jacque San Agustin, SM Supermalls SVP Marketing; Amy Michael Brava P. Nolasco, DDB-ARC OIC, Regional Executive Director; Jessica Bianca T. Si, SM Prime Holdings, Inc. Project Director SVP; Hon. Emi Balisano-Cabrera, Mayor of Pasay City; Althea Ignacia Layosa Rodriguez, DENR Undersecretary for Special Concerns and Legislative Affairs; Pasha Bentley So, SM Supermalls SVP - Mall Operations



SM City Cagayan volunteers are ready to clean the coast of Legaspi Boulevard



SM City Magsaysay clean their beach collected along Baitan Street



SM City Orizaba Central and SM City Orizaba Downtown return to Kausarlan Punta to a clean-up



SM City Zamboanga volunteers in Puerto Princesa Bay clean-up with 140 of the Puerto Princesa



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PAGE _____

DATE _____



STP PROJECT. Manila Water Company Inc. celebrates its partnership with the local government of Antipolo City, along with the Department of Natural Resources, with landmark Hinulugang Taktak sewerage treatment plant project, at the Hinulugang Taktak Nature & Adventure Park. Attending the event are (from left) Manila Water project management group adviser Angel Santiago Gonzalez, Metropolitan Waterworks Sewerage System board trustee Merly Cruz, MWSS board chair Elpidio Vega, MWSS administrator Leonor Cleofas, Antipolo City Mayor Casimiro Ynares III, Manila Water chief regulatory officer Donato Almeda, Rizal Governor Nina Ricci Ynares, Manila Water president and CEO J.V. Emmanuel de Dios, Rizal Vice Governor Reynaldo San Juan, Manila Water chief regulator Patrick Lester Ty and Antipolo City councilor Michael Leyva.

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Villar supports more bamboo production for environment, countryside livelihood

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

SENATOR Cynthia A. Villar yesterday urged the public and all concerned government agencies to continue propagating bamboo.

Villar said bamboo “has the potential of supporting sustainability in economic growth as it grows

very fast and can be grown easily in different climate conditions and altitudes and thus, reduces the pressure on trees producing timber for products for wood.”

“After harvesting, bamboo regrows from its own root system and it doesn’t

need to be planted again,” Villar said, noting that bamboo forests play a leading role in global carbon cycles because they act as carbon sinks.

Villar, chairperson of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, was the keynote speaker during the Bamboo Month and World Bamboo Day Celebration spearheaded by the Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council (PBIDC).

She added that planting more bamboo is good for the environment while giving livelihood in the countryside because bamboo can be turned into useful products.

In May 2023, Villar said the PBIDC reported that it is collaborating with the Philippine Textile Research Institute for bamboo for fiber and local governments of Miag-ao in Iloilo and Dapitan City in Zamboanga Del Norte.

The PBIDC is also coordinating with the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development, which is in charge of the government’s socialized housing program.

Villar said her home city Las Piñas is known for the 19th-century old and world-renowned bamboo organ found in our Saint Joseph Church along Diego Cera Street.

“We are also known as Metro Manila’s Parol Capital where bamboo is the main raw material for their lantern making,” she said.

In July 2005, the Villar Foundation established a “Bambusetum” which boasts 30 varieties of bamboo.

A Bambusetum with 28 varieties was also built at the Las Piñas-Parañaque Wetland Park, a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.

She further related Las Pinas has a Bamboo Processing Factory which makes very useful and aesthetically-pleasing bamboo steps which their company buys.



Maynilad hikes tree-planting target by 133% in 2023

West zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc. (Maynilad) aims to plant around 210,000 native trees in vital watersheds for its "Plant for Life" program implementation in 2023 – a 133 percent increase from last year's target of 90,000 trees.

For this year's run of the Maynilad annual reforestation initiative, the company committed to plant 210,000 tree saplings and mangrove propagules over a land area of approximately 525 hectares at the Ipo watershed in Bulacan, Kaliwa watershed in Quezon Province, La Mesa watershed in Quezon City, and the Manila Bay coastline in Cavite Province.

"One climate change mitigation measure that will have a long-term and major impact on protecting our water sources is the planting of trees. It not only enhances carbon sequestration, it also increases the soil's water-retention capacity, thus preventing erosion in watersheds that could lead to high turbidity in the raw water supply," said Maynilad's Quality, Sustainability and Resiliency head, Roel Espiritu.

Espiritu said that intensified reforestation activities this year will focus on improving forest cover at Mt. Balagbag in Bulacan, which is now highly denuded and

has to be restored.

Maynilad plants trees with the help of volunteers from private and public organizations – including its sister companies under the MVP Group such as PLDT/Smart – that share in the water company's concern for environment conservation. Maynilad also works with the Mt. Balagbag Farmers, local communities, indigenous people, and Bantay Gubat to sustain high survival rate of the trees planted. More than 1 million trees have already been planted through "Plant for Life" since the program's inception in 2007.

Maynilad is the largest private water concessionaire in the Philippines in terms of customer base. Its service area includes the cities of Manila (all but portions of San Andres and Sta. Ana), Quezon City (west of San Juan River, West Avenue, EDSA, Congressional, Mindanao Avenue, the northern part starting from the Districts of Holy Spirit and Batasan Hills), Makati (west of South Super Highway), Caloocan, Pasay, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, Valenzuela, Navotas, and Malabon, all in Metro Manila; and the cities of Cavite, Bacoor, and Imus, and the towns of Kawit, Noveleta, and Rosario, all in the province of Cavite.



TITLE :

PAGE

DATE

Marina prepares other agencies for IMO audit

THE Maritime Industry Authority (Marina) has intensified its preparation for the International Maritime Organization (IMO) audit in October, including other government agencies.

Jean Ver Pia, the Philippines' single point of contact for the IMO Member State Audit Scheme (Imsas) and Maritime Attaché in London, presented the government agencies' audit schedules and the expected actions to be taken from their end.

Marina convened an Imsas Technical Working Group (TWG) meeting attended by representatives from the Department of Transportation, Philippine Coast Guard, Philippine Ports Authority, Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority, National Telecommunications Commission, and National Mapping and Resource Information Authority on September 13 via a hybrid setup.

The groundwork for the audit was laid with the issuance of Executive Order 84 in 2019 to ensure full compliance

with the country's international obligations and responsibilities as a member of the IMO.

Chaired by the Transportation assistant secretary for maritime, Julius Yano, and assisted by the head of the Imsas Secretariat, Marina Overseas Shipping Service officer in charge, Precila Jara, the TWG members discussed updates on the preparations for the mandatory audit. The revised draft's detailed audit timetable and program were also presented.

Yano has emphasized the need for a unified effort to ensure that the Philippine maritime industry adheres to the highest standards and complies with international maritime commitments to sustain an efficient and robust maritime industry.

The country's preparedness for this audit will strengthen its standing in the global maritime community and enhance maritime safety, security and environmental protection within the Philippines' waters.

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09-20-23

TITLE: _____

PAGE _____

DATE _____

Environment activists claim abduction by military

Flanked by officials who claimed that they "surrendered" to the government, the two environment activists who went missing in Bataan earlier this month accused the military of abduction and coercion.

During a press conference organized by the National Task Force to End Local Com-

munist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) in Plaridel, Bulacan yesterday, community volunteers Jonila Castro and Jhed Tamano denied that they voluntarily surrendered to the military.

"The truth is that we were abducted by the military on board a van. We were

Turn to Page 2

Environment From Page 1

forced to surrender because we were threatened. That is the truth," Castro said in Filipino.

"We never wanted to be in the custody of the military. The contents of the affidavits are not true because those were signed inside the military camp. We were not able to do anything that time," added Castro, a volunteer of multi-sectoral network AKAP KA Manila Bay.

Castro was referring to the affidavits that they supposedly signed, which stated that they left the communist movement. It was presented by the NTF-ELCAC in an earlier press conference to supposedly prove that the two were not kidnapped.

Tamano, a program coordinator of the Ecumenical Bishops Forum, also bared details of their abduction in Orion, Bataan on Sept. 2.

"An SUV stopped in front of us then abducted us. We were forced to join them... We thought it was a syndicate, but they know us," she said in Filipino.

Castro and Tamano were conducting research on the effects of the Manila Bay reclamation on the livelihoods of the fishing communities in the area when they were abducted.

The supposed topic of the press conference was "Jhed Tamano and Jonila Castro to Face the Media to Debunk Abduction Propaganda of Karapatan, et. al" and was attended by

NTF-ELCAC secretariat director Alexander Umpar, 70th Infantry Battalion commander Lt. Col Ronnel dela Cruz, Plaridel Mayor Jocell Aimee Vistan and the two environment activists.

Lt. Col. Dela Cruz introduced the two activists as having returned to the fold of the law, saying the activists requested that they be interviewed by media.

On the other hand, Mayor Vistan said the two are her constituents and they will be provided with whatever they need.

However, when Castro was given the floor to speak, she boldly said military men aboard a van abducted them and the content of the affidavit is not true.

Castro specifically identified personnel of the 70th Infantry Battalion who subjected them to interrogation.

Tamano also confirmed the state-

ment of Castro and the press conference was abruptly stopped.

The press conference was live streamed on the Facebook page of the local government of Plaridel, Bulacan. It was later taken down, although clips are still available online.

Both Tamano and Castro were later released, hours after the press conference where they accused the military of abduction and coercion.

Accompanied by Gabriela party-list Rep. Arlene Brosas, their families and other human rights advocates, Castro and Tamano were brought to the Commission on Human Rights central office in Quezon City.

In response to the allegations from the activists, the NTF-ELCAC stated they were "appalled as we are deeply saddened by the unfortunate turn of

events" and that they "felt betrayed."

"Whatever caused their sudden change of heart is beyond us. Earlier engagements by Task Force officials with the two students regarding the veracity and truthfulness of their affidavits were convincing enough to merit their public appearance. We were hoodwinked," the NTF-ELCAC said in a statement.

"We leave to the wisdom of the Task Force's legal eagles as to how to proceed from here. Rest assured that the NTF-ELCAC remains committed to continue to tread the path of unity, peace and development at all costs and that Ms. Tamano and Ms. Castro's safety and well-being are of primordial importance," the statement read.

- Janvic Mateo, Ramon Efren Lazaro, Michael Punongbayan, Daphne Galvez, Emmanuel Tupas



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND
INITIATIVES
SERVICE

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INQUIRER

1
PAGE

UPPER
 LOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

BANNER
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

09-20-23

TITLE: _____

PAGE _____

DATE _____

1/3

ACTIVISTS BACK WITH KIN AFTER BARING ABDUCTION

STORY BY CARMELA REYES-ESTROPE, KRIXIA SUBINGSUBING AND FRANCES MANGOSING

A press conference in Bulacan held by the anticommunist task force backfires after the two members of environmental groups it presented insist they were abducted by the military. Hours later, they are reunited with their families.

A2



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND
INITIATIVES
SERVICE

TITLE: Activists.....

2/3

PAGE

Activists back with kin after baring abduction

FROM A1

By Carmela Reyes-Estrope,
Krixia Subingsubing
and Frances Mangosing
@Team_Inquirer

The two environmental activists who went missing on Sept. 2 and were later reported to be in government custody after leaving the "leftist movement" were finally reunited with their families on Tuesday afternoon.

From Bulacan province where they were in the custody of the 70th Infantry Battalion (IB), Jonila Castro and Jhed Tamano were brought to the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) office in Manila to ensure that they would be on "neutral ground" upon their release. They were accompanied by Gabriela Rep. Arlene Brosas.

After a closed-door meeting with CHR officials, both women had a tearful reunion with their respective families who had been scouring police stations for weeks to find them.

"While we did not know what would happen to us while we were under custody, we drew strength from the belief that there were people in the outside world waiting for us," said the 21-year-old Castro. "Now, we need to focus on what our country needs. We need to continue the fight against reclamation activities for the sake of the fisherfolk of Manila Bay."

'Threatened'

In a press briefing organized in the morning by the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-Elcac), she and Tamano confirmed they



CHUCKING THE SCRIPT Environmental activists Jonila Castro and Jhed Tamano accuse the military of kidnapping them, in a press conference by the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict which the task force had to scrap. —SCRENGRAB

were kidnapped by the military on Sept. 2.

"We chose to speak up today because it's important that the truth comes out. Were we abducted or did we voluntarily surrender? The truth is we were abducted by the military," Castro said at the briefing held at the Plaridel municipal hall in Bulacan.

"We were forced to surrender because we were threatened. It's not true that we wanted the military to take custody of us," she added, debunking the government's claim that both women had yielded to authorities for their own protection after deciding to leave the communist movement.

"The issue here is the blatant facism of the military that we want to uncover today. The truth here is the issue on the Manila Bay reclamation. Fishermen are losing their source of livelihood," Castro said in a firm, defiant voice that broke at times.

Seated beside her was the 22-year-old Tamano who, ac-

ording to environmental and rights groups, is a coordinator for the Community and Church Program for Manila Bay of the Ecumenical Bishops' Forum. Castro, on the other hand, is a community organizer for Akapka Manila Bay, which is opposed to reclamation activities.

Flanking the two women were NTF-Elcac Director Alexander Umpar on one side and Lt. Col. Rommel dela Cruz, commanding officer of the 70th IB, on the other. Both officials seemed surprised at the unexpected turn of events, with the latter glancing frequently at NTF-Elcac spokesperson Undersecretary Joel Egco, who served as the moderator at the event.

Tamano confirmed that she and Castro were kidnapped and did not surrender voluntarily to the military. "We were walking on the road on Sept. 2 when a sport utility vehicle (SUV) stopped in front of us and we were forced to board it. That is

the truth. We thought it was a syndicate," she said.

At the time of their disappearance in Orion, Bataan province, both were preparing for relief operations in the province whose coastal towns are among the many areas threatened by reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

Military: They were rescued

Dela Cruz, who as head of the 70th IB is in charge of military operations in Bulacan and Pampanga provinces, said that he and his men rescued Castro and Tamano after receiving a report that they were missing.

He insisted that both voluntarily surrendered to his unit and that Tamano had even admitted to carrying firearms and being involved in encounters between the military and communist rebels.

"They (Castro and Tamano) signed their affidavits with their lawyer [that they were voluntarily yielding to the government]. We were not even there when they signed their statements," Dela Cruz said.

For his part, Umpar asserted that he was "standing by the report of our military." "We are here to take good care of the welfare of activists who return to the fold of the law," he said.

Tamano, however, denied that they were armed at the time they were kidnapped.

Before the press briefing was cut short by NTF-Elcac officials, Castro disclosed that she and Tamano had proof that they were abducted, adding that they lost their belongings while trying to resist the men who were forcing them into the SUV.



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND
INITIATIVES
SERVICE

09-20-23

TITLE:

Activists... - -

3/2

PAGE

DATE

ACTIVISTS BACK WITH KIN AFTER BARING ABDUCTION

FROM A2

"We didn't surrender. In fact, we lost our slippers. What we are wearing now are not ours," she said.

"We were abducted. We were blindfolded. Our arms were tied. We and our families were threatened. We were interrogated. I denied what we have signed in that affidavit. They are the ones who made up the stories in that affidavit," she added.

Outside the municipal hall, their supporters from the "Surface Jonila and Jhed Network" called on the military and the local government to immediately release them.

'We felt betrayed'

The NTF-Elcac in a statement Tuesday said it stood by Dela Cruz's account, noting that it was backed up by the activists' respective affidavits narrating their whereabouts from the time they decided to leave the underground movement until their arrival at the 70th IB headquarters in Bulacan "with the help of a friend."

"We are appalled as we are deeply saddened by the unfortunate turn of events during this morning's press conference... We felt betrayed," it said, adding that it was also standing by the report of Bataan policemen.

"Whatever caused their

sudden change of heart is beyond us. Earlier engagements by task force officials with the two students regarding the veracity and truthfulness of their affidavits were convincing enough to merit their public appearance. We were hoodwinked," the NTF-Elcac stated.

It said that if the two women's intention was to humiliate the task force, "we shall remain unfazed and committed to fulfilling our mandate for the greater good of the people and of the country."

In a press briefing on Friday, National Security Council Assistant Director General Jonathan Malaya said that Castro and Tamano surrendered to the 70th IB on Sept. 12, then executed sworn affidavits in front of lawyers from the Public Attorney's Office and CHR.

Malaya also threatened to file charges against groups which claimed the two were

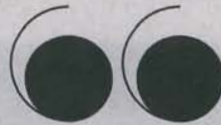
kidnapped by authorities.

This is not the first time, however, that activists who had been reported missing were presented by military officials or policemen.

On June 2, Patricia Cierva and Cedric Casaño suddenly surfaced alongside 18 other "confessed rebels" who surrendered to Cagayan Gov. Manuel Mamba. The mass surrender was facilitated by the local military unit and the Cagayan Provincial Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict.

At a press briefing, youth organizer Cierva and Casaño, the Kabataan Partylist coordinator in Isabela province, belied reports they were taken by the military, contrary to rights group Karapatan's claim that they were abducted by members of the 501st IB during a supposed encounter on May 18.

—WITH REPORTS FROM JANE TA AND INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ.



**We are appalled as we are
deeply saddened by the unfortunate
turn of events during this morning's
press conference ... We felt betrayed**

National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict



TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

Scientists: 'Tree of life' nears extinction

WASHINGTON, D.C.: Humans are driving the loss of entire branches of the "Tree of Life," according to a new study published on Monday, which warns of the threat of a sixth mass extinction.

"The extinction crisis is as bad as the climate change crisis. It is not recognized," said Gerardo Ceballos, professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and co-author of the study published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS). **►ExtinctionA2**

"What is at stake is the future of mankind," he told AFP.

The study is unique because instead of merely examining the loss of a species, it examines the extinction of entire genera.

In the classification of living beings, the genus lies between the rank of species and that of family. For example, dogs are a species belonging to the genus canis — itself in the canid family.

"It is a really significant contribution, I think the first time anyone has attempted to assess modern extinction rates at a level above the species," Robert Cowie, a biologist at the University of Hawaii who was not involved in the study, told AFP.

"As such it really demonstrates the loss of entire branches of the Tree of Life," a representation of living things first developed by Charles Darwin.

The study shows that "we aren't just trimming terminal twigs, but rather are taking a chainsaw to get rid of big branches," agreed Anthony Barnosky, professor emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley.

73 extinct genera

The researchers relied largely on species listed as extinct by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). They focused on vertebrate species (excluding fish), for which more data are available.

Of some 5,400 genera (comprising 34,600 species), they concluded that 73 had become extinct in the last 500 years — most of them in the last two centuries.

The researchers then compared this with the extinction rate estimated from the fossil record over the very long term.

"Based on the extinction rate in the previous million years, we would have expected to lose two genera. But we lost 73," explained Ceballos.

That should have taken 18,000 years, not 500, the study estimated — though such estimates remain uncertain, as not all species are known and the fossil record remains incomplete.

The cause?

Human activities, such as the destruction of habitats for crops or infrastructure, as well as overfishing, hunting and so on.

The loss of one genus can have consequences for an entire ecosystem, argued Ceballos.

"If you take one brick, the wall won't collapse, he said. "You take many more, eventually the wall will collapse.

"Our worry is that ... we're losing things so fast, that for us it signals the collapse of civilization." **AFP**



TITLE:

PAGE



MARINE HEATWAVES can decimate species that cannot migrate to escape into erably warm waters, notably corals. (AFP)

Marine heatwaves last longer in deeper water — study

By AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

PARIS, France — Marine heatwaves may last longer and be more intense in deeper water, potentially threatening sensitive species as climate change makes the extreme events more frequent, researchers said on Monday.

Oceans have absorbed 90 percent of the excess heat produced by the carbon pollution from human activity since the dawn of the industrial age.

Marine heatwaves — episodes of abnormally high water temperatures — have become more frequent and intense.

These can have a particularly severe impact on species that cannot migrate to escape intolerably warm waters, like corals in the Great Barrier Reef and kelp forests off southern Australia and the northeastern Pacific.

In a new study published in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, researchers looked at impacts of temperature spikes in deeper waters, which lead author Eliza Fragkopoulou said was “the first attempt to look into marine heatwaves below the surface.”

“Marine heatwaves and their effects have been studied mostly at the ocean surface and we did not know much about their characteristics in the deep ocean,” she told AFP.

Using on-site observations and modelling, researchers examined global marine heatwaves from 1993 to 2019, including data up to 2,000 meters (6,562 feet) below the surface.

They found the intensity was highest at 50 to 200 meters below the surface, occasionally up to 19 percent stronger than the surface heatwave.

The duration also increased with depth, with warming persisting up to two years after temperatures returned to normal on the surface the study said.

The scientists looked at a proxy measure of thermal stress known as cumulative intensity and mapped that against distribution of biodiversity at the edge of their maximum heat limits to see areas where marine creatures are potentially more vulnerable to changes.

These high stress conditions overlapped in up to 22 percent of the global oceans, they found.

Regional variability of marine heatwaves makes measuring biodiversity exposure complex, and their duration varied by location due to different oceanic conditions.

In general, Fragkopoulou, of the Centre of Marine Sciences at Portugal's University of Algarve, said the impact on biodiversity was likely greatest from the surface to a depth of 250 meters.

The largest portions of the oceans categorized as highly exposed were found in the North Atlantic and Indian oceans, at depths between 1,000 and 2,000 meters.

Better monitoring 'urgent'

A separate study published last month in the journal *Nature* suggested that some marine creatures can withstand the heat better than others, with a finding that ocean fish can endure marine heatwaves with no major impact on their numbers.

Fragkopoulou told AFP that more research was needed on heatwaves in the deeper oceans to unpick the potential impacts on tourism and fisheries.