

18 September 2023 Monday



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Volunteers help clean-up

20 Metro waterways,

1 river

By KHRISCIELLE YALAO

A total of 10 esteros in Manila, five creeks in Quezon City, Las Piñas, and Caloocan, two creeks each in Pasay and Mandaluyong, a river in San Juan City, a creek in Taguig, and the Estero de Tripa de Gallina were cleared of garbage and other debris by community volunteers and local government personnel in a nationwide campaign initiated by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) on Saturday, Sept. 16.

The cities of Mandaluyong, Pasig, and San Juan took part in the simultaneous nationwide clean-up drive called the Barangay at Kalinisan Day (BarKaDa) which aimed to involve barangays in the regular conduct of community-based environmental programs, primarily the cleaning and maintenance of waterways like esteros and creeks, and promote solid waste disposal and management.

The event also gave way to community gardening projects, anti-dengue activities, and other environmental projects.

It was enacted through DILG memorandum Circular 2023-133, which calls on local government units (LGUs) to approve of ordinances and resolutions declaring at least one day of the week wherein BarKaDa is implemented in the city's barangays.

The initiative was also launched to celebrate International Coastal Clean-up Day, and the start of National Clean-up Week.

The local government officials, volunteers, residents, local police officers, and personnel from the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) collected trash including plastic bottles, plastic bags, and styrofoam from streets, roads, and other public spaces; as well as dredged clogged creeks.

In Mandaluyong City, the waterways that were cleared of garbage were Maytunas Creek in Barangay Addition Hills, Maysilo Bridge, and Buhangin Creek in Barangay Hulo.



Personnel of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology help clean up one of the esteros or waterways in Metro Manila. (Photo from BJMP-NCR)

Former Councilor lawyer Che Che Pablo-Santos, DILG Mandaluyong Director Patrick Megia, City Health Department Head Dr. Arnold Abalos, and Addition Hills Barangay Captain Carlito Cernal led the clean-up drive

in their city.

Meanwhile, around 40 community volunteers, Barangay Dela Paz officials, members of the Ecological Solid Waste Management Committee (BESWMC), and the Asa Philippines

Foundation joined forces to clean areas in Pasig City.

It was conducted at the Hakbangan Creek, its surrounding areas, and within the Octagon Phase III Subdivision.

Around 35 sacks of garbage were collected including garden and solid waste, dried leaves, toiletries, and mud clay.

Other members of the Barangay Peace and Order Council (BPOC) of Barangay Ugong, along with Clean and Green cleared the Pasig City River Park.

The BFP-Pasig also conducted operations at the Parian Creek in Barangay Pinagbuhatan.

DILG San Juan Director Engr. Perla Upano and DILG Local Government Operations Officer (LGOO) Maricor Dayandante headed the program implementation at the San Juan River.

BarKaDa was formally launched in Tondo, Manila on Saturday by DILG Secretary Benhur Abalos.

Other cities that joined the BarKaDa launch were Quezon City, Manila, Caloocan, Malabon, Muntinlupa, Taguig, Las Piñas, and Pasay in the National Capital Region (NCR).

Around 233 jail officers of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology-National Capital Region (BJMP-NCR), also conducted clean-up activities in their areas.

The local governments of Ilocos Norte, Dinagat Islands, Iloilo City, Pangasinan, and Antique also participated in the clean-up drive.



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GLOBAL CLEANUP DAY.

Volunteers flock to the Dolomite Beach in Manila to mark the observance of the International Coastal Clean-up (ICC) Day on Sunday. This year's ICC theme, "Clean Seas For Healthy Fisheries," emphasizes the crucial connection between ocean health and the country's abundance of marine resources.

Revoli Cortez



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INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEANUP DAY

TRASH COLLECTION ALONG CAGAYAN RIVERS NETS 2,200 KILOS OF GARBAGE

By Villamor Visaya Jr.
@villvisayajrINQ

TUGUEGARAO CITY—At least 2,200 kilos of garbage such as plastic wrappers, drinking straws, bottle caps and Styrofoam were collected from the riverbanks in this city and neighboring areas traversed by the Pinañanauan River in Cagayan province on Saturday.

The activity, organized to celebrate the International Coastal Cleanup Day, was participated in by 500 environmental partners and stakeholders from the business sector, national government agencies, and municipal and barangay local government units.

The cleanup at the Pinañanauan River, which traverses Tuguegarao City and the town of Peñablanca in Cagayan, was done under the theme “Clean Seas for Healthy Fisheries.”

The Pinañanauan River, an 83-kilometer tributary of Cagayan River that crosses through the provinces of Cagayan and Isabela, is also a known tourist attraction and a protected area in Cagayan, as it passes through the Peñablanca Protected Landscape and Seascape that hosts numerous karst formations and underground chambers and wild flora.

Garbage must be properly disposed of and not in rivers, especially plastic materials

that end up in the sea, which are likely to destroy marine biodiversity, said Department of Environment and Natural Resources Regional Director Gwendolyn Bambalan in an interview on Saturday.

One of the volunteers, Maria Angelica Perez, a 21-year-old student leader, lamented that they gathered mostly nonbiodegradable items that are “detrimental to the environment.”

Conservation efforts

The International Coastal or World Cleanup Day involves multisectoral marine environment and ocean conservation efforts in line with the target of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030).

It was coordinated by the global organization Let’s Do It! World, from its headquarters located in Tallinn, Estonia.

The first World Cleanup Day was organized in Sept. 15, 2018.

Cleanup leader Kristine Iris Ceballos, a manager of a mall in Tuguegarao, said they had been implementing year-round sustainable programs called the green movement in the province.

Ceballos emphasized that their operations are aligned with sustainable and environment-friendly practices focused on energy conservation, solid waste reduction and water conservation. INQ



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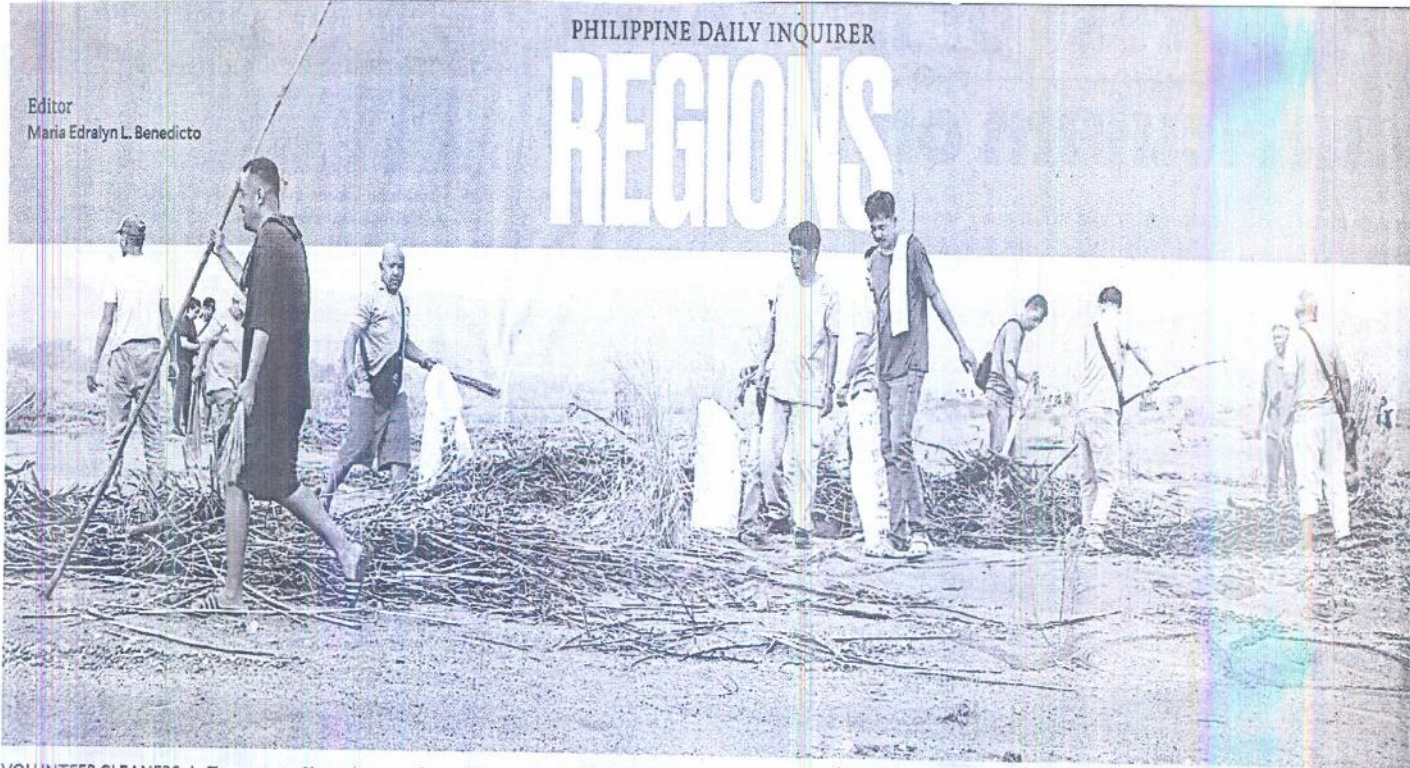
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Editor
Maria Edralyn L. Benedicto

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
REGIONS

VOLUNTEER CLEANERS In Tuguegarao City, volunteers from the government and other groups use makeshift cleaning tools to clear the banks of the Pinacanauan River and its tributaries of garbage and other debris on Sept. 16 as part of activities to mark the International Coastal Cleanup Day. —VILLAMOR VISAYA JR.



A THIRD OF SLAIN ACTIVISTS OPPOSED MINING

REPORT: PH STILL DEADLIEST FOR ENVIRONMENTALISTS IN ASIA

By Jane Bautista
@janebautistaINQ

A report published last week has shown that the Philippines has, for 10 years, remained the deadliest country in Asia for environmental defenders.

Filipino environmentalists said the finding highlighted the "perilous terrain" facing them under an administration intending to leverage the country's mineral wealth for economic growth.

International watchdog Global Witness, in its report published on Sept. 13, said at least 177 environmentalists were killed in 2022. Of that total, 16 were in Asia and 11, or majority of the fatalities in the region, were recorded in the Philippines.

The Philippines also ranked fifth most dangerous country for environmentalists, following Honduras (14 deaths), Mexico (30), Brazil (34) and Colombia which, at 60, had the most number of environmentalists killed.

Fatalities from DENR

The report listed the names of those in the Philippines killed in the past year, including volunteer teachers Chad Booc and Gelejurain Ngujo II, peasant organizer Ericson Acosta, Richard Mendoza, Elgyn Balonga, Robert Aragon, Tirso Añar, Joseph

Jimenez, Silvestre Fortades Jr., Rose Marie Galias and Eugene Lastrella.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) declined to comment on the report, saying it was not aware of the "circumstances of each of the cases."

The agency noted, however, that it has about 2,500 forest rangers, forest protection officers and other personnel tasked to help in the protection of the environment.

There were also fatalities among them who were not included in the report. Two forest rangers and one forest protection officer were killed in the line of duty last year, according to the DENR.

With 281 fatalities, the Philippines also ranked third (after Colombia's 382 and Brazil's 376) among countries with the highest number of slain environmentalists since 2012, the report said, adding that one-third of those killed had opposed mining operations.

Jean Lindo, spokesperson of the Environmental Defenders Congress, said the alliance of environmentalists was "deeply concerned" about the ban on new mining operations that then President Rodrigo Duterte lifted in 2021.

"Our worry primarily revolves around communities residing near mineral resources,

many of whom have vehemently opposed the encroachment of large, and often foreign, mining corporations," she said in a statement sent to the Inquirer.

Vulnerable communities

Lindo cited the communities situated near areas with rich mineral resources including those in the Cordilleras, Nueva Vizcaya province, the Zambales mountain range, the whole island of Mindoro, Negros Occidental province and the Caraga and Soccsksargen regions.

The network became more apprehensive after President Marcos declared that mineral exploration and extraction would be integral to the economic blueprint of his administration.

"With this renewed push for mining, we are forced to brace for a renewed onslaught against environmental defenders and entire communities that we now recognize as environmental defender communities," Lindo said.

The Global Witness report cited the case earlier this year of Sibuyan Island, in the archipelago of Romblon province, where residents resisted the operations of Altai Philippines Mining Corp. and formed a barricade to stop the company's hauling trucks from leaving the port.



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Two residents were hurt on Feb. 3 when policemen tried to disperse the protesters who were blocking the path of the trucks.

Human rights advocate Rodne Galicha said riot police told them that they were there to maintain "peace and order." But instead "they were all lined up on the highway and then attempted to guide the company's trucks through," he said.

The report quoted environmental youth leader Charles Rocil as saying that "It was a mix of anxiety and fear that someone might die anytime because of the [advancing] trucks.... But it turned out the police were the ones who tried to hurt us. And actually, they did hurt us."

'Deadly streak'

The Global Witness report is a "disturbing truth that hounds every environmental defender and organizations under the current dangerous political situation," said fisherfolk group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang

Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya).

Fishers continue to face similar threats in their efforts to protect marine and aquatic resources from profit-driven projects, the group said in a statement.

Pamalakaya also cited the case of environmental activists Jonila Castro and Jhed Tamano, whose circumstances have drawn controversy after a security official claimed over the weekend that they were now under government custody after seeking the government's help for wanting to leave the

"communist movement."

"Human rights violations and attacks against activists and democratic organizations send a chilling effect to the grassroots. This deadly streak represses vulnerable communities and sectors from taking action, [considering] how dire their economic conditions are," the group said.

Reacting to the report, the Advocates of Science and Technology for the People (Agham) called out the Marcos administration for its "silence and inaction" over the killings and forced disappearances of envi-

ronmental defenders.

"Why does the state seem reluctant to [protect] those who defend the environment? Worse, they are the ones who persecute environmental defenders," said Cleng Julve, campaigns and advocacies officer of Agham.

"Despite the public clamor to protect the environment, the government continues to approve destructive projects," she said, adding that with the ongoing climate crisis, the implementation of such projects would only exacerbate the hazards confronting vulnerable communities. INQ



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COAST GUARD SURVEYS 'DELIBERATE' REEF DAMAGE

By **Frances Mangosing**
and **Dexter Cabalza**
@Team_Inquirer

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) on Sunday raised the alarm about destroyed coral reefs in Escoda (Sabina) Shoal and a "deliberate" man-made alteration of the "natural topography of the underwater terrain" in that area, where Chi-

nese maritime militia vessels have been repeatedly called out for swarming and intruding into the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Underwater surveys from a "special covert mission" conducted by the PCG from Aug. 9 to Sept. 11 showed the presence of "crushed corals," suggesting "a potential act of dumping, [possibly] involving the same

dead corals that were previously processed and cleaned before being returned to the seabed" of the shoal about 185.2 kilometers from Rizal town, Palawan, according to Commodore Jay Tarriela, PCG spokesperson for the West Philippine Sea.

"The results of this survey were deeply concerning, as the marine ecosystem appeared lifeless, with minimal to no signs of

any life forms," he noted.

Tarriela said the PCG supported and confirmed reports by the Armed Forces of the Philippines, exposing the severe damage inflicted upon the marine environment and coral reef in the seabeds of Escoda Shoal and Rozul (Iroquois) Reef, which lies 230 km northwest of Rizal.

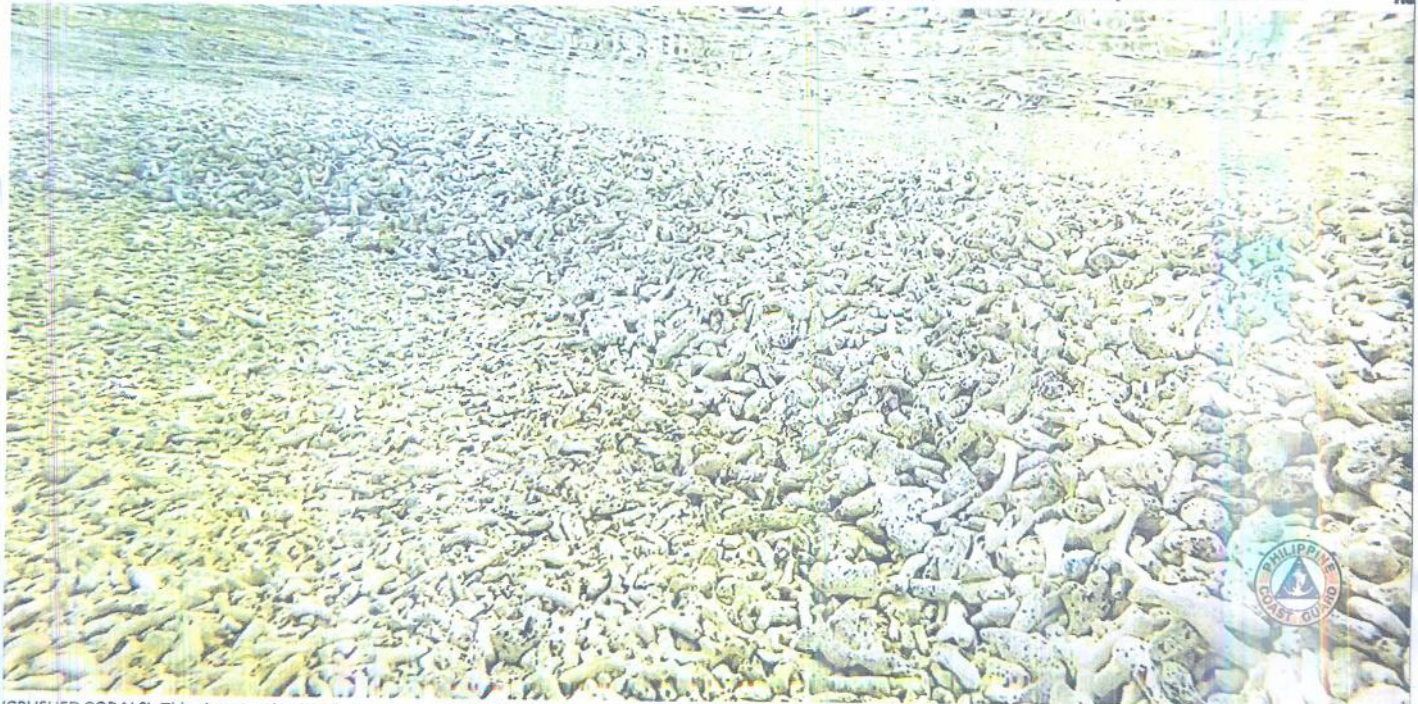
"The destruction which may

have possibly been caused by the Chinese maritime militia vessels is not only an ecological disaster but also threatens the livelihoods of our fishermen and the fragile ecosystems that depend on a healthy marine environment," he said.

"While the PCG's observations may require additional scientific analysis for validation, it is of utmost importance

that all Coast Guard organizations and maritime law enforcement agencies in the region prioritize their dedication to protecting and preserving marine ecosystems," Tarriela added.

At the time of the PCG special covert mission, there were 33 Chinese maritime militia vessels in Rozul Reef and 15 in Escoda Shoal.



'CRUSHED CORALS' This photograph taken during a survey by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) of the seabed of Escoda (Sabina) Shoal, conducted between Aug. 9 and Sept. 11, shows what appears to be a fresh pile of coral rubble, their bleached color indicating they were dumped there recently. The shoal is about 180 kilometers west of Palawan province. —PHOTO FROM PCG



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Both Rozul and Escoda are within the 370-km EEZ of the Philippines and are also part of the Kalayaan Island Group under the jurisdiction of the municipality of Kalayaan, Palawan.

They are in the southern part of Recto (Reed) Bank, where a service contract on oil exploration was put on hold last year following the government's suspension of all exploration activities in the West Philippine Sea after a China Coast Guard vessel shadowed survey ships in the area.

Escoda is also the assembly point of Philippine vessels conducting resupply missions to Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal, where Chinese military ships frequently harass Filipino vessels delivering supplies to the grounded BRP Sierra Madre, the military's outpost in that part of the West Philippine Sea.

Damage assessment

The AFP earlier expressed concern over what they suspected as massive coral harvesting based on their own surveys in July near Rozul Reef.

In a news forum in Quezon City on Saturday, AFP Western Command (Wescom) chief Vice Adm. Alberto Carlos disclosed the destructive culling of corals sometime in July when there were at least 50 Chinese maritime militia vessels found clustering in Rozul.

"After we drove them away, we pinpointed the areas where the Chinese [ships] stayed and sent out our divers there to do an underwater survey. They saw there were no more corals

left. The seabed was damaged and there's nothing left there but just debris," he noted.

According to the Wescom commander, they were coordinating with scientists and experts for an assessment of the damage in the area and to confirm the timeline of the coral harvesting there.

"But from the untrained eye of our divers, the corals there had just been harvested recently at that time," Carlos pointed out.

He clarified, however, that it was not yet conclusive if the Chinese vessels were indeed the ones who harvested corals in Rozul.

"These are just suspicions. We are not saying they (Chinese vessels) are harvesting our corals. We suspect that somebody is harvesting our corals and that means they are violating our sovereign rights," he said.

"It should be the Filipinos who should be enjoying the resources in our EEZ, not anyone else. But it looks like somebody is exercising that right without our permission," he added.

For AFP spokesperson Col. Medel Aguilar, the reported coral harvesting was not only detrimental to the environment but also a "threat to food security later on, not only of our country, but the whole world."

As of Sept. 15, Carlos said the number of Chinese militia vessels in Rozul reached 40—higher than the 23 reported by Wescom during the aerial patrols conducted on Sept. 6 and 7.

To ward off these Chinese vessels and prevent their resurgence in the area, he said "We have to maintain our presence there, 100 percent, 365 days a year."

But he admitted that due to inclement weather and limited resources, this could not be possible as Filipino troops had to return to port to refuel and rest.

"We should have a constant and strong presence there. If we need to engage our allies and treaty partners, so be it," Carlos said.

Funding for research sought

Fisherfolk group Pamalakaya (National Federation of Small Fisherfolk Organization in the Philippines) on Sunday called on the government to conduct a damage assessment on corals in Rozul Reef.

"There is a need to identify if the swarmed area was subjected to coral harvesting, clam hunting, or any military activities that destroyed its vast coral reefs," the group said in a statement.

According to Pamalakaya, the Marcos administration must take the issue urgently and tap marine scientists and experts to evaluate the damage and the possible long-term consequences to the local fishery production.

"Of course, this requires the government to allocate sufficient funding to the science and research sectors," said Bobby Roldan, a fisher from Zambales province and vice chair for Luzon of Pamalakaya.

He added that providing financial support to the local science and research industry would not only help in assessing the environmental impacts of Chinese activities in the West Philippine Sea, "but also in exploring and utilizing our very own marine and mineral resources." —WITH A REPORT

FROM JANE BAUTISTA INQ



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Gov't urged: Assess damage in WPS corals

By BELLA CARIASO

The fishers group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas yesterday urged the government to conduct further damage assessment of the Rozul (Iroquois) Reef after the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) aired its suspicion that Chinese militia might have harvested the corals from that area of the West Philippine Sea.

Bobby Roldan, the group's vice chairman for Luzon, said they are supporting the statement of Vice Admiral Alberto Carlos, chief of the AFP Western Command, that the reef has been plundered of its corals, and the Chinese were likely behind it.

Carlos has said the massive poaching of corals left a trail of destruction of marine resources in the area, which is near Palawan and within the country's exclusive economic zone.

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"There is a need to identify if the swarmed area was subjected to coral harvesting, clam hunting, or any military activities that destroyed its vast coral reefs. We urge the Marcos administration to take this matter urgently by tapping marine scientists and other experts to extensively assess the damage and its possible long-term implications to the local fishery production," Roldan said.

Roldan, who is also a fisherman from Zambales, said that the government should be spending for the strengthening of the local science and research industry, instead of pouring billions of pesos into the confidential and intelligence funds.

"This will make us capable not only of assessing the environmental impacts of Chinese activities in the West Philippine Sea, but also

in exploring and utilizing our very own marine and mineral resources," he added.

He noted that an estimated 100 square miles of coral reefs in the West Philippine Sea, particularly in the Spratlys, were destroyed due to China's artificial island that hosts its military facilities.

Citing the study of Advocates of Science and Technology for the People, the fishers group said that it could take at least 20 years for a coral reef to recover, depending on the conservation measures in place.

The AFP said the Chinese may have begun clearing the reef of its corals in July when their ships swarmed around the land feature, about 150 nautical miles from the Palawan mainland.

When the Chinese ships left Rozul Reef for Panganiban (Mischief) Reef weeks later, the AFP deployed Navy divers to conduct an underwater survey.

- With Mark Ernest Villeza



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AFP suspects Chinese swarming behind extensive coral damage at Rozul Reef

By MARTIN SADONGDONG

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) discovered an extensive damage in the corals surrounding Rozul (Iroquios) Reef in the West Philippine Sea (WPS), and it suspected that the swarming of Chinese vessels in the area had something to do with it.

Vice Adm. Alberto Carlos, commander of the Palawan-based Western Command (WesCom) which supervises the military operations in WPS, said they are now doubling their efforts on maritime surveillance after they detected a resurgence of Chinese vessels in Rozul Reef.

Rozul Reef, located at the southern end of Recto (Reed) Bank in the north-eastern portion of Kalayaan Island Group (Spratly Islands) in Palawan, is known as a haven for different species of fish and other marine life thanks to the natural coral reef growing around it which serves as their shelter.

But now, the corals are gone, according to Carlos.

The military commander said the WesCom noticed a resurgence of Chinese vessels in Rozul Reef in

August, just a month after they drove away around 50 Chinese maritime militia (CMM) vessels in the area.

"There was a considerable amount of time that there was no swarming in the area because of our presence there," Carlos said in a news forum in Quezon City on Saturday, Sept. 16.

"When they left, we sent out our divers to do an underwater survey and we saw that the corals are gone. There's nothing left, they are destroyed and only debris were there," he added.

Carlos said the WesCom suspects "massive illegal harvesting of coral" in the area, citing a report provided by Philippine Navy divers when they conducted underwater surveys.

Although the WesCom was not definitively asserting that the Chinese vessels are harvesting corals, Carlos said there were "indications" that "strongly suggest" such activities may be occurring.

Carlos emphasized that this raises concerns about violations of the country's sovereign rights in the WPS.

He said that only the Philippines has the rightful claim to the resources within its exclusive economic zone in the West Philippine Sea, citing the

arbitrary ruling in 2016 which rejected China's claims in the South China Sea on the basis of its nine-dash line.

"That's why it's alarming because as far as the Western Command is concerned, it is our duty to protect that sovereign rights for the Filipinos, who are the ones that should be benefiting from the resources in our exclusive economic zone," Carlos said.

Now, Carlos said the WesCom targets to increase their presence in Rozul Reef to protect the area and its resources. This, however, is not easy to do due to adverse weather conditions and resource limitations.

"We'd like to maintain [presence] 100 percent, 365 days a year. But because of the weather, limited resources, our troops have to go back to port to refuel, to take some rest," he said.

One of the strategies being considered by Carlos to protect the country's interests in the WPS is to hold coordinated patrols with allied countries.

"We're doubling our effort on that. We're going to address that issue by increasing our presence there. We should be constant, have strong presence there. Sama-sama na (We should join forces with others)," he said.



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letters

Where have all our corals gone

During the world conservation Congress in Amman, Jordan in 2000 while I was seeking re-election to the IUCN Council, we filed a resolution making the Spratly Islands into a marine peace park. We withdrew the resolution in plenary, with China assuring us of cooperation. Nothing happened. I won the election.

In 2016 during the World Conservation Congress in Honolulu, we filed the resolution again, this time with facts and studies from Ed Gomez and John Mcmanus of the UP Marine Institute. The facts stated that the coral colonies in the South China Sea were the richest in the world and that in fact they would replenish the Pacific Ocean day in and day out.

On a trip that year, Mcmanus warned of the Chinese destruction of our rich and pristine coral reefs. We have echoed this many times to no avail. We lost the resolution as China was the president of the union and president Zhang con-

trolled the union.

Sadly, today the Chinese have built infrastructure in islands and have illegally harvested and destroyed the coral reefs. Coral reefs are the beginning of the marine food chain and to destroy them would kill the oceans and deprive us all of fish and marine resource for food and livelihood.

Presidential Decree 1219 issued by former president Ferdinand Marcos in 1978 has been violated. In 1980 we went to Washington DC with Tom Garrett and used this decree and had it amended to the Black Bass and Lacey Acts that were signed into law by then president Ronald Reagan.

Sadly, our government, despite the tribunal ruling in our favor, has done nothing. We will all be victims. We call for action to save our seas. It's 2023 and the coral colonies are all gone. It's a crime against humanity. - **ANTONIO M. CLAPAROLS**, president, Ecological Society of the Philippines



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DILG, NCR coastal LGUs tackle issues on PH fisheries regulations

By CHITO CHAVEZ

The Department of the Interior and Local Government-National Capital Region (DILG-NCR) met with officials of coastal communities in Metro Manila and discussed the issues affecting the local fishing regulations.

The local coastal communities included those in Las Piñas City, Manila, Navotas City, Parañaque City, and Pasay City.

Through the Manila Bay Clean-up Rehabilitation and Preservation Program – Regional Program Management Team (MBCRP-PMT), the DILG and select fisherfolks from the concerned local government units (LGUs) had a dialogue on the intricacies of the Republic Act (RA) 8550, or the “The Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998.”

“The fisherfolks were joined by representatives from the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR), Department of the Environment and Natural Resources – NCR (DENR – NCR), Philippine National Police (PNP)- Maritime Group, and the Philippine Coast Guard-Maritime Industry Authority (PCG-MARINA),” the DILG-NCR noted.

Jason Boholano of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR)-NCR presented an overview of RA 8550 as amended by RA 10654, followed by a forum on the Fisheries Code.

In the meeting, the multi-sectoral

group also tackled issues pertaining to DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2023-012 or the “Guidelines in the Enactment and/or Updating of the Municipal/City Fisheries Ordinance of Coastal Local Government Units.

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)-NCR’s representative Justin de Ramos provided updates on the National Guidelines for the Coastal Resource Management Plan (CRMP) and the integration of CRMP in the Comprehensive Development Plan and Comprehensive Land Use Plan of local jurisdictions.

Lt. Lorna L. Sison of the Philippine National Police (PNP) Maritime Group discussed the roles and responsibilities of Fishery Law Enforcement Officers and the requirements and processes imposed by law enforcement agencies.

A dialogue between the fisherfolks and the government fisheries bodies also discussed issues relevant to fisheries management, such as the integration of the Coastal Resource Management Plan in the Comprehensive Development Plan and coastal laws implemented by enforcement agencies.

“The Philippine Coast Guard MARINA also shared relevant information concerning their operations with LGUs and the fisherfolk. The activity served as a platform to explore viable solutions to the many challenges facing fisherfolks in the coastal areas of NCR,” the DILG added.



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Asean conference highlights medicinal forest-tree research

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

[@jonlmayuga](#)

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has emphasized the significance of advancing research and knowledge on medicinal plants and forest trees.

The one-day Asean Conference on Medicinal Forest Trees held on September 7 in New Clark City, Pampanga gathered around 117 participants from Southeast Asia. It underlined the role of researchers in increasing awareness about the potential benefits of the important natural resource.

In a statement, Director Maria Lourdes G. Ferrer of the Ecosystems Research and Development Bureau (ERDB) urged participants of the conference to continue championing research, innovation, and responsible management of the country's natural resources, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and information sharing to bring about transformative change.

"Through your rigorous research, innovative thinking, and unwavering [resolve] to responsible stewardship of our natural resources, we have unearthed possibilities that will undoubtedly expand beyond the limits of current knowledge," Ferrer said.

She noted that the conference discussions not only deepened understanding,

but also promoted linkages for the advancement of medicinal non-timber forest species.

Besides the inadequate research support, the conference acknowledged the shortage of published literature on medicinal forest trees. It also emphasized the substantial threats posed by forest degradation and habitat loss to vital medicinal forest tree species. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for more ethnobotanical and pharmacological research on medicinal plants and forest trees.

The ERDB recommended integrating the said issues into the DENR's "Research, Development, and Extension (RDE) Agenda." Simultaneously, efforts will continue in collecting data on medicinal forest trees and conducting ongoing ethnobotanical and pharmacological research.

To enhance science communication, there will be an improved information and education campaign on the medicinal value of forest trees, along with increased promotion of RDE on medicinal forest trees.

The publication of research results will continue to raise awareness and encourage the use of these valuable resources.

"Together, we can fully realize the medicinal potential of our forest trees, creating a brighter and healthier future," the ERDB director concluded.



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INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF BIRD PERCHES IN REFORESTATION

Reforestation of damaged forests is crucial for fighting climate change and protecting wildlife. One common way to do this is by planting trees, but this can be expensive and labor-intensive. A cheaper and more effective approach is Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR), which can involve the use of bird perches to attract fruit-eating birds that can help spread tree seeds and speed up the natural regeneration of the forest.

Researchers from the University of the Philippines Diliman-College of Science Institute of Biology (UPD-CS IB), the Norwegian Insti-



tute for Nature Research, and the UK's Newcastle University aim to embark on a systematic review and meta analysis of previous studies and observations to figure out how well artificial and natural perches work in increasing seed dispersal

A Philippine green pigeon (*Treron axillaris*) is seen eating a fig, the seeds of which will be dispersed the next time the bird defecates. Researchers are looking at the potential role of artificial and natural bird perches in this dispersal process towards restoring degraded forests.
JELAINE LIM GAN

and seedling growth on degraded areas.

"The results will synthesize available evidence on the topic, identify knowledge gaps we need filling to upscale the strategy, and inform their use in concert with

other ANR strategies," the researchers said in their paper. "The search strategy was informed through a literature scan and discussions with stakeholders and experts," they added.

The meta study aims to see if perches help bring in more seeds and seedlings in terms of numbers and types. The researchers hope to learn how to use perches better and combine them with other strategies to bring damaged forests back to life.

The results of the meta study are expected to be available in 2024.



All Phl eagles face threat of habitat destruction - UNODC

All eagle species in the Philippines face the threat of habitat destruction due to deforestation for agriculture, livestock and logging purposes, and are equally susceptible to poaching, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The UNODC cited an undercover operation in Pampanga in July last year, led by the Philippine National Police-Maritime Group (PNP-MG), that resulted in the confiscation of a Philippine serpent eagle and the arrest of several suspects who were attempting to sell the bird, which had been advertised in an online buy-and-sell group chat.

The Philippine serpent eagle is categorized as a "least concern" species, according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List.

It is important to note, however, that its population trend is on a decline, leading to its inclusion under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

"This worrisome trend mirrors the challenges faced by other eagle species in the Philippines, all of which are equally susceptible to poaching," the UNODC said.

"For instance, the Philippine eagle is listed as 'critically endangered,' and the hawk eagle is categorized as 'endangered,' both suffering from illegal wildlife trade," the agency added.

The trading and possession of wildlife, including their by-products and derivatives, are explicitly prohibited under Republic Act 9147, or the Philippine Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act.

"The law serves to safeguard the abundant natural wealth of the Philippines, a nation acknowledged as one of the world's 18 mega-diverse countries, containing between 70 and 80 percent of the world's plant and animal species," the UNODC said.

"Yet this astounding biodiversity has also helped make the Philippines a source, transit point, and destination for the illegal trafficking of poached wildlife," it added.

Through the removal of key species, the illegal wildlife trade is severely impacting ecosystems and altering predator-prey relationships, according to the agency.

"With their majestic appearance and status as symbols of strength and pride, eagles are often a target of wildlife traffickers," it said.

The UNODC also observed that traffickers mostly trade eagles to private collectors, to be kept as pets, or they are sold to zoos.

"As in this case, wildlife is often advertised online, a trend that has increased over the last years, especially during the COVID-19 pan-



demic. The anonymity of the web makes it difficult for law enforcers to identify the numerous advertisements and the real-life identities of the sellers," it said.

Philippine law enforcement agencies, however, have made significant progress in combating wildlife crime, thanks to an advisory program launched in 2021 by the UNODC, with support from the US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.

The program brings together a diverse group of agencies representing different areas of expertise and authority, including the police, customs, wildlife authorities and prosecution services.

During the advisory meetings, the agencies discuss case development for recent arrests and seizures and devise strategies to execute joint operations and investigations.

The UNODC provides agencies with information on specialized investigation techniques and mentoring aimed at sharing international best practices relevant to the Philippines.

The advisory program has contributed to more effective operations conducted by law enforcement authorities, with PNP-MG's Col. Oliver Tanseco crediting the success of the operations to the improved collaboration, information sharing and joint planning among participating agencies.

"Several of the operations were carried out jointly with our partners in the program, including the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development and several regional offices of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Coordination was seamless due to our shared membership in the Advisory Program and our regular interactions," Tanseco said.

Last year, the PNP-MG conducted a staggering 852 operations related to violations to the country's Wildlife Act, a four-fold increase from the 169 operations in 2021.

The increase was partly attributed to a higher demand for wildlife as "exotic" pets, a surge in social media posts and groups promoting the keeping of exotic wildlife as pets, and the unwitting involvement of ride-sharing and delivery companies in the transport of illegally traded wildlife.

The advisory program has also put a spotlight on the emerging and pervasive problem of wildlife trafficking.



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"Through our exposure in the Advisory Program, we have come to fully grasp the ecological imbalance caused by this illegal trade and its dire consequences on human health, development, and well-being. It's a grave matter that demands our attention and, consequently, our decisive action," Tanseco said.

The UNODC noted that successes have also been seen in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand, where the agency also runs similar advisory programs to combat wildlife and forest crime.

The UNODC further supports the capacity of these countries by facilitating access to a variety of equipment crucial for conducting operations and investigations.

The PNP-MG reported that it has transferred a rescued eagle to a wildlife rescue center, where it will undergo rehabilitation. The ultimate goal is to release this magnificent creature back into the wild once it has made a full recovery.

The Philippine serpent eagle is part of the more than 700 wildlife specimens rescued by the PNP-MG.

- Pia Lee-Brago



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Enhanced defense cooperation vital to PH security, climate change resilience

In view of geopolitical realities that are in flux, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro emphasized the need for leveraging multilateral security cooperation upon his confirmation by the Commission on Appointments last week. He said: "The intensity of the need to focus on protecting our sovereignty and sovereign rights is paramount in the global race for resources and influence." He added that this would be achieved through "politics and diplomacy, backed by a strong backbone of a strategic defense posture."

It is in this context that the annual Mutual Defense Board – Security Engagement Board meetings were conducted at Camp Aguinaldo last week and lined up for 2024 over 500 bilateral engagements that cover the entire gamut of security cooperation, information sharing, capacity building and capability development.

Projects to implement the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) were the focal points, as the partners envisioned the conduct of joint exercises and the involvement of key international allies. Recall that last June, at the sidelines of the annual Asia Security Summit in Singapore, the defense ministers of Japan, the United States, Australia, and the Philippines agreed Saturday to step up security cooperation to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific amid China's growing maritime assertiveness in the region.

There are currently nine EDCA sites in the Philippines, based at Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija; Antonio Bautista Base Air Base in Palawan; Basa Air Base in Pampanga; Lumbia Airport in Cagayan de Oro; Benito Ebuena Air Base in Cebu; Camilo Osias Naval Base in Sta. Ana, Cagayan; Lal-lo airport in

Lal-lo, Cagayan; Camp Melchor dela Cruz in Gamu, Isabela; and Balabac Island in Palawan.

Aside from strengthening the country's defense and security capabilities, fortifying the nation against the vicissitudes of global warming and climate change is an equally vital concern. Recall the massive destruction wrought by super-typhoon Haiyan in 2013 that underlined the significance of being able to tap on a reliable network of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief provided by the country's allies.

As reported in East Asia Forum, the 1,200 members of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF), was "the largest overseas deployment for the SDF, and the biggest humanitarian relief dispatched by the Japanese government in history," thanks to the unqualified support extended by then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. As reported by Relief Web, South Korea also dispatched a relief team composed of "20 medical personnel, 14 paramedics, four staff members of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and two MOFA officials via military aircraft," underlining the historic alliance of the two countries dating back to the Korean War in the early fifties when their soldiers fought side by side.

The solidarity forged with long-standing allies provides a bedrock of deterrence and defense as our Navy and Coast Guard patrol our seas and defend the country's expanded economic zone. Elevating alliances into strategic, broad-based partnerships that cover the broad fields of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief are equally vital in demonstrating that the government is capable of extending comprehensive protection to its citizenry.



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Lora Santiago
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SEPTEMBER 18, 2023





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LWUA marks 50 years of securing clean water in PH

BY VINA MEDENILLA

In the United Nations World Water Development Report 2023, published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization or Unesco in March 2023, about 2 billion people in the world did not have access to safe drinking water and 3.6 billion lacked access to safely managed sanitation.

In the Philippines, a survey by the Social Weather Stations in December 2022 revealed that only 67 percent or an estimated 17 million Filipino households had access to running or piped water.

In the opening ceremony of the sixth Edition of the Water Philippines Conference and Exposition in March this year, President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. said the Philippines was facing a water crisis and underscored the pressing need for the government to intensify its efforts to combat it.

One of the government's efforts when it came to water security was the establishment of the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA), a government-owned and controlled corporation that acted as a funding source to ensure safe, affordable and sustainable water for all Filipinos.

LWUA was created under Presidential Decree 198, also referred to as the Provincial Water Utilities Act of 1973, and was signed by the late Ferdinand Marcos Sr. on May 25, 1973. It played a critical role in promoting and supervising the development of water supply systems in provincial cities and municipalities outside Metro Manila.

What a water district is

Under LWUA, there have been so-called water districts (WD). A WD functioned as

a local corporate entity that supervised and administered water supply systems and sanitation systems in one or more provincial cities or municipalities.

The establishment of a WD was voluntary, and it followed a rigorous process to ensure compliance with legal standards and requirements. As of this writing, there were about 532 operational local WDs across 648 cities and municipalities throughout the Philippines.

In the Sunshine Media Network International or SMNI "Business and Politics" program that is hosted by The Manila Times Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Dante "Klink" Ang 2nd, LWUA Administrator Vicente "Vince" Homer Revil said the institution's role was to ensure there was sufficient clean water for Filipinos by financing water-related projects of WDs, helping them with the technical and engineering services and making sure that all WDs were compliant with national laws in providing safe and potable water to areas or communities it serves.

LWUA, together with the WDs, have served 5.4 million households that was equivalent to roughly 22.3 million individuals so far.

There were three levels of water service coverage in the Philippines. Level 1 was the point source such as wells, level 2 was the communal faucet and level 3 was the

Local Water Utilities Administration LWUA50 Anniversary

household connection. Under level 3, LWUA and WDs had extended services to 23 percent of the population, equating to 22.3 million out of 38.3 million residents in the countryside that fell in this category.

Loans

LWUA positioned itself as the lending institution, equipped with financial, technical and institutional development expertise necessary to ensure a water district's project generated a return on investment.

WDs had access to four loan windows, offered by LWUA. Loan window 1 was for individual household connections and communal faucet projects, focusing on comprehensive development, and repair or rehabilitation of both new and preexisting water supply systems. Projects under loan window 2 included activities related to generating new service connections, watershed management and allocating special loans for emergency purposes. Loan window 3, on the other hand, was open for projects aimed at upgrading water supply infrastructure or facilitating commercial operations. Lastly, loan window 4 was dedicated to initiatives for project development and efficiency improvement.

An additional loan window has also been introduced, and it was specially open for financing water district expansion projects, well drilling and water source development.

When it came to loan approvals, Revil noted that while LWUA offered support to all water districts, there were limitations on available funds. Consequently, the institution had set priority areas for efficient allocation of resources.

LWUA mainly prioritized loans intended for the development of WDs, the expansion of districts' service coverage, the bolstering of district operations' viability and the enforcement of WDs' compliance with the law.

Revil stressed that, in general, the WDs were performing well financially, given that adequate capital was a prerequisite for the establishment, sustainability and expansion of each district.

Moreover, LWUA received monthly reports from WDs, allowing the agency to track the districts' water sources, operational updates and financial performance.

Setting standards for long-term success

The LWUA administrator went on to explain that LWUA has established standards for WDs to attain profitability and ensure their long-term viability.

He said WDs must have sufficient sources of water; must allocate their capital wisely; must have enough transmission lines directly to households; must lessen their nonrevenue water and most importantly, the water they offered must be safe and healthy through conducting proper treatment of their water sources.

Revil also mentioned that the government worked toward a water-secure Philippines, drawing inspiration from South Korea's thriving water system.

He said: "South Korea has a very strong institution in terms of water development. What they did [was] they focused their resources on five rivers. By focusing on water development [through] building dams, weirs and other catchment basins, they are now able to provide clean water to about 98 percent of the population of South Korea."

Data by the United Nations Children's Fund or Unicef has also shown that 99.28 percent of South Korea's population used safely managed drinking water services in 2022.

This was what the government envisioned for the Philippines, said Revil. In line with this, he revealed the government planned to optimally develop river basins throughout the country such as the Pampanga river basin in Central Luzon, two other basins in Mindanao, and others in Cagayan and Bicol to ensure water supply. The government also did this to build more water impoundments for proper domestic use of rivers and to boost water security.

"We have a lot of river basins in our country. And we have identified a lot of rivers that can be the source of development for our water supply," Revil added.

Water use

Water scarcity remained to be a persistent issue in many areas of the Philippines. Some water supplies were still sourced from groundwater or aquifers, particularly in remote areas without access to rivers, lakes and other surface water.

Revil further explained: "In our country, we only invest in flood control. We only [view] water as a calamity during rains or



Local Water Utilities Administration Administrator (LWUA) Vicente "Vince" Homer Revil, Rep. Jose "Bong" Teves and LWUA Chairman Ronnie Ong open the exhibit as part of LWUA's 50th anniversary celebration on Sept. 4, 2023. PHOTO BY MIKE DE JUAN

as a natural disaster. We do not use it as a resource. It should be a resource for us. [We should] look at how we treat water. When it rains in other countries, they put catchment basins or infrastructure for that to ensure there are reservoirs."

If our water supply came from surface water, President Marcos said, we wouldn't have to dig wells that negatively impacted our land's water table, agriculture, infrastructure and more.

With this purpose in mind, LWUA made it a point that water in communities outside Metro Manila was transmitted through pipelines, treated and directly served to the households.

Water Resources Management Office

In his second State of the Nation Address, President Marcos said the government was giving a "special focus" on water security by making sure the water sector's programs and projects were well-coordinated, centralized and carried out in a systematic manner.

Last April 27, 2023, Marcos also signed Executive Order (EO) 22, which administered the creation of a Water Resources Management Office (WRMO) under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

As stated in the EO, this office was tasked to specifically address the challenges in the management of the country's water resources brought about by "fragmented water and sanitation sector, increasing demand for water due to population and economic growth, [impact] of climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic, lack of adequate infrastructure leading to uneven distribution of water resources and inconsistent government regulations."

The WRMO carried the responsibility of integrating and harmonizing all government policies, programs and projects of relevant agencies in the water resource sector to ensure availability, accessibility and affordability of water.

Attached to this office were

government agencies LWUA and its WDs, National Water Resources Board (NWRB), Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, and Laguna Lake Development Authority.

Patubig sa Buong Bayan at Mamamayan project

In response to the President's call to focus and heighten efforts on water security, LWUA has recently introduced its Patubig sa Buong Bayan at Mamamayan (PBBM) legacy project. This undertaking was to ensure efficient, sustainable and continuous water services for all Filipinos.

In the next 5 years, the PBBM program aimed to complete 738 water supply projects and 43 sanitation projects. This project was primarily built for the expansion of WDs' service coverage in order to reach more cities or municipalities with no WDs and to operationalize WDs that did not have capacity to sustain their operations.

By the end of 2025, Revil said this program was expected to serve over 7.9 million households, marking a 45-percent increase from 5.4 million in 2022. The joint projects of LWUA and WDs were also expected to be a boon to 1.8 million households upon the program's completion.

The PBBM program was also projected to provide safe and affordable drinking water to 670,000 additional households in the coming years.

Aside from the PBBM project, LWUA has also launched the Save Water Advocacy earlier this year that aimed to promote water conservation in every household.

When asked about the proposed Department of Water, which could possibly duplicate the role of the NWRB, Revil said he was confident that economic managers would study the functions of it.

LWUA highlighted its past and recent achievements with an exhibition that marked the start of its 50th anniversary celebration on September 4. The main celebration took place at the Manila Hotel on Sept. 15, 2023.



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THE PHILIPPINE STAR

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EDITOR: DULCE A. SANCHEZ

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Thick smog obscures the view of buildings in Mandaluyong City at around 10 a.m. yesterday. The Department of Health has advised the public to wear masks in areas affected by smog to protect themselves from air pollutants.

JESSE BUSTOS



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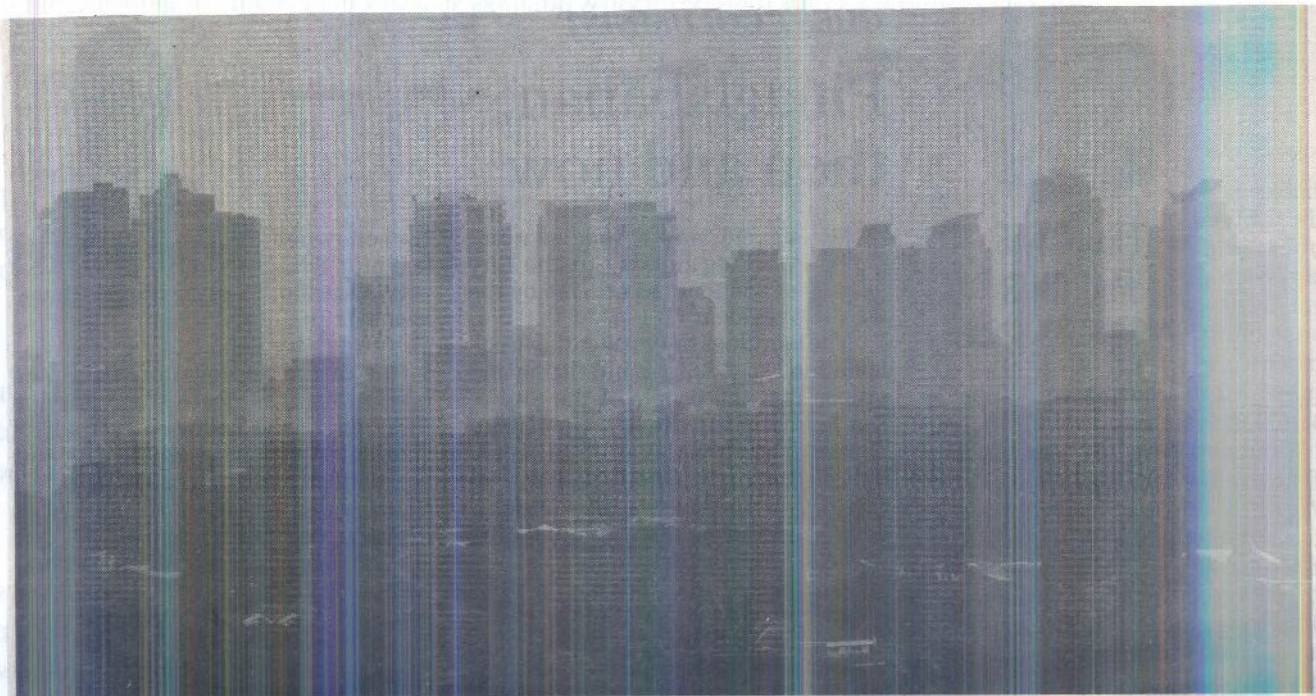
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METRO MANILA SMOG — Thick smog envelops the skyline of Metro Manila on Sunday, Sept. 17, 2023. Smog is toxic haze primarily composed of pollutants caused by urbanization and industrialization. (Mark Balmores)

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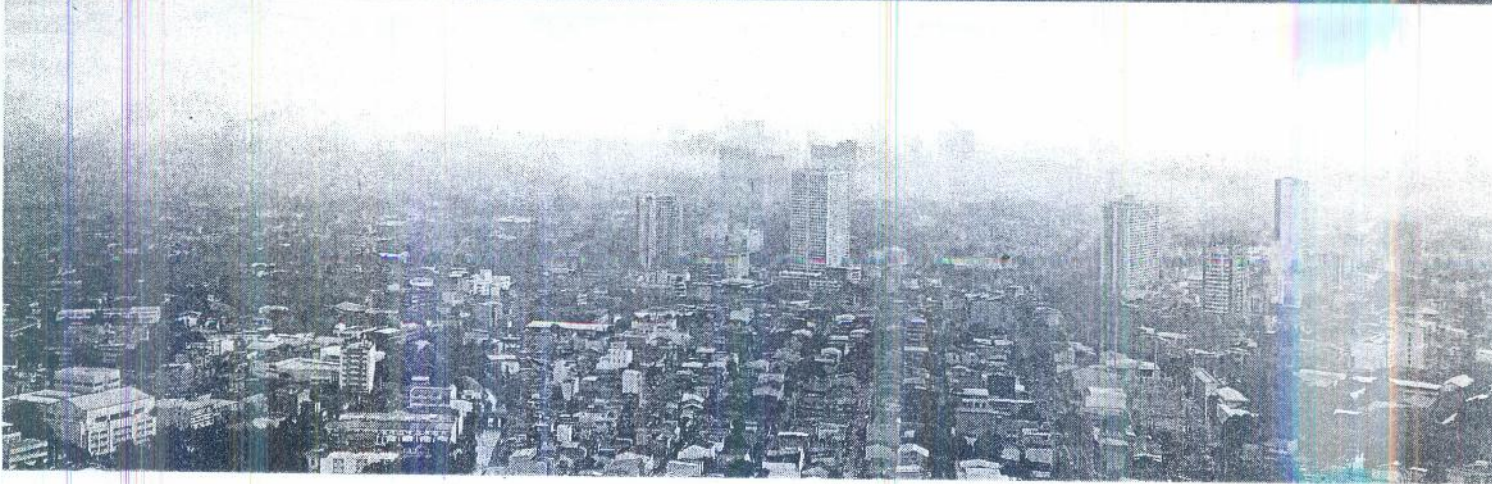
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SMOG IN THE CITY Smog hangs over the metropolis on Sunday. The state weather bureau said it was caused by thermal inversion or the presence of warmer air on top of colder air mass near the ground, preventing pollutants from disappearing. In a rare good news for the environment, a United Nations report confirmed earlier this year that the hole in the ozone layer that has been threatening Earth since the 1980s is shrinking. —GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE



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Mayon logs more volcanic tremors

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) yesterday detected an increase in volcanic tremor events in Mayon Volcano in Albay.

In its latest bulletin, Phivolcs reported that Mayon Volcano exhibited 12 volcanic tremors, nine more than September 16.

Mayon showed a slow effusion of lava flow from the crater with lengths of 2.8 kilometers (kms) in

Mi-is (south), 3.4 kms in Bonga (southeastern), and 1.1 kms in Basud gullies, and four kms of lava collapse from the crater.

Phivolcs also monitored 147 rockfall and five Pyroclastic Density Current (PDC) events, produced 1,551 tons of sulfur dioxide per day, and spewed a 400-meter tall plume that drifted west.

Phivolcs said that Mayon remains on Alert Level 3 (intensified or

magmatic unrest).

It said entry within a six-km radius Permanent Danger Zone (PDZ) is still prohibited and pilots of any aircraft are barred from flying close to the volcano, due to possible hazards like rockfalls, landslides, or avalanches, ballistic fragments, lava flows and lava fountaining, pyroclastic density currents, moderate-sized explosions, and lahar during heavy and prolonged rainfall. (Sonny Daanoy)