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PAGE

OPINION
 LOWER

FEATURE
 STORY

BANNER
 STORY

EDITORIAL

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09-19-23

TITLE

PAGE

DATE

SM's Biggest Haul at the 38th International Coastal Clean Up: 75,000 Kilos of Trash Collected By Over 17,000 Volunteers Across 15 SM Malls



From L to R: Geronimo Reyes, International Coastal Cleanup Philippines Project Head; Orliber D. Paula, SM Estates SAVP; Joaquin San Agustin, SM Supermalls SVP Marketing; Atty. Michael Drake P. Matias, DENR-NCR OIC, Regional Executive Director; Jessica Bianca T. Sy, SM Prime Holdings, Inc. Project Director AVP; Hon. Emi Rubiano-Callixto, Mayor of Pasay City; Atty. Ignatius Loyola Rodriguez, DENR Undersecretary for Special Concerns and Legislative Affairs; Perkin Bentley So, SM Supermalls SAVP- Mall Operations

▶ 5

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

M Cares continues to drive active participation in ocean conservation by taking part once again in this year's International Coastal Cleanup Day last September 18, 2023, Saturday.

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 17,026 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 rawwater harvesting, highlights the importance of community initiatives 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 Engr. Liza B. Sierfo. "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 avenue for volunteers to work together towards a cleaner, greener future.



SM City Batang clean coastal barangays by the Batang National and Nature Park



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



Coastal barangays by Fuente Princesa Bay clean up with SM City Fuente Princesa



SM City Roxas joins the activity at Bayway Beach



Gathering over 17,000 volunteers from various sectors, coastal cleanups are part of SM Cares' advocacies that champion social inclusion and care for the environment.



SM City Batang clean coastal barangays by the Batang National and Nature Park



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



SM City Roxas joins the activity at Bayway Beach



SM City Tuguegarao & SM City Zamboanga clean coastal barangays by the Batang National and Nature Park



City Cebu clean Kindlumsion River by SVP



SM City Zamboanga clean coastal barangays by the Batang National and Nature Park



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SM City Zamboanga clean coastal barangays by the Batang National and Nature Park



TITLE: _____

PAGE _____

DATE _____

Sen. Tolentino: Reef destruction may be prelude to reclamation

BY BUTCH FERNANDEZ

[@butchfBM](#)

THE reported destruction and hauling off of corals at Rozul Reef that is part of the West Philippine Sea (WPS) may be part of a bigger and long-term plan by China, which has deployed once again dozens of boats in the area, according to Senator Francis Tolentino.

These activities may be a prelude to a grand reclamation plan and the construction of artificial islands, as China has done in other parts of the WPS, he said.

When there are no more corals, the reclamation may proceed at full speed, Tolentino explained.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) on Monday confirmed a weekend military report of severe damage in Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal, caused by the Chinese Maritime Militia. Rozul Reef is at the northern part of Ayungin Shoal, site of recent face-offs between PCG and the Chinese Coast Guard and militia ships trying to block Philippine resupply missions for soldiers at the BRP Sierra Madre, the iconic Philippine sentinel in the WPS.

China had the past two decades built several artificial islands in the WPS where it erected airports and military facilities.

Tolentino, chairman of the Senate committee on maritime and admiralty zones, had conducted his panel's first hearing last week, where he and several senators stressed the significance of setting such clear-cut zones in order to strengthen the security cluster's efforts to protect Philippine rights over its exclusive economic zone.

Tolentino said the Philippine government should not lose time in mounting a strong complaint over the destruction and seizure of the corals and other precious marine resources, acts that violate the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

(UNCLOS), he said.

The government can also seek compensation for damage to the natural resources.

The complaint may be lodged with the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea or ITLOS, or the International Court of Justice. Manila may also seek arbitration, said Tolentino, a noted lawyer.

The senator announced he would call about four more hearings on the proposed Philippine maritime zone law. The outcome of such is a new map that will more clearly lay down the jurisdiction and territory of the Philippines in the WPS areas being claimed by other countries.

Authorities earlier said this new map is timely, given China's recent unveiling of its 10-dash-line map, which expanded the controversial nine-dash-line map. The disclosure was met with protests from several countries, notably India.

Damage assessment

THE Marcos administration should conduct further damage assessment on corals in the Rozul Reef (Iroquios) in the WPS amid reports of possible cases of coral harvesting in the area.

The Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) said, "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," Pamalakaya vice chairman for Luzon Bobby Roldan said in a statement.

He said the Marcos administration should take the 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.

With Jonathan L. Mayuga



PCG confirms 'severe' reef damage in 2 WPS features

By REX ANTHONY NAVAL

THE Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) on Monday confirmed earlier military reports that revealed severe damage in Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal caused by the Chinese Maritime Militia (CMM).

"The PCG fully supports and confirms the report released by the Armed Forces of the Philippines Western Command [Wescom], exposing the severe damage inflicted upon the marine environment and coral reef in the seabed of Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal," Coast Guard spokesperson Commodore Jay Tarriela said in his X account (formerly Twitter).

He also revealed that from August 9 to September 11 this year, the PCG monitored an average presence of approximately 33 CMM vessels in the vicinity of Rozul Reef and another 15 in Escoda Shoal.

"Maritime patrols carried out during the same period by BRP Sindangan [MRRV-4407] and BRP Cabra [MRRV-4409] further validated the presence of these CMMs in these West Philippine Sea [WPS] features," Tarriela said.

In the same period, the PCG launched missions to conduct extensive underwater surveys of the seabed in both Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal.

"The results of these surveys showed that the marine ecosystem in the subject WPS features appeared lifeless, with minimal to no signs of life. Moreover, the surveys conducted 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," Tarriela noted.

He added the presence of crushed corals suggested a potential act of dumping, possibly involving the same dead corals that were previously processed and cleaned before being returned to the seabed.

"The continued swarming for an indiscriminate illegal and destructive fishing activities of the CMM in Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal may have directly caused the degradation and destruction of the marine environment in the WPS features. The PCG emphasizes the importance of protecting and preserving our

marine environment, which plays a crucial role in sustaining marine life and supporting local communities," he stressed.

Earlier, Wescom air patrols on September 8 and 9 revealed a concerning resurgence of Chinese swarming activity in the WPS.

"Wescom's comprehensive assessment of the air patrols has highlighted three areas experiencing heightened CN [Chinese] swarming activity. Rozul [Iroquois] Reef emerged as the most prominent location, with 23 CFVs [Chinese fishing vessels] observed. Additional swarming was observed in Escoda [Sabina] Shoal, where five CFVs were present, and in Baragatan [Nare] Bank, with two CFVs recorded."

Wescom said the increased presence of CFVs raises concerns regarding the potential implications for Philippines' maritime security, fisheries conservation, territorial integrity, and preservation of the marine environment.

It added that these activities have been a source of tension in the WPS and have contributed to instability in the region.

"Furthermore, a previous incident reported by the Philippine Navy [on] August 24 revealed that 33 CFVs were spotted in Rozul [Iroquois] Reef during a routine air patrol. Rozul Reef is located within the country's exclusive economic zone [EEZ] and continental shelf, making this intrusion a violation of Philippine sovereign rights and jurisdiction. Previous swarming incidents in the area have also been followed by reports of massive coral harvesting, further raising concerns about their harmful environmental impact," Wescom said.

The air patrol also reported swarming activity in Escoda [Sabina] Shoal, which is also located within the Philippine EEZ and serves as a marker for the approach to Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal.

This is where unauthorized Chinese shadowing of Philippine watercraft typically occurs.

"The repeated swarming incidents in both Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal emphasize the continuous violation of Philippine sovereign rights and jurisdiction in its western border," Wescom noted.



1/2

Fish catch down 70%; destruction of corals blamed

By BELLA CARIASO

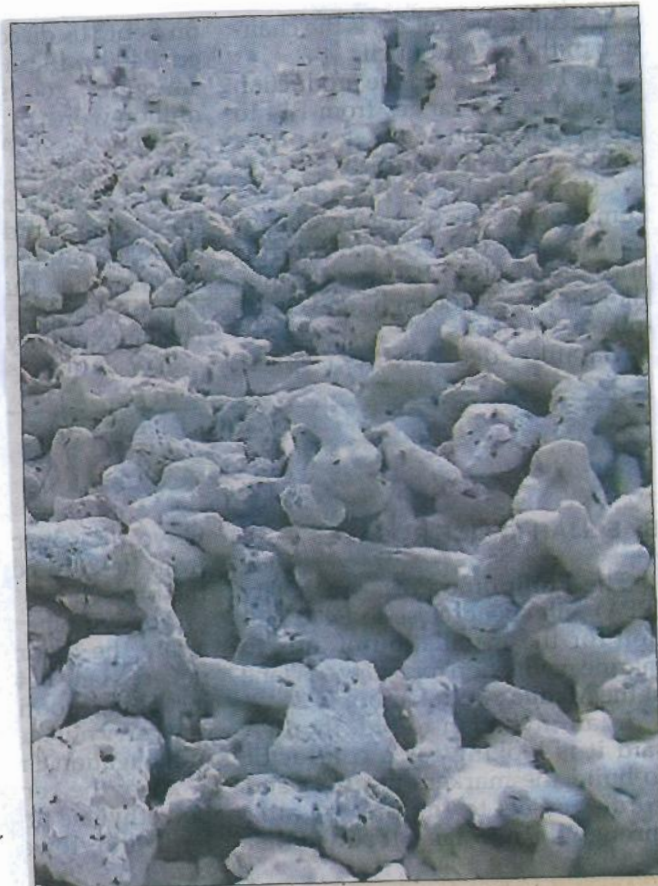
Fish catch in the West Philippine Sea has gone down by 70 percent since 2020, and further decline is expected amid reports of massive poaching of corals by the Chinese, a militant fishers' group warned yesterday.

Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) national chairman Fernando Hicap raised the warning in a radio interview, in the wake of reports of plunder of corals in Rozul Reef, believed perpetrated by the Chinese. Corals are breeding grounds for marine life.

Reports from fisherfolk – particularly from Zambales – have indicated 70 percent decline in fish catch “amid the illegal activities of Chinese fishing vessels,” Hicap said.

He noted that the drop began after the standoff in Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal in 2012 when Chinese vessels stopped Philippine Navy personnel from apprehending a Chinese fishing boat carrying an illegal cargo of endangered corals, baby sharks and giant clams. The Chinese have never left

Turn to Page 4



Screengrab from a Philippine Coast Guard underwater survey video shows the damaged coral bed in Escoda (Sabina) Shoal, which appears to have minimal to no signs of life.



Fish From Page 1

since then.

"Since after the standoff... Chinese fishing vessels have not left the area. The decline in the fish catch started as the Filipino fishers were no longer free to fish in the West Philippine Sea," Hicap added.

"They cannot enter the West Philippine Sea. They were forced to leave the area," he said.

Hicap said the untrammelled harvesting of corals by the Chinese would further reduce fish production and exacerbate the situation for Filipino fisherfolk.

"If there are no corals, there will be no source of food for the fish. This will result in a shortage in the supply of fish in the country as a whole," he warned.

Hicap called on President Marcos to order concerned agencies to determine the extent of the damage to coral reefs in the West Philippine Sea as well as demand due compensation from China.

"We need to determine the extent of the damage so that we will be able to rehabilitate the affected areas and demand China to pay for the damage of the coral reefs," he said.

Vice Admiral Alberto Carlos, commander of the Armed Forces of the Philippines Western Command, revealed on Saturday the plunder of corals in Rozul Reef that he said may have been perpetrated by the Chinese.

The poaching of corals in Rozul Reef left a wide swath of the sea floor strewn with debris, Carlos said at a briefing.

He said the Chinese may have started harvesting the corals in July when their boats swarmed the land feature.

Survey

West Philippine Sea-Philippine Coast Guard (WPS-PCG) spokesman Commodore Jay Tarriela said they would be conducting another underwater survey within the week to further assess the conditions of corals in Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal, with the help of marine scientists from the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute.

"We would do another underwater survey this week with our vessels and probably reach out to the UP-MSI to help in figuring out what is the main reason why these corals were dumped in a particular area. We would also investigate why all of a sudden there is no more life form in the seabed of these two shoals," Tarriela said.

He added that the National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea has yet to decide if they would also seek help from marine scientists from other countries.

"As far as the PCG is concerned, based on the video that we released, there is deliberate dumping of crushed and processed corals. Until now it is puzzling what is the motivation of whoever dumped those crushed corals," Tarriela added.

The PCG has yet to identify the culprit behind the destruction of the corals, but stressed that circumstantial evidence points to the Chinese.

"The continued swarming for indiscriminate illegal and destructive fishing activities of the Chinese Maritime Militia (CMM) in Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal may have directly caused the degradation and destruction of the marine environment in the WPS features," the PCG said.

From Aug. 9 to Sept. 11, the PCG monitored an average of 33 CMM vessels in the vicinity of Rozul

Reef and 15 CMM vessels in Escoda Reef.

The BRP *Sindangan* and BRP *Cabra* were patrolling the area.

During the period, the PCG conducted underwater surveys of the seabed in the two areas.

"The results of these surveys showed that the marine ecosystem in the subject WPS features appeared lifeless, with minimal to no signs of life. Moreover, the surveys conducted 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," he said.

"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," the Coast Guard official added.

New reclamation?

On concerns raised by Sen. Francis Tolentino that the harvesting of the corals could be a prelude to reclamation, Tarriela said, "That is something that we still do not know. That is the reason why we want to reach out to marine scientists to at least understand the motivation for the dumping."

Tolentino chairs the Senate special committee on maritime and admiralty zones.

Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri described China's actions in the West Philippine Sea as "annoying."

"You know it takes about 100 years to be able to have a very healthy ecosystem and coral reef and that is the fishing," Zubiri added. "That's the breeding ground for more of the seagoing fish so all the oceanic fish are born there and come out and become big tuna and big fish.

"This is a wanton destruction of our future food security areas and why do they need to destroy it? Why do they need to take these coral reefs? Is it because they use it for decorative value in China or make it into jewelry because the red corals, those that are very rare and protected," he pointed out.

Japan expresses alarm

Japan's top diplomat has branded as "alarming" reports of China's plunder of corals in Rozul Reef near Palawan.

"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," Japanese Ambassador Kazuhiko Koshikawa said in a post on social media platform X, formerly Twitter.

But in its own post on X, the Chinese embassy dismissed the report as disinformation and raised anew Japan's release of treated radioactive wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant.

"People should be alarmed by the spreading of such disinformation. Oceans are indeed the lifeblood of our planet. So stop the release of contaminated nuclear water from Fukushima," the Chinese embassy said.

Koshikawa earlier said it was "unforgivable" to take advantage of harmful rumors and malicious fake news about the discharge of treated radioactive wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant.

He said Japan is striving to recover from the Fukushima disaster while maintaining a high level of transparency based on scientific evidence.

- With Evelyn Macairan, Cecille Suerte Felipe, Pia Lee-Brago



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09-19-23

TITLE: _____

1/2

PAGE _____

DATE _____

Senators warn of China ‘playbook’: Reef damage, then reclamation

**By Marlon Ramos
and Frances Mangosing**
@Team_Inquirer

Senators on Monday said the destruction of coral reefs in Escoda (Sabina) Shoal could be a portent of things to come, including the possibility of reclamation activities by China in Philippine waters.

Also on Monday, a maritime law expert warned of a collapse of the country’s fisheries in the West Philippine Sea if damage to marine life continues.

Asked if the destruction of seabed in the West Philippine Sea, as reported by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) on Sunday, could be in preparation for reclamation activities by China, Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri said, “That’s possible.”

“That has been their guidebook and playbook since the beginning. They want to destroy an area first and then they reclaim it. That’s why we have to remain vigilant,” he told the Inquirer in an interview, noting that China’s illegal structures in the West Philippine Sea followed its decimation of marine resources.

Sen. Francis Tolentino shared Zubiri’s suspicion, noting

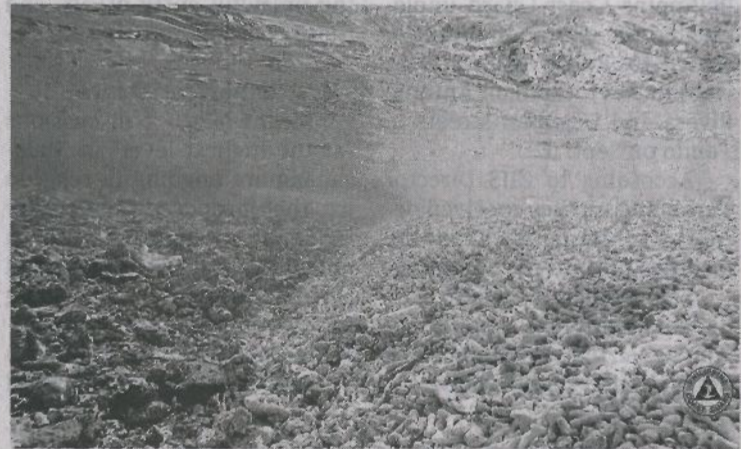
that Escoda Shoal’s proximity to Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal and Palawan province made it important to conduct patrols in the country’s 370-kilometer exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Tolentino on Monday shared with reporters several underwater photos of the area showing piles of damaged corals and the discoloration of the seabed.

“Aside from harvesting and damaging the corals, they may have other plans,” said the vice chair of the Senate foreign relations committee. “The destruction of the corals could be a prelude to reclamation.”

The Department of Foreign Affairs, meanwhile, in a statement late Monday said: “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 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.”

It added: “We, therefore, call on everyone concerned to act responsibly and cease all activities



SORRY SIGHT A recent survey conducted by the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) in Escoda (Sabina) Shoal in the West Philippine Sea shows the destruction of the coral bed in the area, which has been blamed on the Chinese. —PHOTO COURTESY OF PCG

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.”

Budget for PCG, Navy

Zubiri assured the PCG and the Philippine Navy that they would receive a bigger slice of the government’s budget for 2024.

“[Next year’s] budget is critical. This is the time that we have

to put our money where our mouth is. This is the time that we need to increase the budget for [the acquisition of] ships, patrol crafts and marine research centers,” the Senate leader said, adding that his chamber is committed to providing as much as P600 million to set up marine radio stations in several coastal communities in the country.

Sen. Ronald dela Rosa said the government should conduct a scientific assessment to deter-



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INQUIRER

A4
PAGE

UPPER
 LOWER

PAGE 1
STORY

BANNER
STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

09-19-23

TITLE: Senators.....

2/
2

PAGE

DATE

mine the actual damage to the area. The Coast Guard has time and again reported the presence of Chinese vessels in waters surrounding these shoals.

"We should keep exposing the evil deeds they have done [in our territorial waters] so that the whole world will know," Dela Rosa said.

Sen. Jingoy Estrada, chair of the Senate national defense committee, urged the appropriate state agencies to work together in raising "awareness and consciousness on maritime and archipelagic issues and concerns [and on] our national sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Intrusions beyond WPS

Meanwhile, University of the Philippines (UP) law professor Jay Batongbacal, in a television interview, said the marine destruction in the West Philippine Sea would be a "huge blow" to the country's food security, since these waters contribute 27 to 30 percent of the country's capture fisheries, or the harvesting of marine life there.

"The worst-case scenario for us, as a country that depends on marine resources in the West Philippine Sea, is that

this will lead to the collapse of the fisheries in that area," he told CNN Philippines.

"The bigger threat there is that if this area collapses, the sustainability of other areas, such as the inter-island waters of the Philippines to which the West Philippine Sea is ecologically and biologically connected, that will also suffer," he added.

Batongbacal, the director of the UP Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea, warned of intrusions beyond the West Philippine Sea once this area is depleted of resources.

"We could see them intruding even more frequently into the Sulu Sea and into the waters of [the] Visayas, looking for these resources. Over the longer term, that is the bigger environmental and ecological threat to us," he pointed out.

Apart from the West Philippine Sea, there have been earlier reports of China's interest in waters east of Luzon, notably the area of Philippine Rise.

Batongbacal said only China was capable of such activities, as it did before in other reefs for their artificial island building. —WITH A REPORT FROM TINA G.

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PAGE UPPER
 LOWER
PAGE 1
STORY
BANNER
STORY
EDITORIAL
CARTOON

09-19-23

TITLE: _____

1/2

PAGE _____

DATE _____

Escoda Shoal appears lifeless; massive marine ecosystem destruction noted

By MARTIN SADONGDONG

Like at Rozul (Iroquios) Reef, marine environment in the seabed of Escoda (Sabina) Shoal was severely damaged to the extent that it appeared "lifeless," amid the continued swarming of Chinese maritime militia (CMM)

vessels in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

Commodore Jay Tarriela, PCG spokesperson for WPS, revealed this on Monday, Sept. 18, as he confirmed a report earlier released by the Palawan-based Western Command (WesCom) of the Armed Forces of the Philip-

pines (AFP) that CMM vessels may have been responsible in the massive destruction of coral reef in WPS features.

"The Philippine Coast Guard fully supports and confirms the report released by the Armed Forces of the Philippines Western Command, ex- ▶ 7



Escoda Shoal appears lifeless; massive marine ecosystem destruction noted ◀

posing the severe damage inflicted upon the marine environment and coral reef in the seabed of Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal," Tarriela said.

Both Escoda Shoal and the Rozul Reef are located in the WPS. Escoda Shoal is an atoll located northeast of Kalayaan Island Group (Spratly Islands) in Palawan while Rozul Reef is located at the southern end of Recto (Reed) Bank in the northeastern portion of Kalayaan Island Group.

According to Tarriela, the PCG monitored an average of 33 CMM vessels in the vicinity waters of Rozul Reef and 15 CMM vessels in Escoda Shoal from Aug. 9 to Sept. 11.

"During the same period, the PCG launched missions to conduct extensive underwater surveys of the seabed in both Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal. The results of these surveys showed that the marine ecosystem in the subject WPS features appeared lifeless, with minimal to no signs of life," he said.

"Moreover, the surveys conducted at 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," he continued.

The PCG official said the presence of crushed corals in Escoda Shoal "strongly" suggested a "potential act of dumping" using the same dead corals that were processed and cleaned by the CMM vessels.

"The continued swarming for an indiscriminate illegal and destructive fishing activities of the Chinese maritime militia in Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal may have directly caused the degradation and destruction of the marine environment in the WPS features," Tarriela said.

Prior to this, WesCom commander Vice Admiral Alberto Carlos had said that they have observed a resurgence of CMM vessels in Rozul Reef in August, a month after they drove away around 50 vessels in the area.

Philippine Navy divers then conducted an underwater survey in Rozul Reef and found out that the coral reef in its seabed was already gone.

Tarriela emphasized the importance of protecting and preserving the marine environment in the WPS as he said it plays a crucial role in sustaining marine life and supporting local communities in the area.

Prelude to reclamation?

Sen. Francis Tolentino believes there's something deeper in China's coral harvesting endeavors in Iroquios or Rozul Reef in the West Philippine Sea saying it might be a prelude to reclamation.

"May iba pang plano siguro po ryan, di lang 'yong pagkuha ng corals at pagdurog nito. Iyong pagpatay kasi ng corals ay prelude sa isang bagay—pag pinatay mo iyon, pwede ka nang mag-reclaim (Perhaps there's a different plan there, not just harvesting and destroying corals. Destroying corals is a prelude to something—if you kill it, you can reclaim)," Tolentino said in an interview on GMA's Unang Hirit on Monday, Sept. 18.

Tolentino, who chairs the Senate Special Committee on Maritime and Admiralty Zones, also noted that the said harvesting violates the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

"Kung magfa-file po tayo ng claim, damages, dapat sa isang tribunal na recognized ng UNCLOS, United Nations (If we will file a claim or damages, it has to be in a tribunal recognized by the UNCLOS)," he said.

Tolentino is currently crafting the Philippine Maritime Zone Law that he envisions to be the country's legal basis for its territorial dispute.

"Iyon po ang kinukutya sa atin ng China, 'Nagke-claim kayo rito, wala naman kayong maritime zone law (That's what China's insulting us with, 'You are claiming here, but you don't have a maritime zone law),' he said.

Meanwhile, opposition Sen. Risa Hontiveros called for a Senate resolution and investigation on the issue.

"This would not be the first time na nag-environmental degradation ang Tsina sa ating dagat (that China committed environmental degradation of our seas)," Hontiveros pointed out. "They also dredged our sea floor to invent their artificial islands, militarize them, within the West Philippine

Sea and our exclusive economic zone (EEZ), para i-claim na teritoryo nila (to claim that it is part of their territory)."

Hontiveros also recalled that China still owes the Philippines ₱800 billion for the destruction of the country's natural resources due to its activities in the West Philippine Sea.

"Salamat sa Armed Forces of the Philippines sa pagbunyag nito. I think it deserves an investigation, at idagdag natin sa humahabang litsahan ng utang ng Tsina sa ating bansa (We thank the AFP for exposing this issue. I think it deserves an investigation and we need to add this to the list of what China owes our country," the senator said.

Japan, China trade raps

With these developments, the Japanese Embassy in Manila has expressed concern over the extensive maritime damage in the area frequented by the Chinese militia in the West Philippine Sea—a move that also triggered the Chinese embassy in the country to respond.

A tirade from the Chinese embassy came after the Japanese embassy said it was a "very alarming news" to learn that a large number corals in the Rozul Reef were harvested.

"Our oceans are the lifeblood of our plant, and coral reefs are its colorful heartbeat. Let's preserve and protect these vital ecosystems for generations to come," the official X (formerly Twitter) account of Japanese envoy Koshikawa Kazuhiko said.

The Chinese embassy did not let Koshikawa's comment pass.

Shortly after the Japanese's envoy's post, it said "people should be alarmed by the spreading of such disinformation."

Agreeing that "oceans are indeed the lifeblood of our planet," the Chinese embassy also urged Japan to "stop the release of contaminated water from Fukushima."

China has been a vocal opposition of Tokyo's release its treated radioactive water into the waters—a move already greenlighted by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). (With reports from Dhel Nazario, Hannah Torregosa, and Joseph Pedrajas)



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PAGE

UPPER

LOWER

PAGE 1

STORY

BANNER

STORY

EDITORIAL

CARTOON

09-19-23

TITLE: _____

PAGE 1/2

DATE

China, Japan envoys spar over coral harvesting

THE Chinese Embassy in Manila has reacted sharply to concerns by the Japanese ambassador over the reported harvesting of coral in the West Philippine Sea.

Japan's Ambassador Koshikawa Kazuhiko on Sunday described as "very alarming news" the Armed Forces of the Philippines Western Command (Wescom)

report suspecting China of harvesting coral in Rozul Reef in the West Philippine Sea.

"Our oceans are the lifeblood of our planet, and coral reefs are its colorful heartbeats. Let's preserve and protect these vital ecosystems for generations to come," Koshikawa wrote on X (formerly Twitter) on Sunday.

Replying to Koshikawa's post, the Chinese Embassy wrote, "People should be alarmed by the spreading of such disinformation."

"Oceans are indeed the lifeblood of our planet. So stop the release of contaminated nuclear water from Fukushima,"

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2/2

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China, Japan envoys

the embassy said, and even tagged Koshikawa in its post.

In an apparent riposte to the Chinese Embassy's tirade, Koshikawa on Monday shared a research conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) on China's coral harvesting operations.

The MoFA noted that "since mid-September 2014, multiple vessels believed to be Chinese coral vessels have been found in the waters near the Ogasawara Islands."

China, on the other hand, has strongly opposed Japan's release last August 23 into the Pacific Ocean of "nuclear contaminated water" from the tsunami-disabled Fukushima nuclear plant. Japan, however, countered that the wastewater had been properly treated.

Koshikawa said that last July 4, the International Atomic Energy Agency published a comprehensive report which stated that other embassies in Manila have reacted to the coral harvesting controversy.

Australian Ambassador Hae Yu has said Canberra, through the Australian Institute of Marine Science, "is pleased to be partnering with the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development to provide coral reef monitoring training and equipment in Palawan."

"This is helping to protect invaluable marine resources in the Philippines for current and future generations," Yu wrote on X.

The British Embassy said the United Kingdom "stands strong with the Philippines in the global effort to safeguard 30 percent of the world's land and ocean biodiversity by 2030."

It added that Britain had "joined over 190 countries that have pledged to this global conservation commitment."

The reported coral harvesting in Rozul Reef is among the recent incidents that point to the increasing Chinese activity in the West Philippine Sea.

China has already deployed a flotilla of fishing vessels,

backed by coast guard ships, in aggressively asserting its presence in the West Philippine Sea, ignoring calls by Asean and European leaders to abide by United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos), which gives the Philippines sovereign rights over its 200 nautical miles exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

"The irresponsible and aggressive actions of China Coast Guard is leading China to global isolation," Armed Forces spokesman Col. Medel Aguilar has said.

Nearly 400 vessels have massed in the West Philippine Sea, a number of them in Sabina Shoal and Rozul Reef, collecting coral and conducting reclamation operations.

"While many countries have already expressed their support to our position, no country has ever come forward to openly support China's claim over WPS (West Philippine Sea)," Aguilar said.

During the recent roundtable discussion in Singapore, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. echoed his call to the region's leaders to stop unilateral and assertive action that could further fuel tensions in the South China Sea.

Without mentioning China, the President expressed concern over actions which he said violated international law, including the 1982 Unclos.

Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Gen. Romeo Brawner Jr. has said several countries have expressed interest in conducting joint patrols with the Philippines in the West Philippine Sea as a deterrent against China's aggressive acts.

Sixteen European nations have signed a joint statement supporting the Philippines fight for sovereignty in the West Philippine Sea, Brawner said.

He identified the countries as Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Austria, Romania, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden.

BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO



TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

Japan, China trade barbs on WPS; PCG: Coral reef damage 'extensive'

**By Rey E. Requejo, Vince Lopez
and Macon Ramos-Araneta**

JAPAN on Monday raised concern over the extensive maritime damage in waters frequented by Chinese militia vessels in the West Philippine Sea, but China quickly shot back by denouncing Tokyo's release of contaminated water from its Fukushima nuclear plant.

The Japanese Embassy in Manila said the damage done to coral reefs, presumably by Chinese boats in Rozul (Iro-

quois) Reef was "very alarming news."

"Our oceans are the lifeblood of our plant, and coral reefs are its colorful heartbeat. Let's preserve and protect these vital ecosystems for generations to come," Japan's Ambassador to the Philippines Koshikawa Kazuhiko said on his X social media account.

He was referring to a report from the Armed Forces of the Philippines Western Command, which said it suspected Chinese boats were behind the exten-

Next page

Japan,...
From A1

sive damage done to the corals in the West Philippine Sea.

But the Chinese Embassy did not let the Japanese ambassador's remarks go unanswered.

Agreeing that "oceans are indeed the lifeblood of our planet," the Chinese Embassy urged Japan to "stop the release of contaminated water from Fukushima."

China has objected to Japan's release of treated radioactive water into the ocean—a move that was approved by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

On Monday, the Philippine Coast Guard confirmed the "extensive maritime damage in areas frequented by Chinese maritime militia."

"The PCG fully supports and confirms the report released by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Western Command (WESCOM), exposing the severe damage inflicted upon the marine environment and coral reef in the seabed of Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal," Jay Tarriela, PCG spokesman, said.

Tarriela said surveys conducted by the PCG in Escoda shoal revealed the effects of China's underwater activities in the region.

"The surveys conducted 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," Tarriela said in a statement.

"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 added.

Jay Batongbacal, director of the University of the Philippines Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea, said the rampant coral harvesting in Rozul Reef in the West Philippine Sea could have dire implications for the country's food security.

Batongbacal said he had no doubt it was China behind the reef destruction.

He noted Chinese vessels often destroy the coral reefs to extract the giant clams underneath, which the Chinese use as a substitute for ivory.

The environmental group Pamalakaya urged the government to do further damage assessment on the corals in Rozul Reef.



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A4
PAGE

UPPER
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PAGE 1
STORY

BANNER
STORY

EDITORIAL

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09-19-23

TITLE :

PAGE

DATE

ENVIRONMENTAL TERRORISTS!



KIKO
THEY

CORAL AND MARINE LIFE DESTRUCTION IN ROZUL REEF IN
THE WEST PHILIPPINE SEA BY CHINESE FISHING MILITIAS



09-19-23

TITLE: _____

PAGE _____

DATE _____

Sen. Cynthia Villar cites ecological gains from bamboo propagation

CITING its many economic and ecological benefits, Senator Cynthia A. Villar urged the public and all concerned government agencies to continue propagating bamboo.

"The Sustainable Development Goals noted that 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," she said.

"After harvesting, bamboo regrows from its own root system, it doesn't need to be planted again," Villar added, noting that bamboo forests play a leading role in global carbon cycles and carbon sink.

The senator, 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 said the theme "Buong Bansa Magtanim: Kawayan para sa Kalikasan, Kabuhayan, Kaunlaran at Kinabukasan!" of the celebration, which also included the ceremonial bamboo planting at the CITE Bambusetum, has captured our mutual goal of planting more bamboos for the betterment of our environment. It also gives livelihood in the countryside by turning bamboo 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.

For housing, it coordinates with the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development, which is in charge of the government's socialized housing program.

"And it is also looking at the potential use of bamboo for charcoal and biomass production, which is a cheaper, energy-efficient and is ecology-friendly, in partnership with the Forest Products Research and Development Institute [FPRDI]."

Villar said her home city Las Piñas is known for the 19th-century old and world-renowned bamboo organ found in 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 has established our Bambusetum which boasts of 30 varieties. 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 Piñas has a Bamboo Processing Factory which makes very useful and aesthetically-pleasing bamboo steps which their company buys.



Deal seeks to scale up use of bamboo

THE Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and CUBO Modular signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Monday to scale up the use of bamboo in local home construction.

Trade Undersecretary and Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council (PBIDC) Executive Committee Chairperson Blesila Lantayona said that the MoU aims to tap CUBO Modular's expertise for the construction of homes using bamboo. The MoU was executed during the Philippine Bamboo Month event at the DTI National Capital Region Office-Center for Innovation and Technology for Enterprises in Marikina.

Under the MoU, DTI and CUBO Modular will also organize an annual bamboo furniture design competition, provide training and employment for Filipino bamboo carpenters, export locally-engineered bamboo housing products, and connect with a global network of women-led businesses through SheTrades Philippines Hub to boost Filipino women's international competitiveness in business.

"The MoU signifies a powerful synergy between a national government agency and a pioneering corporation, both driven by a common vision, which is to catalyze the local engineered bamboo ecosystem and uplift communities throughout the Philippines," Lantayona said.

This was echoed by CUBO Modular Chief Executive Officer and co-founder Earl Forlales, who said that there is interest in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, India, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand and South Korea to buy homes made from bamboo from them.

"Bamboo is by far the most sustainable building material right now," he said.

CUBO Modular is a Filipino company that started operations in 2019 and is a pioneer in combining modular design, renewable materials, rapid manufacturing and assembly, and local craftsmanship for its homes made from bamboo.

In the same event, the PBIDC unveiled its new shared service facility that will boost its central operational base for developing bamboo products.

DTI also said that the office refurbishing and operational expenses for the central operational base were funded by the Philippine Exporters Confederation Inc. (Philexport), led by its President Sergio Ortíz-Luis Jr.

The Philexport president was also present during the event, which was also attended by Sen. Cynthia Villar, Agriculture Undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano, DTI National Capital Region officer in charge Director Ma. Sofia Narag, and DTI Region 2 Director Leah Pulido Ocampo, among others.

To recall, Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual stated in June the need for a whole-of-government approach to improve the country's bamboo industry.

According to DTI, the country's bamboo product exports increased from \$730,000 in 2016 to \$930,000 in 2022. Meanwhile, the average annual investment in the industry is P108 million for the same seven-year period.

Job generation for the industry has more than doubled to 10,898 in 2022 from 4,222 in 2016. Meanwhile, micro, small and medium enterprises involvement in the bamboo industry also increased to 5,012 in 2022 from 725 in 2016. **JENICA FAYE GARCIA**



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Manila Standard



09-19-13

TITLE: _____

PAGE _____

DATE _____



WORLD BAMBOO DAY. Senator Cynthia Villar and other officials led the launching and ceremonial bamboo planting in celebration of World Bamboo Day and Philippine Bamboo Month held at the Center for Innovation Technology Entrepreneurship in Marikina City on Monday. **Manny Palmero**

BOARD OF TRUSTEES



TITLE:

PAGE

DATE

Miners meet focuses on sustainability

THE big players in the country's mining industry will gather various stakeholders for a conference on September 19 and 20 in Mandaluyong City 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.

Organized by the Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP), the Mining Philippines 2023 International Conference and Exhibition, which came after a four-year hiatus, is expected to reignite discussions on the future of mining in the Philippines.

With the theme "Seeing Green: Shaping a Sustainable Minerals Development Industry," the event will bring together a diverse assembly of participants, including government officials, private sector representatives, academics, indigenous communities, and mining host communities.

Aside from mining executives, representatives from support companies, national and local government officials, and other stakeholders are expected to take part in the two-day event which will also showcase best practices in mining operations.

According to COMP, collaboration among the various stakeholders will be a key focus of the conference, with emphasis on the need for a holistic and sustainable approach to mining operations.



PHOTO FROM WWW.PHILEXMINING.COM.PH

On September 19, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga will deliver her keynote address.

Canadian Ambassador David Hartman and Australian Ambassador Hae Kyong Yu, representing two of the world's biggest mining jurisdictions, for their part, are expected to provide insights on the importance of mining to socio-economic development and their countries' close relationship with the Philippines, particularly in improving mining's ESG performance.

Meanwhile, Trade Secretary Alfredo Pascual will likely discuss his department's initiatives to attract investments in the mining sector.

DENR Undersecretary Annaliza Rebuelta-Teh's presentation is expected to focus on strategies for measuring and mitigating the impacts of mining, ensuring a sustainable and responsible approach to mineral extraction.

The event will also serve as a

platform for the exchange of ideas and best practices within the mining industry.

"If allowed to flourish, mining will bring about improvement in the quality of life in host communities," said Michael Toledo, COMP chairman.

"A robust mining industry will undoubtedly help our country overcome the lingering economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. We are in a good position to contribute in a big way to the global energy transition in response to climate change, and we look forward to discussions on this subject during this conference."

COMP Vice Chairman Gerard Brimo underscored the industry's commitment to sustainability: "We've embraced the principles of ESG for more than a decade now. Our adoption of the Towards Sustainable Mining initiative manifests our commitment to align further the environmental protection and social development efforts of our members with global standards." **Jonathan L. Mayuga**



LETTERS

A SOBER LOOK AT RECLAMATIONS: BENEFITS CAN OUTWEIGH COSTS

AMID the bandwagon calls by environmentalists and President Marcos himself to suspend 22 land reclamation projects in Manila Bay and other parts of the country, there is a need to take a sober look at these projects, especially the 13 projects in Manila Bay. Do they really cause those problems attributed to them, and do they have desirable features that can be promoted? In his suspension order, the President pointed out the problems of flooding due to clogged rivers, the disappearing view of the world-renowned Manila Bay sunset, and the diminution of the bay marine area.

Land reclamation has long been recognized in many countries as a viable development strategy in places that experi-

ence rapid urban growth amid scarcity of land and high population density. Fast-growing cities, especially in Western Europe, Middle East, East Asia, and Southeast Asia have been reclaiming lands for port extension and expansion of different land uses, aimed at enhancing their economies while also observing aesthetic and environmental considerations. We see good examples of this kind of land reclamation in the Netherlands, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, and Singapore.

Admittedly, land reclamation, aside from its spatial, economic, and aesthetic benefits, also poses cost challenges such as harsh ecological impacts, socioeconomic dislocations, and legal uncertainties. The chal-

lenges being faced by the current reclamations are the issues about flooding cited by the President, the Manila Bay pollution as petitioned by residents with the Supreme Court, and the adverse impact on the bay's marine life and livelihoods voiced out by environmental groups. However, I would like to point out that the coastal flooding is not caused by the reclamations but by other causes I have cited in a commentary previously published by the Inquirer. Good reclamations do not impede water flow from the mouth of rivers. The pollution in the bay is due more to the uncontrolled throwing of solid and liquid wastes by urban households and factories into waterways. Of course, in reclamation construc-

tion, marine life and fisheries will be affected.

But I would like to point out that the Manila Bay reclamation benefits outweigh their costs. Aside from their socioeconomic benefits that we need to reach upper middle-income status, the bay reclamations have the unique environmental benefit of coastal protection, especially in terms of providing buffers against tsunamis, storm surges, and soil erosion. The precarious location of Manila Bay is that it is facing the Manila Trench which can move anytime and cause a very destructive tsunami on the metropolis—unless buffers like elevated reclamations and seawalls are present to repel it. A 2003 study funded by the

Japan International Cooperation Agency presents a scenario of a possible subduction of the Eurasian Plate against the Philippine Plate with a magnitude 7.9 quake, which can cause four-meter sea waves to rush to Manila Bay in only 70 minutes. By the way, this tsunami may also run up into the Pasig River and flood the low-lying Malacañang Palace.

The last time that subduction tectonics occurred in the Manila Trench was in 1677 and, like the prediction for the West Valley Fault, it can occur again anytime. Proof that well-designed and properly constructed reclamation projects can mitigate the rising sea waves caused by a tsunami was the observation by the Philippine Rec-

lamation Authority that when the bay area was hit once by a tsunami, the reclaimed areas from the Cultural Center of the Philippines to the coastal road did not suffer the same catastrophic rush of seawater that hit the areas from the Manila Yacht Club to the United States Embassy. The reclamation areas along Manila Bay were implemented according to the government's Boulevard 2000 Framework Plan. I would like to suggest that, as part of the plan and for aesthetic purposes, the reclamation projects should follow the seaward width of the Mall of Asia and its provision of a good deck for viewing the beautiful Manila Bay sunset.

MELITON B. IJANICO



Alliance gathers climate experts

INTERNATIONAL and local experts on climate and sustainability will convene next week to discuss the challenges, opportunities, and solutions to expedite the Philippines' private sector net-zero journey, from commitment to execution and completion.

Lopez-led Energy Development Corp. (EDC), in a statement Monday, said the Net Zero Carbon Alliance (NZCA) will celebrate its second anniversary on September 25 and it strongly encourages Philippine companies to attend the conference entitled "Zeroing in on Net-Zero: From corporate pledges to action."

"From learning about the state of net-zero corporate pledges in the Philippines and the potential of carbon capture technologies in decarbonizing hard-to-abate sectors, to exploring the business case of embarking on a net-zero journey and gaining insights into strategies to mitigate ESG risks while driving long-term profitability, NZCA sets this event as a stage for businesses to explore opportunities in transitioning to net zero and help pave the way toward a safe and regenerative future," NZCA, which is spearheaded by EDC, said. *Lenie Lectura*



09-19-23

TITLE:

PAGE:

DATE:

A greener metropolis



Manny B. Villar

THE ENTREPRENEUR

I AM an advocate of making cities and human settlements safe and sustainable. My decades of experience in providing housing to millions of Filipinos taught me valuable lessons about the aspirations of many Filipinos—they want peace and security, a decent quality of life and a shared prosperity with neighbors.

In this modern world where climate change is becoming a concern for our young population, a greener community where parks and trees blend with the concrete is a better alternative than the limited open public spaces and air pollution that have characterized the rapid urbanization of Metro Manila.

This is the exact reason why I envisioned my family's Villar City. For one, it's a more ideal community that will provide access to safe, affordable and accessible transport systems for all. It will have inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces as well, as I've discussed in my previous column here.

But the private sector cannot do it all. The government must also take the initiative in restoring the health of the metropolis by re-introducing the green landscape and providing a more livable environment. The optimist in me tells me that baby steps are the right direction to take despite the gargantuan task ahead.

I am referring to the agreement

signed last week by the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority and the Philippine Reclamation Authority to establish the Roxas Boulevard Promenade from Epifanio de los Santos Avenue to Libertad Extension in Pasay City.

The MMDA has earmarked P70 million to construct the 800-meter park along the scenic boulevard to create a "greener, more vibrant, and more interconnected metropolis."

As I've said, the agreement is a baby step but I'm glad the administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is taking a pause to revitalize that part of Metro Manila. MMDA Chairman Romando Artes deserves credit for the project, an offshoot of the agency's Adopt-a-Park project that seeks to promote an active lifestyle and contribute to the overall wellness of Metro Manilans, through the rehabilitation and development of parks and open spaces within the metropolis.

Residents of the metropolis deserve a break in their routine. As envisioned by the MMDA, the park will feature biking and jogging lanes,

In my own way through the Villar City that spans 3,500 hectares across 14 cities and towns in Metro Manila and portions of Cavite, my development will create a new center of growth. The masterplanned Villar City will be composed of self-sustaining districts or urban centers, such as a modern central business district, a tech valley and a university town, among others.

a pet park, a football pitch, and a space for family bonding, fitness advocates, and or just plain leisure.

I also welcome the plan of the MMDA to develop parks in the city of Manila, Pasig City and Taguig City in the coming months. Parks and open spaces are the lungs that Metro Manila residents need to breathe fresh air.

Our previous policy makers obviously erred in developing urban areas. The uneven development resulted in traffic congestion, air pollution and the unmitigated migration of people to Metro Manila in search of jobs.

In my own way through the Villar City that spans 3,500 hectares across 14 cities and towns in Metro Manila and portions of Cavite, my development will create a new center of growth. The masterplanned Villar City will be composed of self-sustaining districts or urban centers, such as a modern central business district, a tech valley and a university town, among others.

This multifaceted, multifunctional development will be in a class of its own. We've seen such communi-

ties abroad and we hope to have it also here, to be experienced by our fellow Filipinos. It will also be a premier lifestyle hub, set amid verdant landscapes with one million trees, in keeping with the social agenda of the United Nations.

We should perhaps take the observation of the UN seriously when it comes to building sustainable cities. Per the UN, the world's population reached 8 billion in 2022, with over half living in urban areas. The figure is expected to rise, with 70 percent of people likely to be living in cities by 2050.

Many of these cities, says the UN, are not ready for the rapid urbanization, outpaced by the development of housing, infrastructure and services, which will lead to a further rise in slums or slum-like conditions.

Many cities, adds the UN, are also more vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters due to their high concentration of people. Building urban resilience, thus, is crucial to avoid human, social and economic losses.

We've seen that in the Philippines. A poorly planned urbanization has led to the creation of huge slum settlements, congested traffic and greenhouse gas emissions, or poor air quality.

Is it too late to reverse the pitfalls of past urban development policies? Nothing is impossible and we can always envision the future. All we have to do is put more teeth on our decongestion policy.

For comments, send e-mail to mbv_secretariat@vistaland.com.ph or visit www.mannyvillar.com.ph