

24 September 2023 Sunday



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Metro air improves as smog, vog subside

By ROMINA CABRERA

Air quality in Metro Manila and nearby provinces has returned to normal, as the pollution-related smog in the metropolis as well as the volcanic smog or vog from Taal Volcano have cleared, according to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The Air Quality Index (AQI), monitored on a 24-hour basis, showed particulate matter (PM) – or fine particles that can enter the deeper part of the lungs and blood – at 2.5 or in “good” quality in Caloocan City, Makati City, Paranaque, Patentes and Batangas.

The cities of Mandaluyong, San Juan and Taguig also recorded improving air quality.

The AQI monitors six criteria pollutants to determine how clean or polluted the air is and measures ground level 24-hour particulate matter if it exceeds the guideline value of 35 micrograms per normal cubic meter (ug/Nm³).

The AQI values in Metro Manila ranged between six and 38, which are considered in the good category.

The higher the AQI means

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that there is a greater level of air pollution in the area, which reached as high as 217 points in Paranaque City on Friday.

The DENR-Environmental Management Bureau (DENR-EMB) noted that the surface wind direction was toward the west and southwest, away from Manila.

Rains and thunderstorms and the low-pressure area have also contributed to the clearing of the smog.

“Further, scattered rain showers were also observed which may naturally scrub gasses and particles, resulting in lower pollution concentration,” the advisory said.

Only Antipolo City measured at an AQI of 145, which is considered unhealthy especially for sensitive groups, according to DENR-EMB.

The bureau also attributed air pollution in Antipolo to emissions from heavy vehicular traffic, especially during rush hour.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) weather

division chief Juanito Galang noted that the thermal inversion condition added to the smog felt on Friday, alongside heavy air pollution.

Vog from Taal volcano cleared yesterday morning from last Friday’s almost zero visibility.

Sulfur dioxide flux was monitored at 2,730 tons per day on Friday, with upwelling of hot volcanic fluids in the main crater lake.

Vog recurrence

Philippine Volcanology and Seismology Administration (Phivolcs) director Teresito Bacolcol, in an interview over *dzBB*, raised the likelihood of vog recurrence as Taal Volcano continues to spew sulfur dioxide emissions, with plumes reaching 1,800 meters high.

Taal Volcano remains under Alert Level 1, which means that phreatic explosions, volcanic earthquakes, minor ashfall and lethal accumulations of volcanic gas may still occur.

Tourists and travelers are still advised to take precautions if they plan to visit tourist attractions around the



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Taal Volcano, in Metro Manila and Calabarzon. The DOT issued the advisory yesterday through its Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Committee.

The DOT warned that vog from Taal could "cause irritation of the eyes, throat and respiratory tract, especially among children and the elderly."

It advised the traveling public to stay indoors, keep wearing face masks when outdoors and see a medical professional when needed.

It also said the Daang Kastila fissures that make up the Taal Volcano Island Permanent Danger Zone remain closed to the public.

The local governments near the Taal Volcano would also regulate "occupancy and boating on Taal Lake." Flying of aircraft near the volcano has also been banned.

"The health and safety, as well as the comfort and convenience, of our tourists and the traveling public alike are of paramount importance to the DOT at all times," the DOT said.

Standby fund

The national government, for

its part, has reached P89 million in standby funds for the people in Calabarzon, especially in Batangas, who might be displaced by the severity of the vog or by Taal Volcano's unrest, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) said yesterday.

Speaking during the Saturday News Forum in Quezon City, DSWD spokesman Assistant Secretary Rommel Lopez said the relief assistance includes P5.4 million in quick response funds, as well as P19 million worth of food packs on standby in Calabarzon.

Non-food items valued at P35 million such as family kits, kitchen kits and blankets are also available, Lopez said. He said there are no reports yet of evacuation.

Philippine Coast Guard District in Southern Tagalog has alerted all vessels and watercraft operators of the need to take precautions as several areas in Batangas like Batangas City, Calatagan, Tingloy, San Nicolas, Nasugbu, Lemery, Balayan, Talisay, Lian, Mabuni and Bauan were experiencing low to zero visibility, according to area

commander Commodore Gerónimo Tuvilla.

Captain Airland Lapitan, Commander of PCG Maritime Safety Services Unit-Southern Luzon, also urged operators of vessels to sail at low speed to avoid accidents, citing low to zero visibility.

"Ensure that all navigation lights are functioning, both during the day and night, to enhance visibility to other vessels," Lapitan said.

Meanwhile, Sen. Francis Tolentino yesterday urged the Department of Health (DOH) to ensure steady supply of face masks in Metro Manila and nearby Calabarzon region to avoid a price hike as smog or vog continues to envelope several areas in both regions.

Tolentino said in an interview over dzRH that there are still several tourists in Tagaytay near the restive Taal Volcano.

DOH regional director for Calabarzon Ariel Valencia assured the senator of prepositioning of supplies of face masks.

- With Marc Jayson Cayabyab, Ed Amoroso, Emmanuel Tupas, Ghio Ong



HABAGAT RAINS REMOVE SMOG OVER METRO MANILA

THE smog that enveloped Metro Manila on Friday has disappeared, the weather bureau reported on Saturday.

According to Juanito Galang, chief of the Weather Division of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), the downpour caused by the southwest monsoon or "habagat" and low pressure area experienced Friday night until Saturday morning has weakened the smog.

"So right now, we can see... that it has weakened a bit or is clearing a bit. It rained heavily this morning or last night. That's a factor that

the wind is moving a bit compared to yesterday," he said at the Saturday News Forum in Quezon City. "So gradually, we will notice that it is getting clear here in Metro Manila."

The smog that covered many parts of Metro Manila and some areas of Central Luzon was also not caused by volcanic smog or vog from Taal volcano, Galang added.

Technically, he said, it was called photochemical smog that comes from pollutants, such as emissions of

vehicles and industries.

The geographical location of Metro Manila is also a factor, he said.

On Thursday and Friday, the vog that covered the volcano has cleared, Bacolcol said, "but this will be a recurring threat. As long as the Taal volcano is spewing sulfur dioxide, the threat will always be there."

Galang reminded the public to wear a face mask if such a phenomenon recurs.

In Batangas, local officials are reportedly studying placing the province under a state of emergency as towns deal with the thick volcanic smog.

Vice Governor Mark Leviste said Saturday that the state of emergency

would help local government tap into their disaster and emergency funds.

Based on its most recent vog advisory posted on Thursday afternoon, Phivolcs said volcanic smog has lingered over the Taal Region "since the first week of September."

Volcanologists on Saturday meanwhile warned that while volcanic fog or vog from have dissipated, it may recur anytime due to the continued activity of the lake volcano. Director Teresito Bacolcol of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) said that of Saturday morning the vog that enveloped the volcano's caldera was gone. **Maricel Cruz**



Editorial

Proposed tax on plastics to benefit river cleanups

INCLUDING the excise tax on single-use plastics in the government's priority bills is a welcome development. That complements many other initiatives to curb pollution and recent efforts to rehabilitate waterways, particularly the Pasig River. Just on Friday, the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council, or Ledac, added five measures to the Common Legislative Agenda for the 19th Congress, including a tax bill on single-use plastics. That might not stir up excitement given how slow lawmakers have been working on the priority bills of the Marcos Jr. government. But things may be different this time, since that tax bill has been approved on third reading by the House of Representatives and is pending in the Senate. Once enacted, the tax could curb usage of single-use plastics by 25 percent and generate P6.5 billion in revenue in its first year of implementation, which hopefully will be 2024.

The new tax bill will also complement other initiatives to address the plastic pollution crisis in the country. The Philippines has been named as one of the largest contributors — some say the worst producer — of plastic waste in the world. Most of that ends up in the ocean, as well as in lakes and rivers.

Ironically, the Philippines has laws and programs that address the issue, including the Ecological Solid Management Act of 2000 and the National Plan of Action for the Prevention, Reduction and Management of Marine Litter that audaciously aims for zero waste in Philippine waters by 2040. Plus, Republic Act 11858, also known as the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Act of 2022, went into effect early this year. A government statement explained that the new law makes companies responsible for the proper and effective recovery, treatment, recycling or disposal of their products sold to consumers. EPR hopes to reduce the volume of waste generated and extend the life of plastics by adding value or purpose through upcycling or recycling.

Pasig River

Once the tax bill on single-use plastics is passed and if the existing laws are implemented effectively, the Marcos government will take another step toward cleaning up the Pasig River. Obviously, the Philippines has many dirty rivers, but that one deserves priority because it cuts across the National Capital Region (NCR or Metro Manila). If harnessed correctly, the Pasig River can contribute to the economy and reduce poverty.

As said in previous editorials, the Pasig River should be developed as a waterway to help ease the traffic congestion that costs the country billions of pesos daily. Rehabilitation can also boost tourism by beautifying the urban landscape, similar to what Marikina City has done to a tributary of the Pasig River.

In recognition of the prospects mentioned here, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. issued an executive order in July 2023 that created the Inter-Agency Council for the Pasig River Urban Development. Last month, the council presented a master development plan to rehabilitate the Pasig River and maximize its economic potential by transforming its banks into people-centered parks and commercial hubs.

The masterplan, which has also gained the support of first lady Liza Araneta Marcos, aims to clean up the 25-kilometer stretch of the Pasig River, from Manila Bay to Laguna de Bay. Parts of the banks will be developed into mixed-use commercial areas and public parks. The initial steps involve creating bicycle and jogging lanes that link Metro Manila with Rizal province, as well as relocating thousands of informal settlers.

Those informal settlers have been blamed for much of the pollution in the Pasig River that flows into Manila Bay. But to be fair, industries and other residential areas located along the river also share part of the blame. Obviously, the Philippines has many dirty rivers, but efforts to reduce pollution should be focused more on areas where the work can have a greater impact.

Lastly, the authorities should review the enforcement of existing laws, particularly on solid waste management, the EPR Act and other similar initiatives. Unless laws are effectively implemented, new measures like the proposed tax on single-use plastics might fall short of their lofty objectives to clean up the environment, contribute to economic growth and uplift the welfare of the urban poor.



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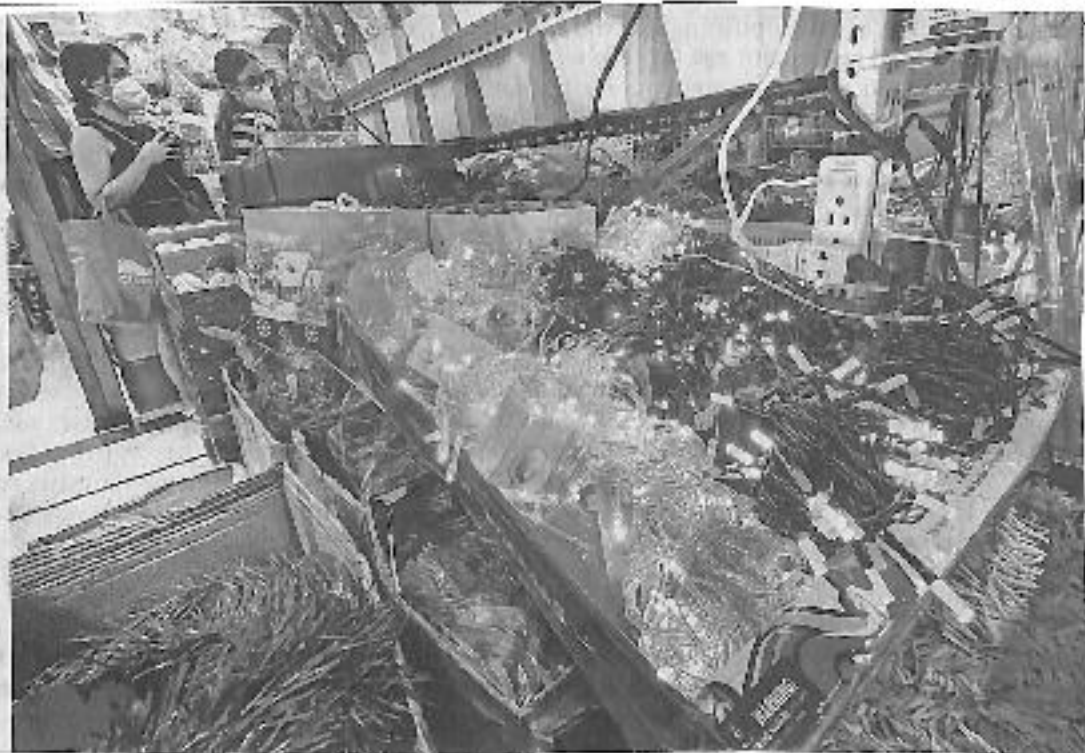
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YULETIDE DECORS
— Christmas lights and decorations for sale are displayed in different stalls in Divisoria, Manila, on Saturday, Sept. 23, 2023. Non-profit organization Ban Toxics has warned the public against buying Christmas decorations that may contain high levels of poisonous chemicals like lead as well as products that did not pass quality and safety standards. (Arnold Quizon)





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Healthy
Pilipinas

Health
is Life!



World Environmental Health Day 2023

September 26

Protektahan ang #KapwaLigiran
para sa ating kalusugan, araw-araw!



Panatiling malinis
ang ating kalusugan at
kapaligiran para
iwag sa sakit!



Suriin ang
"Raise, Reduce, Recycle"



Handa ang mga
Emergency Go Bag
para laging handa
sa sakuna





US researchers engineered bacteria that can break down plastics in oceans

By Masati I. Cayon

DAVAN CITY—American researchers have developed smart bacteria that may help solve plastic pollution of the world's oceans when laboratory results showed their ability to break down plastics.

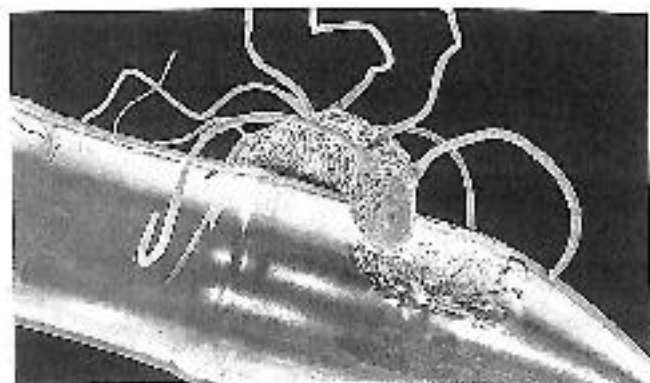
Researchers from the United States' North Carolina State University "have successfully engineered a marine microorganism that can break down polyethylene terephthalate (PET)," or plastic commonly used as packaging of many consumer goods, *Biotech Update*, the online weekly publication

of International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA), cited in its September 20 issue.

The ISAAA said the researchers worked with two species of a bacterium, *Vibrio natriegens* and *Ideonella sakaiensis*, in conducting the experiment.

"A sequence of DNA from *I. sakaiensis* that is responsible for the production of enzymes that can break down PET was taken and incorporated into a plasmid, genetic sequences that can replicate in a cell," it said.

"The plasmid containing the *I. sakaiensis* genes is then introduced into the *V. natriegens*



RESEARCHERS from North Carolina State University have successfully engineered smart microorganism that can break down PET, a highly recyclable plastic, that is a major contributor to plastic pollution in the ocean. www.isaaa.org

bacterium that thrives and reproduces quickly in saltwater. Results of the study show that the genetically engineered *V. natriegens* was able to break down PET in salt water testing," ISAAA added.

The researchers have published their work at the *AIChE Journal*, official publication of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers on September 18.

The ISAAA said that Nathan Crook, the corresponding author, "says that this is the first time that *V. natriegens* was able to express foreign enzymes on its cell surface."

"Similarly, Tianyi Li, the first

author of the paper, says that this is also the first genetically engineered organism to break down PET microplastics in saltwater," it added.

Li said that "with the promising findings of the study, genetic engineering has the potential to mitigate the issue of plastic accumulation in saltwater environments."

It said that PET "is a highly recyclable plastic that is a major contributor to plastic pollution in the ocean."

In Asia, the Philippines has been identified as one of the major sources of plastics dumped into the seas and oceans.



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Recycling plastic not enough, says UN exec

Environment chief urges a rethink on the use of the polymer

UNITED NATIONS—With the production of plastic on the rise worldwide and creating ever more pollution, the UN environment chief warned that humanity cannot just recycle its way out of the mess, and she called for a total rethink about the way we use plastics.

"There are different sort of encamps to the highway to civilization. But I think everybody recognizes that the status quo is just not an option," said Liger Andersen, director of the UN Environment Program, in an interview Thursday with AFP on the sidelines of the General Assembly in New York.

Andersen was talking two weeks after the publication of the first draft of a future international treaty on plastic pollution, which is expected to be finalized by the end of 2004.

It reflects the wide range of ambitions of the 175 countries involved, notably the gap between those who argue for a reduction in the production of raw polymers and those who insist on reuse and recycling.

First, Andersen said the aim was to get rid of as many single-use plastics as possible,



A SECOND LIFE An Argentinian high school student grabs plastic bottle caps to use on a mural that depicts Argentina's soccer superstar Lionel Messi. —AP/WIDEWORLD

"eliminating what's frankly not necessary: that thing that is wrapped in plastic that's completely mindless, that is maybe even wrapped by nature itself," like an orange or a banana.

Powder or liquid?

Then, "there is thinking about the product itself. Does the product need to be liquid? Can we rethink the product ... can it be powder, can it be compressed, can it be concentrated?" she said,

saying that when entering a supermarket, she goes straight to the soap aisle to see if solid versions are available.

"We also have to reduce the overall supply of new raw polymer," she said, noting that this was one option in the draft text of the treaty.

For sure, "We have to recycle as much as we can. But as we look at it now, plastic uses is increasing," Andersen told AFP.

"So what is clear is that we

cannot recycle our way out of this mess."

Annual production of plastics has more than doubled in the past 20 years, to reach 460 million tons. It could triple by 2010 if nothing changes.

Microplastics in placenta

However, only 9 percent is recycled. Plastic waste of all sizes is found today at the bottom of the oceans, in the stomachs of birds and on the tops of mountains, while microplastics have been detected in blood, breast milk and placentas.

"If we continue to pump into the economy all this new raw polymer, there is no way that we will stop the plastic flow into the oceans," she said.

And the health of the oceans is crucial for humanity's future.

The future treaty on plastic pollution would complement the global arsenal to protect the oceans, including the new historic treaty to protect the high seas signed by some 70 countries.

"The fact that we're going to move forward and protect that piece of the ocean is mind-blowingly important," Andersen said.

—AP



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Recycling plastic not enough, warns UN environment chief

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INGER ANDERSEN, undersecretary-general of the United Nations and executive director of the UN Environment Programme, speaks during an interview at UN headquarters in New York City on Sept. 21, 2023. (AFP)

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Oceans a 'collective heritage'

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And the health of the oceans is crucial for the future of humanity.

The future treaty on plastic pollution would complement the global arsenal to protect the oceans, including the new historic treaty to protect the high seas signed this week by some 70 countries.

"The fact that we're going to move forward and protect that piece of the ocean that is beyond national boundaries is mind-blowingly important," Andersen said.

"And something that I'm just very, very happy about. And the whole world should be because this is our common heritage."



WELLNESS RETAIL BRAND COMMITS TO ANNUAL COASTAL CLEAN-UP

WATSONS Philippines, the leading brand in health, wellness, and beauty retail, partnered with the SM Group for the International Coastal Cleanup celebration at SM by the Bay.

Watsons, an affiliate of SM, collaborated as one of the teams that successfully contributed and collected an impressive 66,200 kilograms of trash during the activity held on September 16, 2023 at the iconic Manila Bay coastline.

"As a part of Watsons' sustainability goals, we are committed to help clean up the environment, especially our waterways. One of the goals we've set for ourselves is to be able to collect 65,000kg of trash by 2030. It looks like a big goal to achieve but with our partnership with SM for the International Coastal Clean Up, we are one step closer to that," said Watsons senior sustainability manager Lexie Coloma.

A total of 12,580 volunteers, including Watsons employees, suppliers, partners, media representatives, and even social media influencers, gathered at dawn to contribute to this meaningful event and do their part in environmental preservation.



Watsons employees volunteer for the #DoGoodfortheOceans initiative

In addition to actively organizing and participating in coastal clean-ups, Watsons is also engaged in sustainability programs like Recycle for Rewards and Trash to Cash that incentivize customers to recycle in exchange for special Watsons deals.

Watsons has also partnered with Plastic Bank to share in the ambitious goal of collecting and recycling 40 million plastic bottles by 2030.



Taal vog subsides – Phivolcs

BY CLAIRE BERNADETTE MONDARES,
ARIC JOHN SY CUA AND MOISES CRUZ

THE volcanic smog above Taal area has cleared, the Philippine Institute for Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said Saturday.

"In Taal, it's clear now unlike the low visibility yesterday (Friday). So now, the Taal Volcano is visible from Batangas, so basically there is no vog already," Phivolcs Director Teresito Bacolcol told *The Manila Times*.

Vog is composed of fine droplets mixed with volcanic gases, including sulfur dioxide from the Taal main crater. Exposure to vog can result in eyes, throat and respiratory tract irritation.

Vog concentration is particularly high in Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon), especially near Taal Lake area due to the restive state of Taal Volcano since early September.

On Thursday, the Phivolcs reported that it measured a total of 4,369 tons per day of volcanic sulfur dioxide emission around Taal.

However, in its 5:30 a.m. bulletin on Saturday, it reported that this had decreased to 2,780 tons per day.

The Phivolcs also clarified that

what was observed in Metro Manila was smog not vog.

"This is different from what is being experienced at Taal, although the thermal inversion is also trapping pollutants over the area. But the pollutants actually include volcanic aerosol, and therefore we have vog or volcanic smog over the Taal region," said Ma. Antonia Bomas, Phivolcs volcano monitoring and eruption prediction division chief.

Thermal inversion occurs when layers of the atmosphere don't mix, causing aerosols to get trapped.

"This is a common weather phenomenon, we experienced this several times... I remember in the past few years, there have been instances by the Pagasa of thermal inversion causing [poor] visibility and fog over the metropolis," Bomas said.

"We also have very, very low wind speeds. Actually this is one of the main factors that we have observed to be the primary driver



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ALL CLEAR A resident of Barangay Sampaloc, Talisay, Batangas, looks at Taal Volcano from a makeshift viewing deck, on Saturday, Sept. 23, 2023. The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said Taal is now cleared of the smog caused by its emission of sulfur dioxide, which blanketed surrounding areas on Friday, forcing the suspension of work and classes. It said that the gas emissions were reduced from 4,569 tons per day on Thursday to 2,730 tons per day on Saturday. PHOTO BY MIKE ALQUINTO

of volcanic smog formations. Very low wind speeds causing volcanic gas to accumulate over the Taal region instead of being dissipated or

dispersed away from the volcano, and so, the volcanic gas accumulation actually forms an aerosol, which leads to a formation of a

volcanic smog," she added.

The smog mistaken as vog prompted some local government units to suspend work and

face-to-face classes.

Science and Technology Secretary Renato Solidum Jr. said on Friday that smog formation in urban areas are common, caused by thermal inversions that prevent emission from vehicles to travel up high into the atmosphere.

Pages said rain could help dissipate both smog and vog.

"In fact, we are hoping to rain, because the vog will then be diluted and flush out in rain. And it's the same thing as smog," Bacotol added.

Meanwhile, the Department of Tourism (DOT) urges the public to exercise caution when visiting areas where high concentration of vog were observed.

"Occupancy and hosting on lap take are subject to an advisory from the respective local DRRM (Disaster Risk Reduction and Management)," the DOT said in a statement.

"Civil aviation authorities have also been informed that flying any aircraft close to the volcano is not allowed. The health and safety, as well as the comfort and convenience of our tourists and the traveling public alike, are of paramount importance to the DOT at all times," it added.



Bad eggs

At a recent international mining conference, Philex Mining chairman Manuel V. Pangilinan emphasized that an industry should not be judged based on its worst members.

He said that if countries like South Africa, Australia, Indonesia and China can operate and manage their mining businesses well and can conduct their mining operations responsibly and sustainably, then so can the Philippines.

Pangilinan noted that the local mining industry has to further level up when it comes to sustainability practices and standards, adding that the industry should be judged based

on how the sector as a whole practices mining responsibly.

He emphasized that the mistakes of a few should not lead to the notion that the whole is wrong.

He cited the case of Philex which, on its own back in 2012, voluntarily stopped operations and addressed the tailings pond leak problem, and promptly paid the P1-billion fine imposed by government for the accident caused by unprecedented rain volume on its mining area.

Pangilinan also called on industry players to help improve the state of

mining in the Philippines by addressing, among others, health-related and safety concerns, exploitation of women and child workers, as well as the lack of clarity of plans and actionable post-mining rehabilitation which can restore mine sites to their original natural state.

He likewise recommended that the mining benefits between host LGUs and the national government should be shared more equitably and the latter must ensure the timely remittance of taxes due to the LGUs.

To make the industry sustainable, Pangilinan further suggested the separation of the mining regulatory and promotion functions of the DENR to address the problem of conflicting goals of the department. He said that the Environmental Management Bureau, which enforces environmental laws on mining, should be spun off into a separate and independent body just like the US Environmental Protection Agency. The Mines and Geosciences Bureau, which is charged with the promotion, development, and supervision of mining, can

HIDDEN AGENDA



MARY ANN
LL. REYES



remain with the DENR.

For his part, Chamber of Mines of the Philippines president Mike Toledo explained that mining has become more than just an enterprise that deals with rocks and dirt, noting that global trends and the positive changes being effected by policy makers and industry players aimed at ensuring sustainability are gradually transforming mining as an area of growth, responsibility, and a future that gleams with possibility.

Indeed, there are bad eggs in every industry, but it is not fair to call the entire basket as being rotten.

Take the case of the quarrying industry, which involves the extraction of sand, gravel, and other quarry resources found on or underneath the surface of private or public land which also governed by the Philippine Mining Act and under the regulation and supervision of the DENR.

A few years' back, the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) reported that its infrastructure projects are being threatened by sand and gravel quarry sites which operate too close to irrigation facilities and structures. The foundations of dams are being threatened due to severe erosion caused by quarrying operations.

Meanwhile, a recent study on illegal extraction and trade of black sand in Ilocos Sur revealed that this has caused adverse effects like transformation of riverbeds into large and deep pits, displacement of residents due to threats of soil erosion and flooding, gradual loss of limited fertile lands for agricultural activities, and loss of fisheries productivity and coastal ecosystem.

A study by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) showed that the most important products of quarrying in the country are rock aggregates, namely sand and gravel, with their share of total mineral output increasing through the years.

It said that unlike in mining where operations are generally large scale and degradation impacts are obvious, operations in quarrying are relatively small-scale and the effects are less evident. But while quarrying is considered by many as a secondary component of the entire mining industry, illegal quarrying activities are also giving the Philippine mining industry a bad image.

There are two types of quarrying operations - mountain quarrying and river quarrying. However, PIDS noted that both have potentially significant negative environmental impacts.

In Palawan, it is estimated that illegal operators comprise one-third in terms of number and two-thirds in terms of production of total quarrying in the province.

Just recently, STAR columnist Alex Magno reported that



members of Task Force Sagip Kalikasan have filed a complaint before the Office of the Ombudsman against San Fernando, Camarines Sur Mayor Fermín Mabulo together with five barangay chairman for alleged illegal mountain quarrying activities due to the absence of authority from the DENR or from the provincial government.

It is estimated that Mayor Mabulo and his group have evaded paying local taxes amounting to P54 million.

Despite an order issued by the DENR regional director back in 2021 to cease quarrying operations in the San Fernando barangays, it was claimed that the mayor disregarded the order. In addition, the complainants are saying that equipment belonging to the local government have been used for the illegal quarrying activities.

The same report revealed that the complainants have asked the Ombudsman to immediately suspend Mabulo et al to halt destructive quarrying activities in the area and clear the way for an exhaustive investigation into allegations of graft.

The complainants have accused Mabulo and company of violating the provision on theft of minerals under RA 7942 or the Philippine Mining Act, as well as violation of anti-graft and penal laws for the use of government vehicles for the illegal quarrying activities.

These illegal activities reportedly have been raised and discussed in the sessions of the San Fernando Sangguniang Bayan since 2021 but nothing has happened. It is claimed that 12 of the 14 quarrying sites in the town were illegally operated.

Back in 2017, the Office of the Ombudsman announced that it ordered the dismissal from service of two high-ranking officials from the Bulacan environment and natural resources offices in connection with illegal mining activities in the province.

In 2011, the Ombudsman filed graft charges before the Sandiganbayan against then Mexico, Pampanga Mayor Teddy Tunang also due to illegal quarry activities.

In Cebu City, Mayor Michael Rama called for a stop to illegal quarrying as residents in mountain barangays have reported more and more quarrying activities going on, the effects of which are especially felt during heavy rains.

What is needed is vigilance on the part of the citizens in reporting illegal mining and quarrying activities, local government officials who will not use their authority to exploit the environment, and a national government that will protect the environment against illegal miners of natural resources.

For comments, e-mail at marques@philstarmedia.com



By Peter Paul Duran

THE profound success of "Every Drop Counts: A High-Level Dialogue for a Water-Secure Country" has heralded a new era in shaping a water-secure future for the Philippines.

This critical dialogue responded to the urgent need for a comprehensive approach to water security, bringing together visionaries, policymakers, and key stakeholders from across the nation. Through three enlightening and distinct panel discussions, the event dissected the complex issue of water security: Finance and Water Security, delving into financial strategies to ensure water availability for all; Water Governance, exploring the policies and mechanisms needed for effective water management; and Digitalization, Technology, and Infrastructure in Water Security, highlighting the role of technology and innovation in securing our water resources.

The event honored the esteemed presence of the Guest of Honor, Senator Grace Poe, emphasizing the critical need for a collaborative action plan to safeguard the nation's water resources.

Notably, distinguished keynote speakers profoundly resonated with attendees, including Prof. Mely Caballero-Anthony, who highlighted "Water Security as Critical Core to Human Security," stressing the inseparable link between water and human well-being.

Congresswoman Bernadette Herrera passionately championed the vital role of women in shaping a water-secure Philippines, urging greater inclusivity and gender equity in water management. Israeli Ambassador Ian Fluss shared invaluable insights into technologically fortified water security, sparking conversations on innovative solutions to revolutionize water management. Undersecretary Carlos Pineda David (Department of Environment and Natural Resources) explored the critical aspect of Water Governance, deepening the understanding of its central role in ensuring the sustainability of water resources.

On the other hand, Department of Finance Assistant Secretary Glenda R. Ramirez-Figueroa shed

PIONEERING A WATER-SECURE PHILIPPINES



From left: Ronda Hebe (World Bank), Mimi Ilanones (host and moderator), Administrator Leonor Cleofas (MWSS), Phil Mito Hernandez (Guest of Honor), LWUA Chairman Ronnie Ong, Asst. Adm. John Verzosa (DPWH), and Awardee (AWSS) at the "Every Drop Counts: A High-Level Dialogue for a Water-Secure Country"

light on the crucial nexus between Finance and Water Security, encouraging collaborative financial efforts to drive meaningful change.

LWUA Chairman Ronnie Ong on Water Security

On the sidelines of the event, Manila Standard had the privilege of engaging in an insightful conversation with Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA) Chairman Ronnie Ong. "Every Drop Counts - A High-Level Dialogue for a Water-Secure Country" was organized by Qarah Committee for LWUA.

Chairman Ong emphasized LWUA's essential role in the countryside and his office's policymaking responsibility. He emphasized the need for swift action to dispel the perception of slow progress in the agency and enhance responsiveness to citizens' needs.

Discussing LWUA's prospective role within a potential Department of Water, Chairman Ong expressed hope that LWUA would oversee bulk water or water sourcing, awaiting clarity on the exact role if

the department is established. He advocated for greater collaboration to avoid redundancy and achieve a cohesive approach to managing the country's water resources.

Assessing the water situation in the Philippines, Ong stressed the need to address non-revenue water or water loss issues caused by various factors, resulting in a significant loss of the country's water supply.

He emphasized the criticality of water, pointing out the substantial portion of the Filipino population with inadequate access to clean water and the importance of collective efforts to rectify this situation.

"Water is life. Basik form of life yan ch, kailangan nating tubig. Isa yan sa mga issues na naranais ni UN, right and World Health Organization, water. As of now, marami pa pang mayong maayos na patubig," he said.

"According to a SWS ng survey, only 67 percent of the households in the Philippines are may maayos na tubig. Sa mayayong maayo pa

po," Ong stressed.

The "Every Drop Counts" dialogue saw approximately 400 enthusiastic attendees actively participating, engaging wholeheartedly in discussions to address just that.

Award-winning broadcaster Mimi Ilanones, skillfully moderating the event, ensured conversations remained insightful and thought-provoking throughout the dialogue.

The event was presented by Abbott, Standard Systems Water and Wastewater Technologies, and Tubig Pilipinas. Event Partners included Manila Water, Maynilad, and Prime Water, with generous sponsorship from Aluminates, Chemical Research, and GSW-Law.

"Every Drop Counts" served as a rallying point, igniting urgency and mobilizing action to confront the pressing concern of water security in the Philippines, encouraging collaboration among experts and stakeholders as organizers hope to drive tangible efforts to ensure a water-abundant future for the Philippines.



DOST tech provides safe drinking water

WATER is life. As essential as breathing, water is a very important resource to sustain life and communities, as well as to power industries and economic activities.

With this in mind, the Department of Science and Technology Industrial Technology Development Institute (DOST-ITDI) unveiled groundbreaking technology to solve the shortage of safe drinking water during calamities and emergencies, such as typhoons, flooding, and earthquakes, as well as in remote areas where water supply is disrupted.

The technology, 'SAFEWATRS: Emergency Disinfection System of Drinking Water,' involves a manually controlled, compact, and mobile water treatment system powered by solar energy that can produce up to 2,000 liters of potable water in nine hours.

SAFEWATRS has been installed in several areas in Luzon, particularly in Bagong Silangan

EMERGENCY DISINFECTION SYSTEM OF DRINKING WATER

A DOST - ITDI TECHNOLOGY



DOST-ITDI's new technology, SAFEWATRS: Emergency Disinfection System of Drinking Water, was featured in the 25th episode of the weekly radio program of the DOST-Region I and D2AG Radyo Pilipinas Region I and Region II, 920 AM/102.5 FM/107.7 MHz.

in Quezon City, Agoncillo town in Patangas, No. Domingo in Pocos Barr, and San Clemente in Tarlac.

Ilocos Region is currently on the list of recipients of this technology through the efforts of the

DOST-Region I

Introduced by Engr. Reynaldo L. Esguerra, chief science research specialist at DOST-ITDI Environmental and Biotechnology Division, the system is no different from other filtration

and disinfection systems that are effective in removing chemicals and metals from water, making the post-processed water safe for public consumption.

This technology can process saltwater, rainwater, spring waters, and turbid waters from lakes, producing water that conforms to the mandatory parameters prescribed in the Philippine National Standards for Drinking Water (PNSDW of 2017).

Thus, the quality of drinking water always follows the highest standards, performance testing conducted using Laguna Lake water yielded positive results and was given an excellent rating following the PNSDW of 2017.

The innovation was developed not for the agency to earn from it but to help communities lacking drinking water resources and ensuring enhancement of human well-being, which is one of the four DOST strategies.

Arqueline A. Pinaro/SAT Media Service



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Where the *pawikans* are

The Aboitiz Cleanergy Park, a home to pawikans old and new

By M. Jalawari

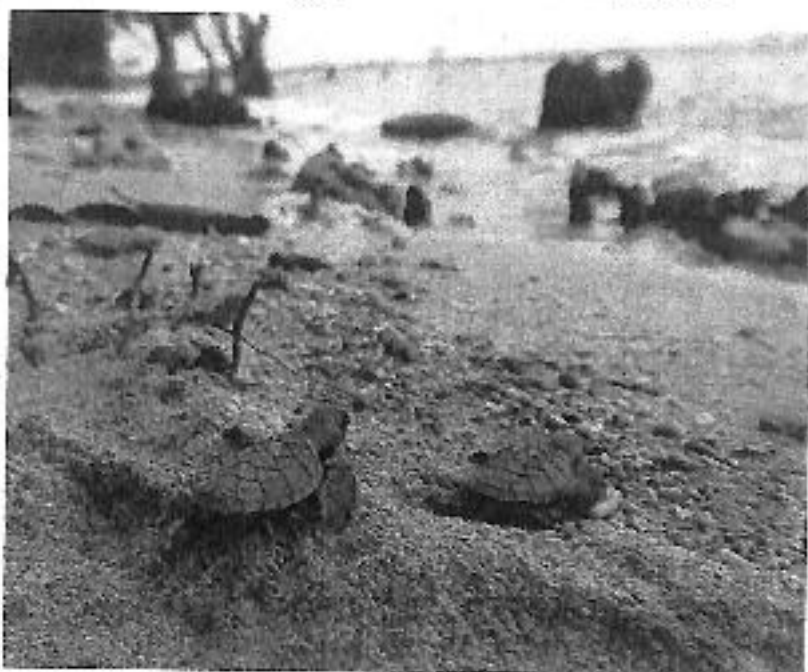
In 2017, a female *pawikan* (turtle), exhausted and injured from forcing her way through the vegetation, was rescued in the Aboitiz Cleanergy Park's mangroves. She — later named "Turtle Cleanergy" — was saved, rehabilitated, and then released by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Region XI.

Fast forward to 2023, and Turtle Cleanergy makes her way back into the park. Marine biologists find two new nests by her, and of another one nearby — perhaps her second — which makes her nine days old, and named by the first half of her name.

Researchers are finding their way to the fly-in-the-forest ecological preserve can be described as a conservation site, which is perfectly situated along the coast of Punta Bariles, Malinao City, Davao del Sur. It is home to

2014, the park has become home to 177 species and counts 16,000, almost 100 endemic migratory bird species, marine animals, and the critically endangered hawkbill, green sea, and olive ridley turtles.

The critically injured Turtle Cleanergy had a cousin, another relative — maybe a sister or a cousin — they call her "Turtle Hope" — one believed to be the original female, first discovered in 2017. She was way before Turtle Cleanergy's nest. This includes the nest in Punta Bariles in 2017. It is



Since its launch in 2014, the park has become home to a mangrove and coastal forest, almost 100 endemic migratory bird species, marine animals, and the critically endangered hawkbill, green sea, and olive ridley turtles.



Cleanergy Caretaker Paolo Maris, Sr. (left) and his former DENR Region XI colleague and DENR Regional Head, in measuring a rescued hawkbill nest for data. The hatchlings are named based on their sex, and released into the water.

researchers were based on their completed DNA studies undertaken by students of the University of the Philippines Mindanao and Dr. Ruth Corbito, a marine biologist from the same university.

Researchers are amazed to learn that both are in the same beach where they were born or, perhaps, nested. In Aboitiz Cleanergy and Punta Bariles, the two turtles were found by park staff in two consecutive years. Both turtles generally lay their eggs in the same beach each season. This year, Turtle Cleanergy laid some 100 eggs, while Turtle Hope laid 100.

DENR XI is working partnership with the Davao Region's Davao Light and Aquatic Conservation for the Aboitiz Cleanergy Park, which has long been a safe nesting place and

refuge for the turtles. "We are grateful for the conservation efforts of Aboitiz Cleanergy park in its commitment to protecting and conserving the ecological and the wildlife species around the area."

With the sea turtle coming back and laying eggs, through the years, the Aboitiz Cleanergy Park has successfully used space for purposes of protecting and conserving the area and its flora and fauna. "By its daily environmental focus, such as public education, solid waste management, and CO2 reduction,"

It was almost ten years ago when Davao Light, the Aboitiz Cleanergy, DENR XI, and the Davao

City Government entered into a joint memorandum of agreement with the Aboitiz Cleanergy Park as a Davao Region DENR. This is in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14, "Protecting Life Below Water." The regular release of Turtle Cleanergy and Turtle Hope in the last several years, along with the turtle's nest, is a testament to the park's conservation efforts and staff.

Members of all ages are welcome to visit the Aboitiz Cleanergy Park. A tour, half-day, or overnight stay is available. Members are encouraged to participate in the release of rescued hatchlings.

Interested parties are invited to call an appointment by contacting Davao Light's small development staff.



'Tiny insects play big roles in biodiversity'

By Kenneth A. Mares

THE insects are often dismissed as worthless, annoying bugs. The small six-legged creatures are the most diversified living organisms on the planet. With around 1-million living species, insects are by far the biggest class within the animal kingdom.



SPIDERS play a role in ecosystems by catching and eating other insects. The spider in the photo is a common house spider.



GRASSHOPPERS play a role in ecosystems by eating plants and other insects.



In the 1940s, most of the 17 "super-bug" families (beetles, flies, mosquitoes, wasps, bees, butterflies, moths, crickets, grasshoppers, cockroaches, termites, and ants) were considered pests. Today, many of these insects are valued for their ecological roles.

The ecological roles of insects are diverse. Some insects, like bees, are essential for pollinating crops. Others, like ladybugs, eat pest insects. Still others, like termites, help decompose organic matter.

Friend of food

Insects are essential for pollinating crops. Bees, butterflies, and other insects transfer pollen from one flower to another, allowing plants to reproduce. Without pollinators, many of the fruits and vegetables we eat would disappear.

Fighters of ecosystem enemies

Ladybugs and other predators eat pest insects, helping to control their populations.

Some insects, like ladybugs, are natural pest controllers. They eat other insects that are harmful to crops.

Other insects, like termites, help decompose organic matter. They break down dead plants and animals into nutrients that can be used by other organisms.

Insects also play a role in the carbon cycle. They help break down organic matter into carbon dioxide, which is then used by plants for photosynthesis.

Guarding animals

Insects are essential for the survival of many animals. Some animals, like birds, eat insects for food. Other animals, like bears, use insects for nesting material.

Insects also play a role in the life cycle of many animals. For example, some insects are essential for the development of certain fish species.

Insects are also important for the health of ecosystems. They help maintain the balance of ecosystems by eating other organisms.

Insects are also important for the health of humans. Some insects, like mosquitoes, can spread diseases. Other insects, like bees, can be used to produce honey and other products.

Insects are also important for the health of the planet. They help break down organic matter into nutrients that can be used by other organisms.

Insects are also important for the health of the world's food supply. They help pollinate crops and control pest insects.

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A heaven for diverse plants

Insects are essential for the survival of many plants. Some plants, like flowers, rely on insects for pollination. Other plants, like trees, rely on insects for nutrient cycling.

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Defense mechanism

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Migratory insects

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Tangible, intangible benefits

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BUT FISHING DISCOURAGED IN BREEDING AREAS

THERE WILL BE NO FISHING BAN IN PH, PRESIDENT ASSURES

By Nestor Corrales
@NCorralesINQ

The government has not and will not impose a fishing ban in the country because it would adversely affect small fisherfolk, President Marcos said on Saturday, correcting a remark he made earlier.

"I was not able to explain it well," the President told reporters after leading the distribution of smuggled rice to indigents in Iriga City.

"I was not talking about a fishing ban. What I meant was, we should not fish in breeding

areas so the fish population will multiply," he said.

"There will be no fishing ban. People will lose their livelihood. [But] we will let the fish reproduce," he said, adding that overfishing in municipal waters remains a serious problem in the fisheries sector.

Republic Act No. 10654, or the Philippine Fisheries Code of 1998, does impose a fishing season for certain kinds of fish in specific waters at different times of the year, but the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) has been struggling to strictly implement such fishing seasons.

According to the latest published BFAR data (2021), more than 2.19 million people were involved in municipal fishing.

Top fish producer

Along with commercial fishers and aquaculturists, capture fishers produced 4.25 million metric tons (MT) in 2021, amounting to more than ₱302 billion—consistently one of the largest in the world.

According to the Southeast Asia Fisheries Development Center (Seafdec), the Philippines is one of the top fish producing countries in the world.

"The total volume of fisheries production in the Philippines in 2015 reached 4.65 million MT with the total value of \$ 7.26 billion," Seafdec said in its country report.

But the growth in the number of fisherfolk as well as the degradation of maritime resources and fishing grounds, particularly poaching in municipal waters, has begun to affect the sector.

The BFAR has tried to implement a fishing vessel identification system, but commercial fishers disputed the measure in court after they were prohibited

from turning off their radars before entering municipal waters.

Reclamation affects fish stocks

Fisherfolk group Pambansang Lakas ng Klusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalalakaya) earlier said the President's plan to impose a fishing ban would only victimize small fishermen who "always fall prey to such strict fishing regulations."

The group pointed out that reclamation, conversion of fishing grounds and large-scale poaching activities are some of the culprits of the declining fish

stocks in the Philippines.

"There are around 187 reclamation projects across the country, as per the Philippine Reclamation Authority itself. These dump-and-fill projects wipe out productive marine and aquatic resources such as mangroves, coral reefs and other wetlands that result in dramatic dwindling of fish stocks," said Pamalakaya national chairperson Fernando Hicap.

But Mr. Marcos assured fisherfolk that the government would monitor and protect breeding grounds of fish to regrow the country's fish supply. no



Prince William, Earthshot Prize name Coastal 500, with PHL, among finalists

NEW YORK (AP)—Prince William and The Duke of Cambridge will be in Singapore in the coming days—ending the trip after a week of the 15th Earthshot Prize.

Coastal 500 is a global network of people and local leaders committed to better, greener and thriving coastal communities.

Princess Anne, 75, will be in 2023, the last of the five of a prize that is a global award for people and organizations who champion the ocean for a better future.

The Coastal 500, which were helped fund in 2022, is a group of 500 people from 100 countries across the world.

The Coastal 500, along with 100 of the best of the world, will be in 2023.

Each of the 500 will receive a grant of \$100,000 to help them lead a project that will improve the lives of people in coastal communities.

The Coastal 500 will be a global network of people and local leaders committed to better, greener and thriving coastal communities.

In addition to their role as the 15th Earthshot Prize, the 500 will receive mentoring, technical and financial support from the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, 75, and the Duke of Cambridge, 75.

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Searca leads project to boost climate resilience in PHL

A NEW project was initiated by Asian research and development agencies in order to enhance climate resilience in agriculture, natural resources and ecosystems in the Philippines.

Being led by the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca), the project is in collaboration with Nias Nusantara and the International Center for Environmental Management.

Funded by the Asian Development Bank, and titled "Accelerating Climate Resilience in Agriculture, Natural Resources and the Environment Project," the initiative aims to advance the Philippine government's climate resilience reform agenda under the Climate Change Action Program (CCAP).

The project kicked off with an inception workshop held on September 8.

Ani Jilkinen, Nias regional director for Asia and the Pacific, enthusiastically supports the project and encouraged collaborative discussions to propel it forward.

Searca Director Dr. Glenn Gregorio said the workshop brought together 47 national and international experts from relevant government agencies and multisectoral institutions in agriculture, natural resources, and the environment to deliberate on the project's objectives. He said the project focuses on three key areas.

According to Gregorio, the project aims to strengthen climate resilience in agriculture by promoting climate resilient farming and supporting climate-smart technologies in crops, livestock, and fisheries in collaboration with Climate Resilient Agriculture Office and National Organic Agriculture Program under the Philippine Department of Agriculture.



Dr. Glenn B. Gregorio
Director, Searca

It also intends to enhance climate resilience in natural resources and ecosystems by expanding the Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Risk Resilience Framework with resiliency roadmaps, guidelines, online monitoring, and capacity building to address climate hazards. This will be implemented in partnership with DENR.

Finally, the project seeks to improve agricultural insurance for climate risk by developing a medium-term insurance roadmap for the Philippine Crop Insurance Corporation (PCIC), exploring innovative financing solutions, and prioritizing financial sustainability and cost-effectiveness with guidance from FCC.

Project Deputy Team Leader Cesar Justo highlighted the project's role in advancing the government's climate resilience agenda as outlined in the CCAP.

"Together, these efforts will strengthen the Philippines' ability to face climate-related challenges head on," Gregorio said.



DOST chief represents PHL at G77, China Summit in Havana, Cuba

SCIENCE Secretary Renato Solidum Jr., representing President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., participated in the recent Group of 77 (G77) and China Summit of heads of state and government on current development challenges focusing on the vital role of science, technology and innovation (STI) in Havana, Cuba.

The G77—attended by more than 100 G77 member countries including various International Organization partners—is the largest intergovernmental organization of developing countries in the United Nations.

The group provides the means for the countries of the South to

articulate and promote their collective economic interests; enhance joint negotiating capacity on major international issues; and continue pursuing South-South cooperation for development.

Thirty heads of states and government from Africa, Asia and Latin America also joined the in-person general debate.

As Solidum delivered the national statement on September 16, he shared some of the major challenges that the Philippines must overcome. They include poverty, hunger, food insecurity, health, energy, gender inequality, the digital divide, disasters

and climate change, among others.

He then acknowledged the critical value that STI upholds toward providing solutions and contributing towards sustainable development.

Solidum cited some of DOST's key programs on capacitating people through scholarship programs; supporting micro, small and medium enterprises through technology upgrading; community empowerment; promotion of science communication; GenRiskPH and PlanSmart-Ready to Rebuild, which focuses on risk assessment, resilience against natural hazards, and disaster reha-

ilitation and recovery initiatives especially in the vulnerable areas.

He pointed out the need to work together in the hopes for a better and more prosperous, fair, just, and balanced world order.

Cuba President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez emphasized that the deliberations and positions on the current global challenges will lead to tangible results in the interest of friendship, solidarity, humanity, and cooperation.

Bermúdez also mentioned that STI plays a key role in fostering productivity, efficiency, wealth creation, and promotion of well-being and hu-

man development.

United Nations Secretary General António Guterres highlighted that the G77 and China Summit is a good platform to raise the voices of the member countries calling for a more effective and stronger collaboration between and among multilateral institutions.

Believing in the principle that no one should be left behind, Guterres called for a global and collective action in strengthening the STI in the international arena as it is essential towards solving common problems and inequalities and contributes in the sustainable development.



SCIENCE Secretary Renato Solidum Jr. speaks at the recent Group of 77 and China Summit in Havana, Cuba. DOST PHOTO



BABE'S EYE VIEW

FROM WASHINGTON, D.C.

AMBASSADOR B. ROMUALDEZ

Triple whammy in our territorial waters

It's bad enough that our Philippine Coast Guard vessels and boats bringing food, water and other supplies to our troops stationed at RRP Sierra Madre in Ayungin Shoal are continuously being harassed and bullied, our fishermen regularly being prevented from plying their livelihood by Chinese Coast



Guard and militia vessels – and now, our precious coral reefs in seabeds within our exclusive economic zone are slowly but surely being destroyed.

According to a report filed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines' Western Command (WesCom) and confirmed by the Philippine Coast Guard that conducted extensive underwater surveys, the marine ecosystems in Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal are dying – if not already dead – most likely caused by the illegal and indiscriminate activities of Chinese vessels that have been swarming the areas, resulting in the massive destruction of coral reefs in the aforementioned West Philippine Sea features.

From Aug. 9 to Sept. 11 alone this year, approximately 33 Chinese maritime militia vessels in Rozul Reef and 15 in Escoda Shoal were monitored by the Philippine Coast Guard. Quoting divers who conducted the underwater surveys, WesCom chief Vice Admiral Alberto Carlos said "there is nothing left" of the corals in Rozul Reef, adding that they have been "destroyed, and only debris was there."

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) says that about "25 percent of the ocean's fish depend on healthy coral reefs" where "fishes and other organisms shelter, find food, reproduce and rear their young in the many nooks and crannies formed by corals." The rich biodiversity found in the habitat created by corals is also the reason why coral reefs are described as the "rainforests of the sea."

A report published at the MIT Science Policy review in August 2020 disclosed that coral reefs "provide ecosystem services worth \$11 trillion annually by protecting coasts, sustaining fisheries, generating tourism and creating jobs across the tropics," and that as many as one billion people across the planet depend on coral reefs for food, income and coastal protection.

More than 500 species of coral and more than 2,000 species of fish live in the waters of the Philippines, which is part of the most diverse and biologically complex marine ecosystem in the world known as the "Coral Triangle" that covers 5.7 million square kilometers of ocean waters spanning across parts of Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and the Philippines, according to NOAA.

As early as 2019, Dr. Deo Morince Onda, an oceanographer and professor at the University of the Philippines' Marine Science Institute, has been warning that the Philippines is losing an estimated P33 billion worth of damage to its reef ecosystem annually, all because of China's land reclamation activities within our exclusive economic zone.

Aside from illegal fishing activities, Chinese vessels have also been poaching giant clams under the reefs and taking corals and the species therein, which they use as decorative materials, ornaments and jewelry, said maritime law expert Professor Jay Batongbacal.

Videos released by the PCG showed the crushed corals, with "visible discoloration" in the seabed of Escoda Shoal that is indicative of "deliberate activities... undertaken to modify the natural topography of its underwater terrain," said PCG spokesperson Commodore Jay Tarricla.

Not surprisingly, reactions to the videos ranged from shock to sadness to anger over the colossal damage that has been wrought upon our marine ecosystem. But what is even more disturbing – totally infuriating – to many Filipinos is that the destruction of the coral reefs is actually a prelude to land reclamation by the Chinese. In Tagalog, "*tinutulo tayo sa sariling mantika*" (we are being cooked in our own fat) – constructing artificial islands with our own corals. Both Senator Francis Tolentino and Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro have warned about this. Intelligence we gathered confirm that these corals are deliberately being crushed, processed and dumped on the seabed.

Since 2013, China has been turning disputed land features in the Spratlys into military bases with ports, runways and other infrastructure. But to use the damaged corals from Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal to make the artificial islands? Absolutely unacceptable.

Support is growing for the filing of cases against China before an international tribunal for the destruction of our corals, and elevating the issue before the UN General Assembly. Calls are also mounting to make China pay billions of pesos not only for the enormous destruction of our coral reefs but for robbing our fisherfolk of their livelihood and threatening the food security of Filipinos.

And for those who continue to make a lot of noise complaining about our Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the United States – wake up! Just think – when the USS Guardian accidentally ran aground on Tubbataha Reef in January 2013, the US paid P87 million for the damage the minesweeper had caused.

China, on the other hand, has built bases in maritime areas that are located within our exclusive economic zone and scoffingly dismisses the destruction of the corals in Rozul Reef and Escoda Shoal as "political drama."

So who is being a responsible member of the community of nations, and who is not? As Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla pointed out, "with or without the territorial dispute, the destruction of the environment is a sin against humanity."

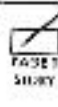
There is absolutely no justification for this type of behavior by the Chinese. We must do all we can and join hands with the international community in putting a stop to these insane activities, and bring everything to its just conclusion.

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'TRILATERAL FRONT' FORMED VS CHINESE INCURSIONS

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The Philippines, Japan and their main security ally, the United States, formed a trilateral front against Chinese incursions in the South China Sea following a meeting on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York last week.

"The Philippines, as you are aware, continues to face challenges with sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the West Philippine Sea or South China Sea," Philippine Foreign Secre-

tary Enrique Manalo said in his opening remarks during the Sept. 19 meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken.

Manalo said that despite the 2016 arbitral award that upheld Philippine sovereign rights over its 370 kilometer exclusive economic zone (EEZ), the Chinese continued to encroach into these waters and harass Filipino vessels.

He said that in addition to the use of water cannons and military grade lasers against Philippine vessels by the China

Coast Guard (CCG), his country also suffered economically due to "challenges to our ability to benefit from the resources in our exclusive economic zone."

The three allies made a commitment to face conflicts with China as a team of three, or trilaterally, instead of just bilaterally. In the East China Sea, Chinese vessels are also conducting illegal activities within Japan's EEZ.

"The three countries will continue to call out behavior that is inconsistent with international law, including the [People's Republic of China's]

recent actions near Second Thomas [Ayungin] Shoal that interfered with the Philippines' lawful exercise of high seas freedom of navigation." Department of State spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement on Friday.

Manalo also pointed to the ongoing Philippine-US partnership in modernizing the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the addition this year of four new sites that would host US forces and military equipment under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA).

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While no actual trilateral patrols have been initiated in the South China Sea, the Philippines, United States and Japan held joint sails in the West Philippine Sea. Patrols are conducted to monitor the country's defenses while sails are a show of unity.

In August, the United States, Japan and Australia conducted joint patrols in the waterway. They were done while Filipinos and Australians held naval drills called "Alon."

The United States and the Philippines are planning to conduct joint patrols in the West Phil-

ippine Sea along with like-minded countries, such as Australia and Japan, but no specific date has been announced yet.

In a news forum last week, AFP spokesperson Col. Medel Aguilar said Malaysia, France, India, Canada and Singapore were also keen on the idea.

Gibco: 'Hypocritical'

In Manila on Saturday, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. stood back at China for claiming that the decrepit BRP Sierra Madre, a Philippine military outpost in the West Philippine Sea, had caused "irrevocable harm" to Ayungin Shoal, saying that Beijing was being "hypocritical."

by the Filipino people and the rest of the world of the Chinese government," he added.

'No factual basis'

China earlier denied reports by the AFP and the Philippine Coast Guard that Chinese maritime militia vessels were responsible for the massive destruction of corals at Rozul (Iroquois) Reef and Escoda (Sahina) Shoal, which are within the Philippines' EEZ.

The Office of the Solicitor General on Thursday said it was studying whether to file a new complaint against China in an international tribunal over the destruction of the coral reefs.



Enrique Manalo
—SENATE PRIB



Gilberto Teodoro Jr.
—DND PHOTO

"Talk about the pot calling the kettle black!" Teodoro said in a statement. "China continues to damage the WFS by its illegal reclamation activities in the SCS and it was found to be a violator of international law

in the 2016 arbitral award when such activities damaged the marine environment."

"Disingenuous propaganda lines such as this only serve to expose China's insincerity and will only heighten the mistrust

Beijing said the accusations had "no factual basis," and urged Manila "to stop creating political drama from fiction."

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that "if the Philippines truly cares about the ecological environment of the South China Sea," it should tow away the Sierra Madre "as soon as possible, stop it from discharging polluted water into the ocean and not let the rusting warship bring irrevocable harm to the ocean."

The military deliberately grounded the Sierra Madre at Ayungin in 1999 to mark the country's claim to the shoal and to serve as an outpost, the