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DENR

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



DENR suspends protected area accord with Socorro village

By BELLA CARIASO

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga yesterday ordered the suspension of the Protected Area Community-Based Resource Management Agreement (PACBRMA) of the controversial Socorro Bayanihan Services Inc. (SBSI) in Sitio Kapihan in Socorro town, Surigao del Norte amid various allegations against the group, including child marriage in the hillside community.

Loyzaga said that the suspension order was necessary pending further investigation into Socorro's alleged gross violation of the terms and conditions of the PACBRMA.

"The DENR will work with the Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development, the provincial government of Surigao del Norte and other authorities to ensure the smooth and peaceful enforcement of the suspension notice and the possible resettlement of the occupants," the DENR said.

The DENR added that a PACBRMA is a legal instrument between the DENR and tenured migrant groups to develop and conserve a portion of a protected area for a 25-year period.

The DENR said that as early as 2019, it started its investigation on the alleged violations of SBSI including restriction of entry in the area, establishment of checkpoints and military-like training; resignation of teachers, uniformed personnel and barangay officials and establishment of structures within the area.

"In 2021 and 2022, the DENR called the attention of SBSI on the recurring violations. In both instances, there was no response from them," the DENR said.

In an advisory, DSWD denied yesterday a circulating social media post that the agency had delisted beneficiaries of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) who are members of SBSI.

However, 4Ps households found to have given their cash grants to the group will, instead, undergo "social case management" to be guided on how the assistance should be used.

"Secretary (Rex) Gatchalian had ordered an investigation to determine those behind this false claims," DSWD added.

Multiple violations

Sen. Ronald dela Rosa, chairman of the Senate committee on public order who presided over the SBSI public hearing on Sept. 28, said that while the leaders denied that their community is a cult, information about the group's activities would qualify them as one.

"Well per our standard, if you will really research the meaning of the cult, they will really qualify as a cult, blind obedience, strict reverence to a single personality, it turns out they're a cult, they don't want to admit it," Dela Rosa said in an interview over ANC.

"We've seen so many violations, like forced marriages for minors, forced sex,

forced labor, violation of the right to travel, violation of the right to formal education, they have many violations and these have to be addressed," he noted.

Dela Rosa said his office received a letter from Socorro municipality, requesting an investigation into the alleged illegal activities of forced labor, arranged child marriages and rape.

"There were accounts of abuses: sexual, physical and even psychological. Accusations of human trafficking, private armies and the operation of a shabu laboratory were also reported to my office," he noted.

"It is bad enough for us to commit crimes against one another, but if and when the alleged crimes are done to innocent children, to those who have yet to make and see their own future, then it is much, much worse and horrifying," he said.

Dela Rosa said his committee intends to conduct the next public hearing in Socorro municipality in Surigao del Norte to save expenses, as members of the committee are less than the number of resource persons who are required to attend the proceedings.

He said when the news broke out that the Senate would investigate alleged illegal activities of a cult operating under the name of SBSI, some senators expected that they would be accused of discriminating and meddling with the affairs of religion or affairs of private associations.



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"Our concern is that in the guise of beliefs and religion, peace and order in society, the safety and welfare of our people are now allegedly threatened. Every person has the right to practice his or her beliefs and religion, it is allowed by the state. But this right does not entitle one to inflict harm over another," Dela Rosa said.

Meanwhile, Manila 6th District Rep. Bienvenido Abante Jr. hinted there could be politics behind the issues that hound SBSI.

"Although I can call for a motu proprio investigation on that matter, there is a need to consider this carefully. Number one, is this political?" he told reporters yesterday during the Balitaan sa Harbor View media forum in Manila.

Abante also said the issue on the group being a religious organization is also tricky as the Constitution ensures freedom of religion.

"We have a constitutional provision to not intervene with religion because they are free to be able to do their own religious profession."

As chairperson of the House of Representatives' committee on human rights, Abante said Congress would study if the group committed human rights violations particularly on minors allegedly ordered by its leaders.

"We could intervene if there is a crime committed. If minors are being wed, if there are no papers or signed marriage contracts, only rituals, what crimes were committed?" he asked.

- With Sheila Crisostomo, Cecille Suerte Felipe, Ghio Ong



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The Manila Times

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Scientists need not be fence-sitters, diplomats need not be disengaged

SOME-
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**ANTONIO
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accused me of being partisan and of undermining not only the nature of science but contradicting the very essence of environmental diplomacy and negotiations, an academic program in which I am currently involved in delivering.

People have this mistaken notion that scientists like me cannot take sides in a controversy, more so if it is about political issues. They argue that we cannot advocate for certain positions. **►ContrerasA5**



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■ CONTRERAS FROM A1

Scientists need not be fence-sitters

There is also this prevailing notion that diplomacy is about peacemaking, and it can only be achieved through disengaged, dispassionate readiness to enter into compromises and cooperation. Diplomats are imaged as nonpartisan conflict resolvers and managers.

I was being excoriated by some for allegedly having the temerity to teach environmental diplomacy, yet project a contrarian, adversarial view. I was being called out for my vigorous defense of the Masungi Georeserve Foundation Inc. (MGFI), effectively taking its side as it engages not only land speculators and watershed syndicates, but even some top brass of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

It is time to correct the wrong impression that scientists are destined to be fence-sitters and that diplomats are bound by the ethos of disengagement. I would like to take this opportunity to debunk the lie that environmental diplomacy is about being in the middle of a conflict and of having a Tinkerbell personality clothed with a kumbaya attitude.

While there are scientists who are mainly involved in detached, theoretical endeavors, there are those who are considered as client advocates, or those who actively render advice to decision-makers, both elected and appointed, as well as other political stakeholders. While basic scientists would no endeavor to influence political action and would be content in presenting their works in scientific conferences and publishing these in peer-reviewed

academic journals, client advocates would find meaning in using their science in advocating for policy preferences to political actors and decision-makers.

Beyond client advocacy, there are issue advocates. These are scientists who are no longer confined to providing advice to policy decision-makers and advocates. They now become advocates themselves, engaged in actual political action such as joining or leading a social movement.

On the other hand, diplomacy, far from being a disengaged neutral ground, is actually populated by representatives of parties in a conflict or a dispute. The image of diplomats as neutral, disinterested bearers of nonpartisan agenda is a jaded concept that can be associated with an emissary, an image that started from how the Greeks practiced early forms of diplomacy. Emissaries were not diplomats but mere messengers. Even the Proxemus, another precursor of modern diplomats, were given the latitude to be partisan. While the Proxemus initially mediates a conflict, by feigning and dining the warring parties, he is not prevented from taking sides if his attempt to mend the differences should fail and lead to war.

Modern diplomacy is not limited to being disengaged, dispassionate and pleasant. Diplomacy is an instrument of the state as an alternative to war. Diplomats are not only found in so-called neutral governing bodies like the United Nations or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations where people are expected to shed their

national affiliations. More often, they are ambassadors and consuls that are tasked to represent their states' interests in bilateral and multilateral settings.

Internally, within the country, diplomacy and negotiation is not just in the province of professional mediators, or even in government agencies whose main job is to oversee the management of conflict. Internal diplomacy and negotiation is found in the interorganizational dynamics that exist between and among stakeholders, given more impetus when there is competition and conflict. Diplomacy is about conflict resolution, but it is not limited to being pleasant and likable. It is not about fostering violence, but it requires assertiveness and the readiness to play hardball.

Anyone familiar with the theories of international relations knows that "being diplomatic" is not just about being reserved. Realist theory posits that conflict is avoided not because of the pacific intention of parties, but because of the balance produced by their aggressive pursuit of power and security. Realists believe that it is naive to believe that cooperation is the natural condition of politics and not conflict. Neo-realists further argue that while states are inherently prone to conflict, actual conflict can be averted in situations in which there is balance of power. This balance of power cannot be achieved by one party bowing or being subservient to the other. While neoliberals would challenge this and proffer cooperation as the option to solve conflicts, current global reality

reveals that this is an unrealistic ideal.

This is true in the case of environmental issues in the country. The case of Masungi is a perfect example of how cooperation can be merely mouthed by many stakeholders, but actually the environment is engaged by self-interest seeking actors who would even use their power and influence to threaten, or buy, state actors to do their bidding. The use of political violence, or the threat of it, is not just resorted to by countries like China or the United States. It can also be deployed by watershed syndicates. And in this context, diplomacy requires going beyond a smiling face.

We speak of cooperation as an ideal, and we have bodies that are supposed to be mediators of conflict. The memorandum of agreement signed between the DENR and MGFI in 2017 speaks of cooperation, while the steering committee that is yet to be convened should be a venue to further this cooperation.

Unfortunately, platforms designed to foster dialogue are now effectively controlled by local powerful forces. The DENR is supposed to be a mediator of conflict. However, it has become a party to the conflict, with some of its top officials displaying open hostility toward MGFI.

Under this political landscape, science cannot afford to just fence-sit. Diplomacy demands assertiveness. Negotiations should promote environmental protection and social justice by speaking truth to bullies and their enablers in government.

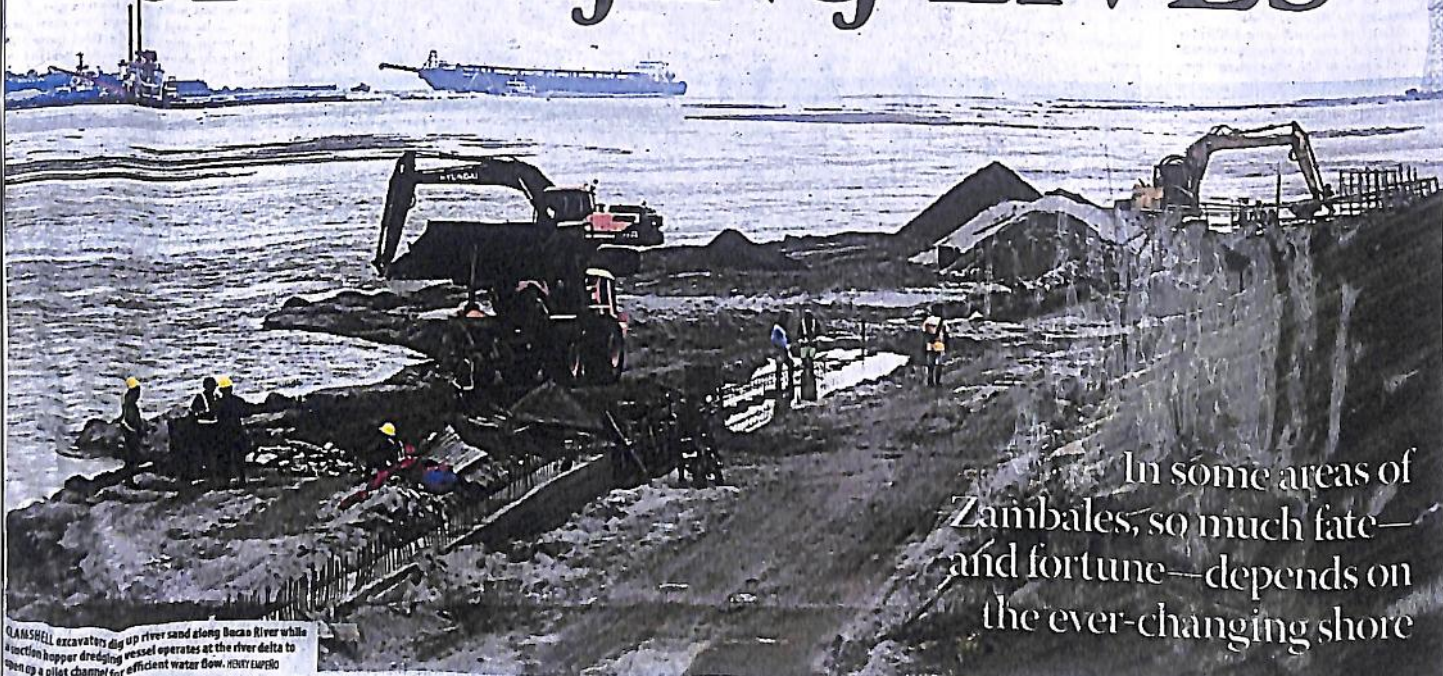


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SHIFTING SANDS, CHANGING LIVES



CLAMSHELL excavators dig up river sand along Bucao River while a suction hopper dredging vessel operates at the river delta to open up a pilot channel for efficient water flow. HEAVY EQUIPMENT

In some areas of Zambales, so much fate—and fortune—depends on the ever-changing shore

STORY & PHOTOS BY HENRY EMPENO

BOTOLAN, Zambales—In a coastal barangay here, three roads approaching the sea abruptly come to a dead end. It didn't use to be like this, village chief Celso Dagsaan told the *BusinessMirror* last Wednesday, as he stood where the black asphalt dropped to gray sand.

"This has been going on for years," Dagsaan said, referring to the coastal erosion that gnaws away at the barangay surge after surge after surge during stormy weather, with each push-and-pull dragging land back into the sea.

"That's why we have been putting up a wall of boulders to protect us from the sea. But even this may not be enough," he lamented.

"See those kids out there?" he said, pointing at six girls playing on the seashore. "That's where the barangay fish landing port used to be. And somewhere close by was the plaza."

We were standing some 20 meters from the end of the road where he parked his tricycle, below the high tide mark where the wet sand starts sloping down steeply into the water. Dagsaan said this very spot was where the coastal road connecting the three streets stood. Coconut trees lined it, he recalled.

"And there," he said pointing some 15 meters into the sea, "that's where a big house owned by an American used to be. But you can't see it anymore; the sea has claimed it."

Disappearing land
DAGSAAN'S village wasn't named "Bangan" for nothing. In the Zambal dialect, it means river mouth or estuary, a place where the river meets the sea. "Estuary" came from the Latin words *aestus* (the

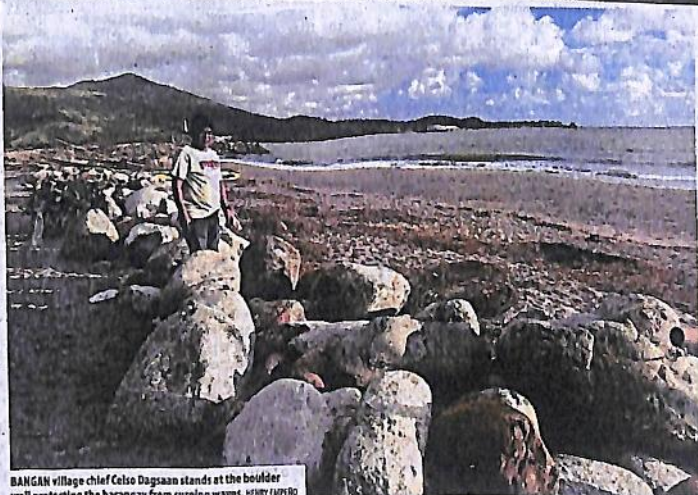


A VENDOR peddles trinkets to tourists at Uliwua, a surfing community in San Felipe, Zambales. HEAVY EQUIPMENT

tide) and *aestuo* (boil), and this village sitting on sandy shore had suffered both the turmoil of the sea's ebb and flow and the rolling current of the nearby Bucao River that drains from Mount Pinatubo.

Over time, Dagsaan said, rising tide has taken out almost one-third of his barangay's land area. This is characteristic of what are considered as high-energy coasts, where waves are powerful for a significant part of the year and the rate of erosion far exceeds the rate of deposition, or the dropping on the shore of materials carried by the sea.

Dagsaan observed that when the Bucao River with its lahar debris rampages downstream during typhoons, the churning river current meets the equally surging sea head-on. This violent union sends river current and sea waves crashing into Barangay Bangan, scour-



BANGAN village chief Celso Dagsaan stands at the boulder wall protecting the barangay from surging waves. HEAVY EQUIPMENT

through under them and they were hardly damaged," he observed.

The village council had long requested for a seawall or a spur dike to direct the force of Bucao River away, but the project seemed daunting even then. "When Ruben Torres was still congressman [sometime between 2001 and 2004 when the former Labor Secretary who hails from this town represented the Second District of Zambales], we proposed the construction of a seawall here, but [Torres] told us he can't use all of these funds for just one barangay," Dagsaan recalled. "That's how big the needed funding for the project already was at that time."

Recently, a foundation donated 20 truckloads of armor rocks, but Bangan needed more, the village chief pointed out.

"It's good that a company built a jetty nearby and this has somewhat deflected the water of Bucao River, but still the surging sea is a big problem for us. What we really need is a seawall," he added.

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A TACO joint painted in eye-catching colors stands out among beachfront establishments in Silu Uliwua, a surfing community in San Felipe, Zambales. HEAVY EQUIPMENT

ing the coast, and eating away at the land.

"It's true that erosion has been reducing our land area, but I noticed that people here only began

losing houses when they began building concrete bungalows," Dagsaan said. "When people had houses simply built on wooden stilts, the sea only surged past



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SHIFTING SANDS, CHANGING LIVES

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Today, Dagsaan said that Bangan is being used by some people as an example of why a dredging project of the Zambales provincial government shouldn't be, with claims that dredging has caused coastal erosion in the Botolan area.

"That is so far from the truth," Dagsaan pointed out. "Years and years before the dredging project, we already suffered from coastal erosion. It started in 1972, when we lost the barangay plaza."

In fact, Dagsaan said, around 300 meters of Bangan's coast has been lost to the sea, and a total of 162 houses have been destroyed since the 1980s.

Choked rivers, surging sea

THE dredging program being undertaken by the Zambales provincial government was precisely designed to rehabilitate the river systems in Zambales, which were silted by sand and other debris ejected by Mount Pinatubo in 1991, said Gov. Hermogenes Ebdane Jr., who was formerly Secretary of the Department of Public Works and Highways.

"Our river rehabilitation program is validated by local observation and experience, and more important, it is based on science. We have to do this for everyone's sake," the governor had stressed.

Ebdane also stressed the recent floods caused by typhoons "Egay" and "Falcon" merely "provided compelling reason for the provincial government to intensify dredging operations," and pointed out that most flooding occurred in barangays when tributary rivers emanating from the Mount Pinatubo area overflowed.

"Thus, it is crucial that these areas which are natural catchbasins for sediments should be dredged immediately as more rains are expected, so that we can create bigger drainage areas that will convey river water to the sea more efficiently," he explained.

According to experts who studied the development of technologies to utilize materials ejected in volcanic eruptions, some 11 billion cubic meters of volcanic materials were ejected by Pinatubo blasts from 1991 to 1994. The eruptions filled nearby valleys with pyroclastic materials, but rains over time brought these pyroclastic deposits into river systems around Pinatubo.

Two-thirds of the total volume of deposits—about 7.3 billion cubic meters, went down to Zambales lowlands through major tributary rivers that drain from the Pinatubo area: Bucaco in Botolan, Santo Tomas in San Narciso, and Maloma in San Felipe.

Ebdane said that following floodings due to silted waterways—capped by the



CHILDREN play at the site of the old fish landing port that was lost to coastal erosion in Barangay Bangan. HENRY OUSTO

severe flooding and landslides in the province during typhoon "Odette" in September 2013—consultations among local government units and national government agencies to seek solutions resulted in the formulation in 2014 of the Zambales River Rehabilitation Program.

Then in October 2019, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) issued Department Order No. 13-2019, which rationalized dredging in heavily silted river channels of Bucaco, Maloma and Santo Tomas in order to arrest the degradation of river systems due to the continuous flow of sediment from upland areas and restore their natural state and water flow, Ebdane added.

Engr. Domingo Mariano, head of the Zambales Provincial Engineer's Office, said the dredgers are doing "pilot channeling" so that river water would flow more efficiently into the sea. This involved the use of suction hopper dredgers, which have powerful pumps and engines that enable dredging of sand, clay, silt and even gravel from the sea bed.

These, however, cause the noise and vibration that people near the project site complain of. But Mariano explained that suction hoopers are needed to soften the depositional areas where fine sand, silt and pumice from Pinatubo had hardened over the years.

"The river deltas are now very shallow because of the deposits. So we need to create a pilot channel; otherwise



BANGAN fishermen bring their boats to safety at day's end. HENRY OUSTO

the river mouths would remain choked and rivers would overflow during heavy rains," he added.

Adelina Correa, a member of Bangan's village council, agreed that there is much misconception about the dredging program.

"They're saying that it depletes 'our' sand; yet, in our case, the problem is erosion. You can also hear some people complain about noise and vibration from dredging, and that's quite true. But the council is okay with this project because it helps the barangay a lot in terms of its finances."

In San Felipe town, heavily silted waterways perennially brought floods, said Marites, a tourism personnel manning a control checkpoint to a seaside resort area.

"The river is choked by debris, that's why there is flood," she told me, as I asked for directions to the seaside sitio of Tektok, where river dredging was ongoing.

"Dredging project is just okay, as long as there's not much noise at night," said John Esmelo, a 45-year-old fisherman who lives near the mouth of the Bucaco River in Botolan.

Dredging a fortune

ESMELO lives in the village of Porac just across the Bucaco River from Bangan, the village that suffered much from coastal erosion.

Porac is considered the host barangay for the dredging project here in Botolan because it is here where sand dredged from the Bucaco River delta is loaded onto barges that deliver them to reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

From Porac, you can also see dredging vessels that suck sand from the huge underwater triangle of volcanic materials that jutted out into the sea from Bucaco River.

As host barangay, Porac has been getting a fair share of revenue from the dredging project, along with the host municipality, and the provincial government. This was what Gov. Ebdane has described as "manna from heaven," the debris ejected by Pinatubo that is now benefitting local communities and has become the cornerstone of the Ebdane administration's program for financial self-sufficiency.

According to Botolan Mayor Jun Omar Ebdane, the municipal government received P30 million as municipal share from dredging operations in Botolan last year. This helped the town address its budget deficit and set aside P55.36 million for various projects this year, Ebdane said.

Porac barangay captain Romeo Ange-

les said that in his 13 years as village chief, it was only now that they have made significant improvements in the barangay because of additional funds from their share of dredging revenue.

He said that from their annual internal revenue allotment (IRA) of P4 million in the year 2020, their share grew to P5 million in 2021 when the dredging allocation was first received.

In 2022, this further grew to P6 million. And while Porac's IRA slid down to P4.8 million this year, a report from the Treasurer's Office indicated that Porac, along with Bangan, will receive a 30-percent share of the P38.5-million barangay's share for April to May 2023, or P5.8 million for just two months.

Angeles said that the first time they received dredging allocation last year, they bought and distributed one-half cavan of rice to the 1,214 families in the barangay, most of whom are fisherfolk. For this they spent P1.4 million out of the P2.43-million allocation.

For the second tranche of dredging revenue, they spent P2 million out of the P7.6-million fund—this time for one whole cavan of rice for each family in Porac.

The rest, they spent for improvement of the barangay hall, said treasurer Janice Yambao: P1.08 million for streetlights; P70,000 for curtains, window blinds, and doors; and P1.9 million for a van for use as barangay service vehicle.

In Bangan, the allocations were used almost in the same manner, said treasurer Margie Fulgar: 73 solar streetlights with built-in CCTV system; a passenger van for the barangay; and food assistance for residents consisting of one cavan of rice, a huge improvement over the 2 kilos dole-out they managed from regular IRA before the dredging project.

Bangan, Kagawad Adelina Correa said, is home to more than 550 families, mostly fisherfolk, whose livelihood from the sea is seasonal. When fishermen can no longer go out to the sea because of the weather, the village council had to buy rice and other foodstuff to sustain them.

Building land

IF the ebb and flow of tides caused land to disappear in Bangan, Botolan, the opposite happened in Barangay Santo Niño, San Felipe town, where the beach community of Liwliwa is thriving on its growing sandy shores.

According to Carlos Salas, an expert

on geohazards at the Mines and Geosciences Bureau of the DENR Region 3, the coastline of San Felipe has been growing into the sea by as much as 300 meters since 1977 up to 2015.

This is because of coastal accretion, which happens when additional layers of matter like sediments gradually accumulate over the years. In the case of San Felipe, accretion is the result of the build-up of labar deposits from the Maloma River north of the municipality, as well as the Santo Tomas River just south of the town proper.

Salas said that sediments come down from the river, then the tides move them along the shoreline. In a survey held in October 2021, just after the Habagat or southwest monsoon rains, an additional 100 meters of growth was observed in San Felipe.

Salas warned, however, that despite the gradual build-up, the coastal situation in the area is still considered "high energy." At the time of Amihan winds, or the northeast monsoon, the coastline may still erode, he pointed out.

Growing problem

THE growing accretion has created a unique problem for San Felipe, Zambales. Mayor Hart Jeresano said that while more and more business has come to town in the form of beach resort operation, feuds emanating from land claims have given him serious headache.

Jeresano said the town's business licensing office has registered close to 300 resorts as of this year, and more are coming. Citing town records, the mayor counted a total of 42 resort businesses in 2019, or before the Covid-19 pandemic; 52 in 2020; 77 in 2021; and 136 in 2022.

By September this year, the list has totaled 298, with most of them being beach resorts with accommodation, or cottages, lodging houses and camping sites. The rest include coffee shops, restaurant-bars, and a few retail sari-sari stores.

The problem with this, the mayor hastened to add, is that most are operated by illegal settlers.

"You see, the coastline has grown by about 300 meters, but this is unclassified land owned by the State. You can't have this titled to anybody because it is still part of public domain and not alienable," Jeresano explained.

He added that some people have been showing up with tax declarations supposedly for the property they occupy, but these documents soon turned out to be fake.

"People, most of them from Manila, have been snapping up beachfront properties here at P9,000 per square meter even without papers. Imagine that?" Jeresano said. "Then there are cases when the claimants quarrel among themselves over areas and boundaries, and then sue before the court."

Those who are placed at the most disadvantage are the native residents in the area, mostly fisherfolk, who were edged out of the land simply because they cannot afford a legal battle, he added.

Jeresano said that if truth be told, all business operators beyond the coastal road at Liwliwa are illegal settlers, who have stayed on simply by reason of occupancy.

"I think it's the DENR that should resolve these cases because it is within their jurisdiction, and not of the local government unit," Jeresano said. "But the sad part is that the illegal settlers act faster than the government could."

The mayor said that in face of the overwhelming influx of settlers in the area, the municipal government had them apply for a business permit, pay the regular fees, but with a written understanding that the permit did not constitute proof of possession, only a regulatory requirement.

Jeresano said that some of the operators intimidated him that they knew their business don't have much leg to stand on legally. "So, they just do what they can to recoup their investments fast, before the law could catch up with them."

Life goes on

JUST before sundown that Wednesday afternoon in Barangay Bangan, the menfolk came down the surf to meet boats that have returned from fishing in the municipal waters. Pulling at the outriggers, the men hoisted the boats up the waterline, up to the dry area of sand just before the boulder wall, where they would be unreachable by tide at night.

Along the beach, the girls playing by the water have left, leaving the area to the distant black bulk of a barge that was broken down in half one day by a violent sea.

At the sand where the coastal road lined with coconut trees used to be, a family of four was heading home: the baby on top of his father's shoulder. Life goes on along the constant yet ever-changing shore.



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Las Piñas gains from bamboo's various economic and ecological benefits



Sen. Cynthia Villar together with the members of the Philippine Bamboo Industry Development Council (FBIDC) hold a bamboo planting ceremony at the Bambusetum in NCR-CITE, Marikina to mark the 2023 World Bamboo Day and Philippine Bamboo Month.

"Bamboo has plenty of economic and ecological benefits and we should continue propagating the same through initiatives that capture our mutual goal of planting more bamboo for the betterment of our environment, for food, and to give livelihood in the countryside by turning bamboo into useful products."

- Senator Cynthia A. Villar



Sen. Cynthia Villar received a token as Keynote Speaker during the launching of KAWAYARN: The Bamboo Textiles PH, of the Department of Science and Technology-Philippine Textile Research Institute (DOST-PTRI)

The people of Las Piñas City continue to reap the benefits of bamboo with various initiatives enabling the propagation and promotion of this plant in the city.

Senator Cynthia Villar, chairperson of the Senate Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Climate Change, has always been fascinated with bamboo, which she said signifies the resiliency of Filipinos. Many projects in her home city capitalize on the economic and ecological benefit of bamboo.

Bamboo Organ

The Las Piñeros' endearment for bamboo is not surprising with the 19th century world-renowned bamboo organ found in the St. Joseph Church. It was built by Las Piñas residents and led by the Spanish missionary Fr. Diego Cera. The instrument used bamboo as its primary material which were taken from the bamboo forests of Las Piñas and Zapote back then. People celebrate this highly regarded work of art through the International Bamboo Organ Festival every February. The bamboo organ is considered a Philippine treasure.

Manunugtog Kawayan

The Las Piñas National High School has a group of students called "Manunugtog Kawayan" that play musical instruments made of bamboos like xylophones and anklongs.

Samahang Magpaparol

Known as NCR's Parol Capital, Las Piñas City is home to three generations of parol makers who uses bamboo frames as their materials in making parol. In 2005 Senator Cynthia Villar helped organize the parol makers by launching the Samahang Magpaparol ng Las Piñas. She assisted them in setting up the Las Piñas Parol Center, which serves as a training area where new designs and packaging techniques were explored. She brainchild the Parol Festival, a yearly competition for parol makers. This is her way of boosting the city's parol-making industry.

Bambusetum

Villar was instrumental in the establishment of a bambusetum in the city.

Thirteen varieties were planted at the Las Piñas-Paranaque Wetland Park, a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance in Manila Bay, in partnership with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Laguna Lake Development Authority. Another collections of bamboos can be found in Villar Sipag Farm, with seventy species of bamboo.

E-Bamboo Factory

Villar also built the Engineered Bamboo Processing Factory, where bamboo sourced from outside the city undergoes an 11-step process to serve as aesthetic and durable bamboo steps, which her family's real estate company buys.

"According to the Sustainable Development Goals, Bamboo has the potential of supporting sustainability in economic growth as bamboo grows very fast and can be grown easily in different climate conditions and altitudes and thus, reduces the pressure on trees producing timber for wood products," Villar said.



The Las Piñas-Paranaque Wetland Park (LPPWP) bambusetum



Las Piñas Engineered Bamboo Factory

She noted that bamboo forests play a leading role in global carbon cycles and carbon sink as these forests absorb up to 12 MT of CO2 per hectare per year, thus balancing the atmosphere in the earth and releasing 30% more oxygen than other plants.



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How bamboo helps the world in its battle against climate change

Bamboo is key in replacing fossil fuels and reducing deforestation.

By ADAM LAURENA

Once labeled as the "poor man's timber," bamboo is now slowly being recognized as an alternative green material as society continuously makes efforts to adopt sustainable practices in various fields.

In modern construction, bamboo is revolutionizing eco-friendly architecture, specifically with its strength, versatility, and renewable qualities, boosting socialized housing not only in the Philippines but around the world.

Used by generations of Filipinos in building the traditional *bahay kubo*, the now-emerging construction material can do more than just be a low-cost material for low-rise structures.

"It is also disaster-resilient because this is not your typical *bahay kubo*. This is a *bahay kubo* built with modernized technology that can withstand typhoons at a wind speed of 240 to 280 km/hour and it can resist earthquakes from 6.5 to 7.5 magnitude," said Dr. Pablo Jorillo, general manager at Base Bahay Foundation, Inc. (BASE).

BASE, an organization that uses bamboo in their socialized housing projects, recently hosted the second annual Bamboost, a bamboo forum that centered around the theme "Building with Bamboo: The Future of Sustainable Construction" and featured a panel of experts in the field that discussed the significance and benefits of bamboo today.

Liu Kiwei, global bamboo construction programme coordinator at the International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation (INBAR) and one of the speakers of the event, talked about the benefits the material can offer when it comes to environmental protection, specifically in fighting climate change.

"Using bamboo, we can store carbon for a very long time, and we can greatly reduce the pressure of present carbon emissions in the atmosphere," she told The Philippine STAR. "That is why I believe bamboo is more important to use than other mainstream construction materials."

Bamboo has a significant contribution in reducing climate change in the developing world, especially in rural communities. Here are four ways it can help in doing such.

It sequesters carbon. Bamboo is one of the fastest-growing plants in the world and has been widely used to create different types of products and structures in Asia, America, and Africa.

"In many other countries in these three continents, you can find bamboo there. Actually, the Philippines is a country with a long history of using bamboo, most especially in bamboo construction," Kiwei explained.



Bamboo can help store carbon emissions for a long time.

More than 10,000 uses of bamboo products can be heard of around the world, according to Kiwei. She believes using bamboo is key for people to be environmentally conscious, as it has one important function that can help reduce climate change.

"It's very important for us to think about how to use bamboo as it mitigates climate change because bamboo can store carbon," she said. "After proper treatment, it can be transformed into a durable component for 30 to 50 years where carbon can be stored."

In a study by the National Institute of Abiotic Stress Management in India, it was found out how bamboo can produce 27.38 million tons of oxygen yearly in the South Asian country, mainly due to how quickly it grows.

Moreover, one hectare of a bamboo forest may sequester 12 metric tons of carbon annually, which is equal to 26,000 pounds, having the potential to slow climate change.

It replaces fossil fuels and reduces

deforestation. Bamboo can also act as an eco-friendly renewable energy source, being a great alternative to fossil fuels.

In a study from the scientific journal GCB Bioenergy, apart from quickly storing carbon and releasing oxygen into the air, bamboo can be transformed into bioethanol, biogas, and other bioenergy products in various procedures such as fermentation and pyrolysis.

"We conducted a review of energy conversion methods for bamboo biomass and found that bioethanol and biochar are the primary products obtained," said study author Zhiwei

Liang of the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Science.

For many people who rely on solid biomass for cooking, such as charcoal or briquettes, bamboo can provide a sustainable source of bioenergy. It can also be converted into gas or pellets, to provide a source of electricity and heating, according to INBAR.

In addition, since bamboo has the function of growing quickly and maturing faster than any type of tree, it takes the pressure off other natural resources, reducing deforestation.

It helps in restoring degraded lands. Bamboo has played an integral role in a huge number of agricultural



Toothbrush and brush made of bamboo



A demonstration during the INBAR-led bamboo construction workshop in Bangladesh.



Handicrafts made of bamboo and cogon



Bamboo straws

landscapes and ecosystems, being of great use in restoring deteriorated lands as it thrives on problem soils and steep slopes that are unsuitable for other crops.

Back in 2018, INBAR released a report about how eight countries, namely China, Colombia, Ghana, India, Nepal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Thailand, had benefited from bamboo when it comes to land restoration.

Specifically, a documented case in Allahabad, India saw rural livelihoods being reclaimed after 80,000 hectares of degraded land became of use again in the community after bamboo as a pioneering species. It has sturdy rhizomes, with roots that regulate water flows and prevent erosion.

It helps promote livelihood. As a rapidly renewable source of materials for over 10,000 documented uses,

bamboo helps in promoting jobs and economic development, especially in rural communities.

As Kiwei mentioned, bamboo has a variety of uses, ranging from furniture to paper, flooring to housing. This allows people to see bamboo's economic role in society and, more importantly, how they can be dependent on a more sustainable kind of material rather than endangered forest resources and fossil fuels.

Bamboo by itself cannot solve the world's problems with regards to climate change. However, if properly exposed and advocated to the public, it can do wonders for the protection of Mother Earth. Let's make the switch to bamboo now!



Liu Kiwei, Global Bamboo Construction Programme coordinator at the International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation.



Liu Kiwei (third from left) in an INBAR-led bamboo construction workshop in Bangladesh in 2019.



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The Manila Times

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Coca-Cola PH, partners collect 1K kgs waste in coastal cleanup

COCA-COLA Philippines, together with Plastic Bank Philippines and Lighthouse Legacy Foundation, led over 200 volunteers to collect debris and marine waste at Julugan Fish Terminal in Tanza, Cavite on Sept. 16, 2023 as part of the International Coastal Cleanup (ICC).

Employees from the Coca-Cola Philippines system, together with waste collection members of its Ecosystem Impact Program with Plastic Bank Philippines and volunteers from ICC Philippines, Lighthouse Legacy Foundation, the local government of Tanza, Philippine Coast Guard Cavite Chapter and Don Bosco School of Theology collected more than 1,000 kilos of waste to help address coastal waste issues in the area.

Lighthouse Legacy Foundation President Zed Avecilla commended

Coca-Cola Philippines for its long-standing commitment to responsible waste management, highlighting the company's "World Without Waste" strategy that was initiated in 2018, well before the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Law was enacted in the country.

The ICC is renowned as the world's largest volunteer effort for ocean sanitation, with The Coca-Cola Company serving as a founding member of the Trash Free Seas Alliance since 1995. In partnership with its local bottling partners, the company is engaging employees, consumers, and communities in cleanups, providing resources, grants, and in-kind donations to help remove trash from beaches and waterways.

In the Philippines, Coca-Cola is doing its part to prevent marine debris through community-based initiatives



■ Coca-Cola Philippines President Tony del Rosario joins hundreds of volunteers in the coastal cleanup at Julugan Fish Terminal in Tanza, Cavite on Sept. 16, 2023. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

like the Ecosystem Impact Program with Plastic Bank. This initiative helps build collection and recycling systems in communities to prevent plastic

bottles from ending up in places where they should not be, while at the same time, empowering workers in the solid waste management sector.



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Fukushima to release wastewater anew

TOKYO: Japan will begin releasing a second batch of wastewater from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant from next week, its operator has said, an exercise that angered China and others when it began in August.

On August 24, Japan began discharging into the Pacific some of the 1.34 million tons of wastewater that has collected since a tsunami crippled the facility in 2011.

"The inspections following the first release have been completed. ... The (second) discharge will start on October 5," Tepco said on Thursday.

China banned all Japanese seafood imports after the first release, which ended on September 11, despite Tokyo's insistence that the operation poses no risk.

Russia, whose relations with Japan are also frosty, is reportedly considering following suit on a seafood ban.

In the first phase around 7,800 tons of water were released into the Pacific out of a planned total of 1.34 million tons, equivalent to more than 500 Olympic swimming pools.

Tepco says that the water has been filtered of all radioactive



UNDER FUKUSHIMA'S GHOST This photo taken on Feb. 3, 2022 shows a general view of hydrogen storage and supply facilities (background) and solar power generation facilities (foreground) at the Fukushima hydrogen energy research field in Namie town, Fukushima prefecture. Japan will begin releasing a second batch of wastewater from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant from next week, its operator has said, an exercise that angered China and others when it began in August 2023. AFP PHOTO

elements except tritium, which is within safe levels. That view is backed by the UN atomic agency.

China has accused Japan of using the ocean like a "sewer," accusations echoed at the United

Nations last week by Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare of the Solomon Islands, who has developed close relations with Beijing.

The release, which is expected to take decades to complete, is aimed at making space to eventually begin removing the highly dangerous radioactive fuel and rubble from the wrecked reactors.

"As was the case for the first discharge, we will continue to monitor the tritium levels. We will continue to inform the public in ways that are easy to understand based on scientific evidence," Tepco official Akira Ono told reporters Thursday.

Despite China's ban on Japanese seafood imports, Chinese boats are reportedly continuing to catch fish off Japan in the same areas that Japanese vessels operate.

Rahm Emanuel, the US ambassador to Japan, last week posted photos of what he said were Chinese fishing boats off Japan on September 15.

"They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Chinese vessels fishing off Japan's coast on September 15th, post China's seafood embargo from the same waters," Emanuel said on social media platform X. **AFP**



2 green activists seek SC protection

By NILLICENT BAUTISTA

Two environment activists, who claimed to have been kidnapped by the military, are seeking protection from the Supreme Court (SC) due to perceived threats and danger to their lives, liberty and security.

Jonila Castro and Jhed Reiyana Tamano filed a petition on Thursday asking the SC to issue writs of amparo and habeas data, arguing that "there is no guarantee with respect to their safety, especially after drawing the ire of several members of government offices."

Under the law, the writ of amparo provides protection to any person whose right to life, liberty and se-

curity is violated or threatened by public officials or private entities.

The writ of habeas data extends protection in relation to gathering, collecting or storing of data or information of the aggrieved party.

In the 37-page petition, the activists said that they fear for their and their families' physical safety after they angered government officials when they denounced the claims that they surrendered to authorities.

The activists instead accused the military of abduction and coercion.

On Sept. 15, the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) announced that Castro and Tamano surrendered to the Philippine Army's 70th Infantry Battalion (70IB) after reportedly being missing for almost

two weeks.

However, during a press conference on Sept. 19, the two activists belied the claims of military authorities and insisted that they were abducted and "forced to surrender."

According to the petition, the activists' right to privacy was "clearly violated and is in threat of being further violated" through "brazen red-tagging" after the NTF-ELCAC said it would be "releasing" and "spreading" the information it has about the petitioners.

In an interview on Sept. 20, National Security Council (NSC) assistant director general Jonathan Malaya warned that the NTF-ELCAC would "continue to expose the information they have about Jhed and Jonila and expose them for what they allegedly are."

The petitioners claimed that they had not consented to the disclosure of information about them.

Listed as respondents of the petition were 70IB commanding officer Lt. Col. Ronnel dela Cruz, members of the 70IB, Malaya, Bataan Provincial Police chief public information officer Cap. Carlito Buco, members of the Bataan police and the NTF-ELCAC.

Rights group Karapatan is backing the move of Castro and Tamano, saying the writs are urgent and necessary to protect the activists.

Karapatan secretary general Cristina Palabay accused the NTF-ELCAC of moving to cover its tracks.

"The writs are but a way to protect them from this shameless cover-up of their abduction," Palabay said in a statement. — With Emmanuel Tupas



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Second round of Fukushima wastewater release starts Oct. 5

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EDITORIAL

Making PH climate-smart

ALARMING, to say the least.

But the United Nations chief, Antonio Guterres, has warned the world's climate is breaking down – following a bulletin from the European Union's monitoring body which said 2023 is likely to be the hottest year in human history.

Global temperatures during the Northern Hemisphere summer have been the warmest on record, with heatwaves, droughts and wildfires whipping Asia, including the Philippines, Africa, Europe and North America in the past three months with what climatologists say is a dramatic impact on economies, ecosystems and human health.

The average global temperature in June, July and August was 16.77 degrees Celsius, smashing the previous 2019 record of 16.48C.

The European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service said in a report "The three months that we've just had are the warmest in approximately 120,000 years, so effectively human history."

Back home, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has encouraged the Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states to motivate developing countries to firm up their climate action commitments.

In his intervention at the 43rd ASEAN Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia, the 65-year-

old President noted "the most urgent threat to our progress is the impact of climate change" and added "It is a looming reminder of the injustice of disproportionate impact on our people."

“The average global temperature in June, July and August was 16.77 degrees Celsius, smashing the previous 2019 record of 16.48°C”

He said ASEAN, during the upcoming COP28 "must call on developed countries to heighten the implementation of their commitment."

He was referring to the United Nations Climate Change Conference, more commonly referred to as COP28, which will be the 28th United Nations Climate Change conference, from November 30 until December 12, 2023, at the Expo City, Dubai.

Among these pledges are climate finance, technology development and transfer,

and capacity building, all of which "drive ASEAN's capabilities to prevent, mitigate, manage and adapt to the impacts of climate change."

Mr. Marcos said the Philippines, being one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, will carry on with international tie-ups aimed at making the region climate-smart and disaster-ready.

"In achieving food security, we must build on cooperation that will harness the transformative potential of our agricultural sector to ensure that food production is responsible and will be of benefit for future generations," Mr. Marcos said.

The echoes of Guterres warning are reverberating throughout the continents.

"Scientists have long warned what our fossil fuel addiction will unleash...our climate is imploding faster than we can cope, with extreme weather events hitting every corner of the planet."

Record-high global sea surface temperatures played a major role in stoking heat throughout the summer, with marine heatwaves hitting the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea.

Climatologists have said, as they look at the additional heat in the surface ocean, the probability is that 2023 will end up "being the warmest year on record."

The average global temperature through the first eight months of 2023 is the second-warmest on record: only 0.01C below the benchmark 2016 level.



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From pledges to action toward achieving net zero

EXTRME weather events and other climate impacts are becoming deadlier and more destructive. Whether this is the new normal, what awaits the world will be much worse and bleaker than it is now if we allow it to be. If there is one thing the global health pandemic taught us it is that we need to look beyond the horizon, and we need to do just that — or further beyond — in this state of global climate emergency.

The GlobeScan Sustainability Study reported in August 2023 that 93 percent of qualified sustainability experts ranked climate change as the most urgent sustainable development challenge.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report of its Working Group 1, titled "Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis" — by far, our most up-to-date physical understanding of climate change, according to the world's top climate scientists working together — didn't mince words when it said: "[C]limate change is driven by us humans, and that it is happening quickly. This is already being felt in weather and climate extremes in every region of the world."

Zeroing in on net-zero

A few days ago, a consortium of Philippine businesses called Net Zero Carbon Alliance (NZCA) celebrated its second anniversary. NZCA is a private sector-led movement initiated by First Gen-owned renewable energy leader Energy Development Corp. (EDC) that aims to achieve carbon neutrality as a transition to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

In his opening remarks, Jerome Cainglet, EDC president and chief operating officer, said: "[T]he Net Zero Carbon Alliance is our response to the collection climate action that the IPCC asked of everyone after they had confirmed that humans are unequivocally increasing greenhouse gas emissions to record levels."

Co-organized in partnership with Eco-Business, Asia Pacific's largest media and business intelligence organization dedicated to sustainable development and ESG performance, and with the theme "Zeroing in on Net-Zero: From Corporate Pledges to Action," the conference featured a panel of company and industry resource speakers that delved into the challenges and opportunities for Philippine corporations embarking on a net-zero journey, as well as the available solutions for hard-to-abate and carbon-intensive sectors.

An analysis released in June found that almost half of the 2,000 largest publicly listed companies in the world have committed to a net-zero strategy. However, the report also revealed that many of these companies either do not count emissions produced by their supply chains, or depend on unreliable strategies to offset their carbon production.

British Ambassador to the Philippines and Palau Laure Beaufils, in her opening keynote, said: "[I]ntent is not enough. Impact is what we are after. We've already seen the outcome firsthand in carbon markets and environmental, social and governance (ESG) frameworks, where investigation after investigation revealed the gap between intention and reality. Sound data must sit at the heart of all net-zero action."

Close to 200 delegates from 69 companies participated in plenary sessions with industry experts and representatives from NZCA member companies on best practices in climate action, as well as existing and emerging solutions to accelerate the Philippines' private sector net-zero journey.

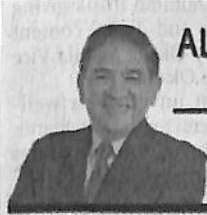
These sessions covered carbon capture technology, green investments and financing, continuing government legislation and incentivization, and greening the supply value chain. The consortium also strengthened its call for vigilance against greenwashing and urged the private sector to in-



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ALL ABOUT CHOICES

LUDWIG FEDERIGAN

creasingly implement measurement, reporting and verification in climate change mitigation efforts.

NZCA is guided by the carbon neutrality framework designed in partnership with Rodel Lasco, executive director of the Oscar M. Lopez Center for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation. The framework mainly espouses carbon reduction and removal for Philippine businesses that begins with the partner's commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 at the latest, followed by measuring its climate resilience and carbon footprint, coming up with its road map, implementing it, tracking, disclosing and validating its progress over time.

Zero Carbon Gateway

The NZCA, likewise, developed a Zero Carbon Gateway to help partners track their progress, including computing their Scope 1 and Scope 2 carbon emissions.

"As always, climate action is a matter of urgency as we continue to experience the ever-increasing impacts of our warming planet around the world, most especially in the Philippines. NZCA aims to contribute practical measures toward decarbonization that Philippine businesses can take, starting with interventions such as renewable energy," says Allan Barcena, NZCA executive director and EDC assistant vice president, and head of Corporate Relations and Communications.

Many businesses are now aware of the need to step up their decarbonization programs. At present, NZCA counts a total of 18 partners, including ArthaLand Corp., British Standards Institution, Cemex Holdings Philippines, Converge ICT Solutions, Drink Sustainability Communications, ECC International, EC Mobility Ventures, Ecolab, First Balfour, First Philippine Industrial Park, Holcim Philippines, INAEC Aviation Corp., Knowles Electronics, Linden Suites, Menarco Development Corp., Monde Nissin Corp., People360 Consulting Group, SGV and Co., Silliman University and Unilever Philippines. This year, NZCA also enlisted Eco-Business and Ako Ang Bukas as Enabler Partners.

Main takeaway

It has been said that the higher value of a corporate business is not found in the monetary profit it brings nor in the wealth it creates, but in the nobility of its purpose: to improve the quality of life of the people and to build a sustainable and resilient human society.

What could be more rewarding than knowing that one's business, however big or small, has made a difference in making a village community or the country as a whole, a safer and happier place to live in.

The road promises to be filled with stumbling blocks. But instead of slowing us down, these challenges should bring about consensus — an agreement that our country should double, even triple, its efforts to reach our targets.

After each disaster, we rebuild and continue to rebuild. Now is the time not just to build better, but build stronger, using the best standards in light of the crises we face today.

Ludwig O. Federigan is the executive director of the Young Environmental Forum and a nonresident fellow of Stratbase ADR Institute. He completed his climate change and development at the University of East Anglia (United Kingdom) and an executive program on sustainability leadership at Yale University (USA). You can email him at ludwig.federigan@gmail.com.



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Marcos: Phl not causing trouble, just protecting territory, fishermen

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Photo taken from an aircraft of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources conducting a regular maritime survey of Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal on Sept. 28 shows two Chinese coast guard vessels in the shoal's lagoon after the Philippine Coast Guard cut the anchor line of floating barriers installed by China.

MICHAEL MARCAS

Marcos: Phl not causing trouble, just protecting territory, fishermen

By HELEN FLORES

The Philippines did not mean to create trouble but was only protecting the welfare of its fishermen in its maritime territory when it removed the floating barrier installed by China in Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal, President Marcos said yesterday.

Speaking to reporters in Surigao del Norte, Marcos stressed that the area where the China Coast Guard (CCG) placed the floating barrier is well within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone. He said the Philippines was not trying to escalate tension in the West Philippine Sea.

"We are not looking for trouble. What we do is we will continue to defend the Philippines, the maritime territory of the Philippines, the rights of our fishermen who fish there, where they have been fishing for hundreds of years," he said. "That's why I don't understand why it changed."

"Again, many of these are operational issues and that I really cannot talk about. But in terms of taking down the barrier, I don't see what else we could do," the President stressed.

"It's not right to put a barrier like that as it is clear that it is within the Philippines," Marcos said partly in Filipino.

This was the first time Marcos spoke about the issue, adding he was surprised by China's latest action in the West Philippine Sea.

The Chief Executive noted that when the fishermen reentered the area previously blocked by the Chinese, they were able to catch 164 tons of fish in just one day.

"As I have said, we avoid trouble, we avoid provocative language but we remain resolute in defending the Philippine territory," he said.

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) removed

the 300-meter long barrier installed by the CCG in the southeast portion of the shoal upon the instruction of Marcos.

Beijing, through foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin, assailed Manila for removing the floating barrier, insisting that Panatag Shoal is Chinese territory.

"I would like to reiterate that Huangyan Dao has always been China's territory," he said, calling Panatag Shoal by its name assigned by Beijing.

"What the Philippines did looks like nothing more than self-amusement," he said in a statement shared by the Chinese embassy in Manila.

Panatag Shoal, also known as Bajo de Masinloc is classified as traditional fishing ground of Filipinos in the 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration on the case filed against China by the Aquino administration in 2013. The ruling invalidated China's massive South China Sea claim and reaffirmed the Philippines' maritime entitlements.

Meanwhile, militant fishers' group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) has urged the government to be more proactive in dealing with China to prevent the latter from committing more "dastardly acts" in the West Philippine Sea.

While praising the PCG's removal of floating barriers in the Panatag Shoal, Pamalakaya said the installation of barriers could have been avoided had there been regular Philippine patrols in the area.

"We demand that the PCG should fortify outposts in the West Philippine Sea and enforce basic rules of engagement in the event of another aggressive confrontation with Chinese forces," Pamalakaya vice chairperson for Luzon Bobby Roldan said.

— With Michael Punongbayan, Emmanuel Tupas, Jun Elias



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Marcos vows: PH will defend borders

BY CATHERINE S. VALENTE

THE Philippines is not looking for a fight with China, but it will defend its borders against aggression, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said on Friday.

The President made the statement after the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) carried out his orders to take down the 300-meter-long floating barrier the Chinese put up on the approach to the Bajo de Masinloc Shoal in a disputed part of the South China Sea.

Interviewed by reporters while visiting Surigao del Norte, the President insisted that putting up the barrier was not right because it was well within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

"Hindi naman maaari na lalagyan ng barrier na ganoon at maliwanag naman na nasa loob ng Pilipinas 'yan (There shouldn't be any barrier there and that is clearly within the Philippine territory)," the President said.

"Hindi tayo naghahanap ng gulo, basta't gagawin natin, patuloy nating ipagtanggol ang Pilipinas, ang maritime territory ng Pilipinas, ang karapatan ng mga fisherman natin na mangisda doon sa mga areas kung saan sila

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■ DEFEND FROM A1

Marcos vows:

nangingisda daang-daang taon na (We are not looking for trouble. We will continue defending the Philippines, the maritime territory of the Philippines, and the rights of our fishermen who have been fishing in those areas for hundreds of years)," he said.

"Again, many of these are operational issues and that I really cannot talk about. But in terms of taking down the barrier, I don't see what else we could do," the President said.

Earlier this week, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, Wang Wenbin, said Beijing "firmly upholds the sovereignty and maritime rights and interests of the Huangyan island," referring to the shoal by its Chinese name.

"We advise the Philippines not to provoke or stir up trouble," Wang warned.

On Monday, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) released a video showing a diver cutting a rope attached to the buoys that were holding up the barrier.

Another showed an anchor being hauled from the water into a wooden outrigger boat.

After the rope was cut, the Chinese government vessels, who were watching from a distance, moved in to remove the barrier, said Jay

Tarriela, PCG spokesman for the West Philippine Sea.

"The barrier posed a hazard to navigation, a clear violation of international law," Tarriela had said.

It also hinders the fishing and livelihood activities of Filipino fisherfolk in Bajo de Masinloc," he added.

Tarriela cited the 2016 Arbitral Award that ruled that Bajo de Masinloc is a traditional fishing ground for Filipino fishermen.

"Thus, any obstruction hindering the livelihoods of Filipino fisherfolk in the shoal violates international law. It also infringes on the Philippines' sovereignty over Bajo de Masinloc," he said.

The barrier was spotted by the PCG and Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources personnel aboard the Navy ships Datu Bankaw during a routine maritime patrol last September 22.

Filipino fishermen who frequented the area said a Chinese maritime militia service boat installed the barrier upon seeing the Datu Bankaw approach the shoal.

Bajo de Masinloc lies 240 kilometers west of Luzon and nearly 900 kilometers from the nearest major Chinese land mass of Hainan.



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PCG vows to remove future shoal barriers

The Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) vowed yesterday to "do whatever it takes" to remove any more floating barriers installed by China in Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal.

The remarks came after an aerial inspection of the shoal - also called Bajo de Masinloc - on Thursday confirmed that a 300-meter

floating barrier, which ignited the latest diplomatic row between Beijing and Manila, had been taken away.

A Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources plane flew over the shoal and journalists on board saw access to its shallow waters unblocked, although the PCG noted the presence of three

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China Coast Guard vessels and a maritime militia ship.

Two of the CCG ships were inside the lagoon of the shoal while the third was "patrolling outside the vicinity," PCG spokesman for the West Philippine Sea Commodore Jay Tarriela said. Two Filipino fishing vessels were also in the vicinity.

The floating barrier was

found across the entrance to the shoal last week during a routine Philippine government resupply mission to Filipino fishermen.

In a special operation ordered by President Marcos, Philippine Coast Guard personnel cut a rope tethering the barrier to an anchor, allowing it to drift.

"In the next coming months, if ever that barrier will once again be in place, the

Philippine Coast Guard will do whatever it takes for us to remove the barrier," Tarriela told reporters, as he sat next to an anchor seized during the mission.

He said it would be up to the National Task Force on the West Philippine Sea, chaired by Marcos and National Security Adviser Eduardo Año, to decide what to do with the anchor, which weighs some 20 to 30 kilos. - Ghio Ong, AFP