

TEACHER EXODUS ALARMS DEPED; EDUCATION CLUSTER FORMED

FROM A1

understood the urgency of addressing the "very deep-seated problems" in the education sector.

"He knows an Education Cluster is needed. But he doesn't want to stop with the cluster because it is just a coordinating mechanism," the DepEd chief said in a Palace press briefing later on Tuesday.

'Study tours'

While he did not cite data on the exodus of teachers, Angara noted that "the destinations do not involve the [United States] but other countries as well, so we will definitely pay close attention to this by looking at the factors that make the teachers leave."

"It's a real problem. I have received reports that many schools overseas invite our teachers for so-called study tours. The problem with these tours, however, is that many of the invited teachers no longer come back," he added.

From 2011 to 2017, around 1,500 teachers left the country annually to work abroad, according to the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration. Many of these teachers moved to China, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Japan and Thailand.

According to DepEd, the overall number of public school teachers as of school year 2020-2021 is 876,842. Of that total, 514,099 are grade school teachers, 288,687 teach junior high school, and 74,056 teach senior high.

To reach the ideal class size of 35 students, DepEd should hire 25,000 teachers annually until 2028, according to Alliance of Concerned Teachers chair Vladimir Quera.

These are among the factors that the new Education Cluster

will tackle, Angara said.

The cluster will be composed of the DepEd, CHED, TESDA, the Department of Labor and Employment, and the Department of Budget and Management. The Department of Social Welfare and Development will be part of the cluster's technical working groups.

It was the Second Congressional Commission on Education (Edcom II) which proposed the cluster.

"All of the agencies are doing their respective jobs, but they do it independently of one another with no mechanism of coordination, of making sure that the plans come together and they deliver an integrated system of education," Edcom II executive director Karol Mark Yee said.

PH students among loneliest

Angara said the cluster would also tackle the country's need for guidance counselors, as he cited a study by the Program for International Student Assessment showing that the Philippines has the highest prevalence of bullying in schools.

Philipino students are also rated as among the loneliest, the DepEd chief said.

"Based on the Anti-Bullying Act, this matter is the concern of guidance counselors. But in DepEd, we have about 5,000 vacant positions for guidance counselors but there are no takers," he said.

The Philippine Business for Education hailed the creation of the cluster, saying that, "We believe this Cabinet cluster and the appointment of an education czar can set the motion for the much-needed long-term vision and plan for education and human capital development of the country."

—WITH REPORTS FROM DEMPSEY REYES AND INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ

DFA open to Ayungin deal extension over entire WPS

By Jeannette I. Andrade
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The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) is open to the possibility of extending the Philippines' provisional arrangement with China over Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal to the entire West Philippine Sea (WPS).

At Tuesday's budget hearing by the House committee on appropriations, Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo, replying to a question raised by House Deputy Minority Leader and ACT Teachers party list Rep. France Castro, said that the coverage extension was "certainly an interesting idea," if Beijing and other claimants to the disputed areas of the South China Sea were willing to cooperate.

According to Ma. Theresa Lazaro, DFA undersecretary for bilateral relations and ASEAN affairs, the provisional understanding with China on the rotation and repositioning (Rore) of troops at Ayungin Shoal is a bilateral consultative mechanism.

The two countries came to an arrangement last month after a resupply mission in Ayungin, where the Philippines in 1999 grounded a Philippine Air Force (PAF) plane conducting a routine patrol over Bajo de Masinloc (Panatag or Scarborough Shoal).

"We have what we call a bilateral consultation mechanism in the [WPS] or South China Sea with China and that meets regularly every few months. Any incident that happens in WPS which we feel is detrimental to our interests caused by China, we, of course, will raise it," he pointed out.

"The arrangement only covers resupply missions in Ayungin Shoal and not the other disputed features in the South China Sea.

"The salient points of the provisional arrangement are basically, first, this is without prejudice to our national positions... Second, this will be subject to review," Lazaro said.



CHINA'S AGGRESSION A Philippine Navy boat is flanked by a China Coast Guard vessel (left) and a Chinese maritime militia vessel (not seen in photo) as both ships fire water cannons at the boat during its resupply mission to Ayungin (Second Thomas) Shoal early in March. —VIDEO GRAB FROM PHILIPPINE COAST GUARD

ject to review," Lazaro said.

Manalo pointed out that since the understanding was provisional, it could be subject to improvement.

Diplomatic protest

Manalo also said that they met on Monday with officials of the Chinese Embassy in Manila to discuss the Aug. 8 incident where China's fighter jets fired flares in the path of a Philippine Air Force (PAF) plane conducting a routine patrol over Bajo de Masinloc (Panatag or Scarborough Shoal).

"We have what we call a bilateral consultation mechanism in the [WPS] or South China Sea with China and that meets regularly every few months. Any incident that happens in WPS which we feel is detrimental to our interests caused by China, we, of course, will raise it," he pointed out.

He said the note verbal the DFA sent to China indicated a strong condemnation of the incident and that the PAF plane posed no threat as it was just conducting lawful flight operations over Philippine airspace.

He explained that the Philippine policy on the WPS "has always been our willingness to settle any differences or disputes through peaceful means."

But De La Salle University international studies lecturer Don McLain Gill told the Inquirer on Tuesday that China's recent action was meant to show that the agreement would not dampen Beijing's claim.

"By belligerently engaging in our airspace, China is fast exacerbating conditions in the air front. Therefore, just as we seek to keep our seas open, we must keep our airspace open

[and safe] from China's monopolizing tendencies," Gill said.

"More robust joint navy and air force exercises with our partners should be considered. We must also consider utilizing funding toward our air power assets and air defense systems," he added.

Expansionist move

The dropping of flares is the latest in a series of aggressive tactics China has been using this year to press its sweeping claims over the South China Sea.

Retired Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonio Carpio told the Inquirer on Tuesday that filing another international case against China's expansionist claims and harassment tactics could be the next step in dealing with the maritime conflict.

"The flares incident only proves that China is determined to seize everything within the 10-dash line no matter what. Let us just proceed to file another arbitration case against China, a move that they obviously dread because another arbitral award will draw more support from other countries and drive another nail on the 10-dash line coffin," Carpio said.

The latest Ayungin incident was denounced by the Armed Forces of the Philippines on Tuesday as "unprofessional" and "unsafe."

It was "coercive, aggressive and deceptive," according to Rear Adm. Roy Vincent Trinidad, Philippine Navy spokesperson for the WPS. —WITH REPORTS FROM JACOB LAZARO, NESTOR CORRALES AND REUTERS INQ

TULFO TO LTO, MMDA: STOP 'INCENTIVES' FOR TRAFFIC TICKETS

FROM A3

Pua said that they would look into Tulfo's suggestion. Police Col. Joshua Alejandro from the PNP's directorate for operations said: "We will advise local police officers to refrain from getting tickets, especially senior officers, from the LGUs."

Alejandro said he agreed with Bosita that policemen were "zealous" in apprehending

violators because LGUs provide incentives from fines and penalties.

Bosita also said he was able to speak with an LTO district officer who was apparently reprimanded due to "low revenue" from traffic apprehensions.

The LTO, Pua said, has no "quota system" and that the fines and penalties from traffic violations directly go to the government. But he said the agency would look into Bosita's claim. —INQ



LOOKOUT FOR OFFENSES A traffic enforcer at Edsa near South Avenue issues a motorist a violation ticket in this 2022 file photo. —LYN RILLON



WHEN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS In this Jan. 31, 2023, photo, schoolteacher Maribeth DS Diaz holds an English class for her Grade 2 pupils in San Francisco Elementary School in Quezon City. Vice President and then Education Secretary Sara Duterte acknowledged at that time "the sad reality... that the system has failed them." —GRIC C. MONTESANO/INQ

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