

DENR monitoring compliance of Bulacan airport with environmental laws

By LLANESCA T. PANTI, GMA Integrated News

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said Wednesday that it will continue monitoring the compliance of the P740 billion New Manila International Airport (NMIA) project in Bulacan even if it is not a reclamation project.

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DENR Secretary Maria Antonia "Toni" Yulo-Loyzaga made the statement after she was asked by House Deputy Minority Leader France Castro after the suspension of the 22 Manila Bay reclamation projects pending impact assessment.

"It is an ongoing national project, and we are continuously monitoring the compliance in environmental laws of the parties involved in the Bulacan airport," Lozaga said.

"We do perform environmental monitoring and ensure that compliance is actually observed," Lozaga added.

In 2019, environmental activist group Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment (Kalikasan PNE) slammed the NMIA and called it a possible environmental threat to Manila Bay's ecosystem.

Lozaga clarified that the Bulacan airport project is not a reclamation project.

"This [Bulacan airport] is not among the reclamation projects as mentioned [involving Manila Bay]," Lozaga added.

The DENR chief, however, said they will still monitor its compliance to environmental laws.

"This is a national government project on a recovered fishpond that is pre-titled, and we are continuously monitoring the implementation of this project," Lozaga said.

The San Miguel Corp. (SMC), the company funding the NMIA, has denied that the Bulacan airport caused last month's heavy flooding in the areas near the said airport amid a number of typhoons that hit the country.

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"The airport project does not involve reclamation. The project site has existing, valid land titles indicating its original status as land," said SMC president and CEO Ramon Ang.

“Due to natural processes over time, this land had become prone to regular inundation. Instead of creating new land, we are redeveloping it to its former state ensuring its productive and sustainable use for the future,” added Ang.

The Bulacan project was approved during the previous administration of then-President Rodrigo Duterte.

In 2020, two fishermen and civil society groups on asked the Supreme Court to stop San Miguel Aerocity Inc. (SMAI) from constructing the New Manila International Airport in Bulacan over environmental concerns.

The petitioners argued that the airport project would be built on land classified as forestland and permanent forestland and may endanger the Manila Bay ecosystem.

They also said the airport project would "adversely affect the resident and migratory bird population" and would "increase risks for adverse climate impacts."

Ang said the company is "sparing no effort to ensure that the Bulacan airport project will be built properly and sustainably."

"Again, San Miguel Corporation will do its part to make this project, which will create over a million jobs, generate additional revenues for government at no cost to taxpayers, and open up a world of opportunities for our provinces and cities, a reality," said Ang.