

BUILDING REEFS OF THE FUTURE

DIVERS SET UP NURSERIES FOR RESCUED CORAL

Move comes after Batangas province's mass coral bleaching event in 2020

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BAUAN (The Philippines)

A GROUP of scuba diving experts and enthusiasts are setting up coral nurseries in a popular dive spot south of the Philippine capital of Manila to help in the propagation and recovery of damaged coral.

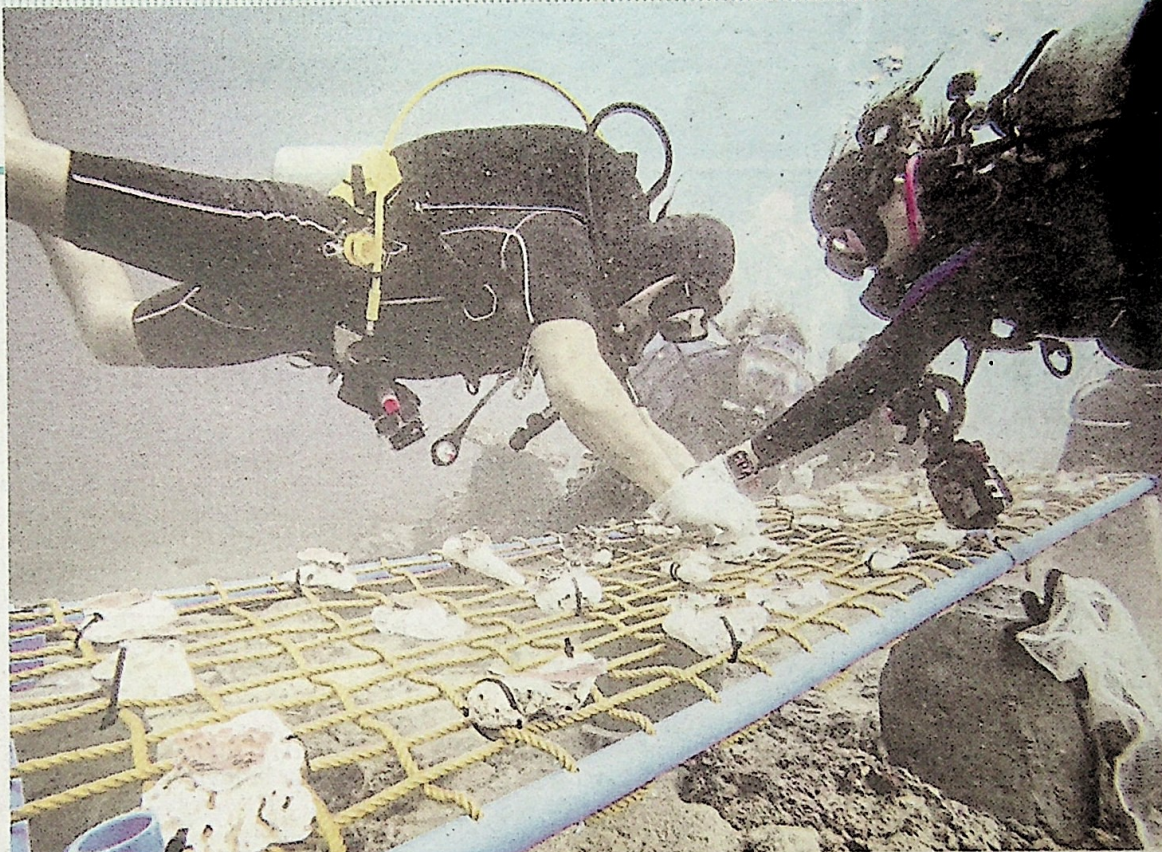
In Bauan, a coastal town in Batangas province, divers collect coral damaged and dislodged by natural calamities and man-made interference, such as plastic waste and dynamite fishing, and salvage living parts before

placing them in coral nurseries.

"If we select those more tolerant to climate change and higher temperature, then you can propagate more of them and actually build a reef of the future," said marine scientist Sam Shu Qin, co-founder of non-profit conservationist group Our Singapore Reefs which is taking part in the initiative.

Bauan, a two-hour drive from Manila, boasts a diverse coral population that has attracted diving enthusiasts for decades.

But its coral has frequently suffered from natural hazards and



Divers attaching pieces of rescued coral onto a steel and rope frame forming part of a coral nursery in Bauan, Batangas province, the Philippines, on March 10. REUTERS PIC

human-caused destruction.

In 2020, parts of surrounding Batangas province suffered a mass coral bleaching event — when high temperature turns coral white through algae loss — with 72km of coastline affected, said conservationist group Reef Watch Philippines.

It prompted Bauan-based scuba diving instructor and resort owner Carmela Sevilla to plant nurseries for detached coral, and invite like-minded conservationists to join the initiative.

The nurseries serve as repositories to replenish coral amid environmental challenges brought by climate change.

The Philippines is an archipelago of more than 7,600 islands with nearly 36,300km of coastline, making it one of the world's most marine resource-rich countries.

But some areas in the Philippines may suffer in the next three months in what the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration declared on Monday as the fourth mass global

bleaching event in the last three decades.

"The goal is not to make such a huge difference, to be able to stop climate change or be able to really create a huge impact on conservation," said Sevilla, who has collected 64 pieces of damaged coral for two nurseries along with volunteers.

"Small efforts are what will make a difference because it slowly builds up over time and is something that can last, and create an impact." **Reuters**