

BEAUTY FROM THE SEA

A 'coral rush' in Philippine waters

Last December 26, 1972, Surigao Development Corporation, after paying P4 for a special permit from the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, set off for the Babuyan Islands to "make a scientific survey and exploration of sea corals." When the scientific survey was over, the company had harvested two tons of corals worth 3 million pesos.

Not long after, 27 Filipino corporations applied for permits to make a similar survey of the same islands — Balintang Channel of the Babuyan Islands.

Australian, European, Japanese and American investors followed suit, applying for permits to comb Philippine seas for the rich atolls. In the meantime, Japanese and Taiwanese fishermen were discovered poaching the Sulu Archipelago for the precious coral.

The coral rush was on. And unless the pattern of events changed, the country's seabeds would be depleted of its rich corals, the national treasury no richer, the country no better for having mineral deposits of value.

Abroad, Japan is fast losing its stockpile of precious corals. It has depleted its own seas and bought off all available corals from the western Pacific. Should it be unable to gather more, it would cease to dictate the price of corals in the world market.

Australia, Europe and the United States are equally serious about cornering a wealthy coral seabed.

Word has spread that Japanese and Taiwanese fishermen have moved on to the southern seas of the Philippines, poaching and discovering an untapped coral mine.

Compounding these foreign countries' concern is the extremely slow — five millimeters or one-half centi-

meter a year — growth rate of precious coral organism. Only a discovery of new fields for coral harvest can save the world "precious coral" industry.

All the fuss centers on the detached coral peacefully settled on its bed. Corals belong to the phylum coelenterata. When of the true or stony variety, corals are colonies of polyps where each polyp, unless of the solitary variety, is a skeleton-forming anemone. When of the soft coral variety, they are colonies of polyps that possess eight hollow tentacles where the polyps may be introverted in many species. Corals in their single days, have ugly figures — simple tubular things with elongated mouths. When married, corals are asexual lovers, polyp budding off other polyps to become a colony. The colony, like a frumpish wife, grows and grows to become a coral boulder hitting the weighing scales at one ton plus.

Coral formations may become fringing reefs, barrier reefs or atolls. Fringing reefs are underwater coral platforms attached to a body of land and extending into the ocean for some distance. Barrier reefs are not attached to the mainland and keep respectable distance from shore with a lagoon or some such shallow body of water.

The atoll is shaped like a ring, its center is a lagoon, the lagoon connects with the outer ocean through a channel, the channel offers shelter to storm-wrecked navigators.

The smaller atoll varieties, coming in shapes and colors prosaically described as beautiful, have a far from prosaic price tag on them. An imaginative creature christened these the "precious corals."

Of the "precious," the legendary is the red coral. For centuries, it had been prized in India as jewelry. Ro-



RP coral: drawing world interest

mans believed it had mysterious powers and began hanging it around their children's neck to save them from diseases. Italians wore the coral to ward off "the evil eye."

Today's coral may not have the legend or even the superstition of

times past. But, the countries of the world are still interested.

Philippine waters, warm and tropical with simple marine animals about, are directly of interest. For in the Balintang Channel of the Babuyan Islands in northern Luzon, the Surigao Straights midway between Visayas and Mindanao, and the Sulu Archipelago, coral species of the precious variety — pink, red, white and black — have been discovered in quantities enough to supply the whole world market. In other regions, there have been strong indications that other precious corals lie in lengthy seabeds.

The onslaught of coral diggers was strong enough to move the Bureau of Fisheries to broadcast official world price quotations for the corals. As the 1970 standards grade corals according to color, the pink or whitish pink (angel skin) is first grade at \$350 per pound; the red is second grade at \$150 per pound; and the white is third grade at \$50 per pound.

"To guarantee that exploration, development, exploitation and utilization benefit primarily the country and its people," the President recently issued a decree safeguarding the country's corals.

Coral resources, without distinction, were turned over to the Bureau of Mines whose facilities extend to exploration and exploitation of natural resources. Licenses to explore were limited to Filipinos or corporations with a 60% Filipino-owned capital stock. Vessels for exploration were likewise limited to those of Philippine registry, with a foreign craftsman obligated to obtain clearances from the Bureau of Mines and other government agencies.

License to explore the precious variety of corals will be given only to applicants with the necessary financial and technical capability to put up a processing plant, tying in with the rule limiting exportation of corals to finished products.

PEOPLE

Eugene Torre begins where other battle-scarred Filipino chess luminaries have stopped. At 21, he has already earned an international master title, thanks to his professionalism and cool determination. Eugene hopes to improve on his feat by bagging an international grandmaster title at the Leningrad Interzonal Chess Tournament where he represents not only the Philippines but also Asia. Despite tough competition from older opponents, the Asian champion, as of Monday this week, had garnered 3 points — from his victory over former world champ Mikhail Tal of the Soviet Union and drawn matches with Argentina's Miguel Juan Quinteros, the U.S.S.R.'s Gennady Kuzmin, East Germany's Wolfgang Uhlmann and tournament leader Bent Larsen of Denmark. Larsen's draw with Eugene, after four hours of delicate endgame play, marked by the Filipino's excellent defensive position, was his first after 5 wins. Eugene's first loss in the tournament, in the hands of American Robert Byrne, didn't seem to



Eugene Torre: RP hope in Leningrad taze the young master. With still 10 or more games in the offing, chess enthusiasts back in his homeland were fervently hoping that Eugene would be able to pile up enough points — 9-1/2 — to qualify for the grandmaster title.

'The fluidity of (their) body

movement makes Filipino dancers more adaptable to modern dance than their European counterparts." So says Pauline Koner, choreographer and teacher of modern dance. Miss Koner saw a film of the Bayanihan during its cultural tour of the United States some years back, but was able to observe the Filipino dancer at close range last month when she conducted the summer dance workshop of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. "Like other Asians, the Filipino doesn't bounce or jump as he dances," she said. "There is ample use of the knees, the ankles and hands which provide the gliding movement in a space, an important element of the dance." Winner of the prestigious Dance Magazine Award in 1963, the New York-born Miss Koner has performed with such distinguished groups as the Jose Limon Dance Company, apart from her own dance group. She is the third foreign guest teacher invited to handle dance classes at the Cultural Center since 1970. Miss Koner calls dancing a "rite of faith" and teaching dance a "rite of dedication." Presiding at such rites has brought her to Russia and other European countries, the Middle

East, Japan, India, Korea and Singapore.

To say that she merely symbolizes the meaning of the religious in a strictly non-religious woman is saying too little of Sister Ramona Maria Tombo, a Maryknoll sister. For Sister Ramona unifies in her work what used to be the traditional roles of the nun and the lay worker. A dentist, the Filipino nun spent years "touring the length and breadth of Mindanao carrying a small foot-operated drill and simple equipment from school to school." From dentistry, however, she has branched out to another type of work. Today she is on the staff of the Manila Youth Center, a section of the Youth Aid Division of the city's police department, hence, "a policeman, almost." Donned in the grey, woolen habit, which other Maryknoll sisters have long discarded, Sister Ramona reports daily, works fulltime and, often, overtime as division assistant and chief of the civilian staff. She helps, and solicits help for, girls and boys, 16 and under, who have tangled with the law.