

WILL DEFEND RIGHTS IN SOUTH CHINA SEA: PHILIPPINES

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The Philippines is ready to defend the oil and gas exploration it has decided to resume in its internationally recognised waters in the disputed South China Sea and will not cede that right to any nation, the energy chief said on Friday.

The Department of Energy announced on Thursday that President Rodrigo Duterte has approved its recommendation to lift a 6-year-old moratorium on energy exploration in three offshore areas west of the Philippines, including in potentially oil- and gas-rich Reed Bank, which China also claims.

Companies with government contracts have been notified to resume their petroleum search, Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi said.

Mr. Cusi told reporters in an online news conference on Friday that China was not informed of the Philippine government's decision to resume oil exploration in its exclusive economic zone, a 320-km stretch of waters where a coastal state can exclusively exploit maritime resources under the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Reed Bank and two other exploration areas are within the Philippines' exclusive zone but China is likely to assert its claim, Mr. Cusi said. "They will not just take it without raising a word. I'm sure they're going to write us," he said.

Asked how the Philippines will respond if China protests, Mr. Cusi replied, "We have to stand up for our rights, that's what we are going to do."

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