

07 May 2023 Sunday



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Editorial

Waste management laws inadequate, need review

FILIPINOS should have more policy discussions on improving the management of solid wastes in the country. Discarded plastics and other garbage not only litter urban centers but also the countryside, including riverbanks and coral reefs underwater. As such, the problem threatens many sectors, including fishing and tourism.

For starters, policymakers should review existing laws. The Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, more formally known as Republic Act (RA) 9003, is apparently deficient. Not all of the garbage ends up in landfills. Much of it, especially plastics, seems to be practically everywhere.

"Like many rapidly developing countries, the Philippines grapples with unsustainable plastic production/consumption and insufficient solid waste management infrastructure," the World Bank reported in 2021.

"A staggering 2.7 million tons of plastic waste are generated in the Philippines each year, and an estimated 20 percent end up in the ocean."

Consumption seems to be one of the culprits. Note, for instance, that Filipinos use 163 million sachets daily, the World Bank added.

Another good measure that seems lacking public awareness is the Philippine Action Plan for Sustainable Consumption and Production. It was crafted by the National Economic and Development Authority or NEDA, with assistance from the Asian Development Bank. The action plan is designed to promote sustainable practices and behaviors across sectors and throughout government. There ought to be an early review of how those plans can be implemented faster.

On a positive note, the government has released the implementing rules and regulations for RA 11898, or the "Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Act of 2022." That law is scheduled to go into effect by mid-2023, but it does not seem to be getting the sort of public attention it deserves. Basically, the EPR law requires large-scale companies to establish mechanisms for the recovery of their plastic packaging.

That is certainly a good initiative, but much more needs to be done. For one, the EPR law does not apply to 99.6 percent of registered firms, which are micro, small and medium enterprises. Second, the timetables mentioned in the law appear modest, even though compliance with it is yet to be tested. The EPR law states that by this year, large enterprises must recover 20 percent of their plastic footprint from last year. And the targets for recovery are to be increased annually until 2030.

Meanwhile, Filipinos seem to be carrying on business as usual, and the Philippines has become a net exporter of plastic scrap and similar wastes. Worse, new wearables, like disposable masks that were mandated during the worst parts of the Covid-19 pandemic, have added to litter found in many places.

Mostly reduce

Authorities should step up the public awareness campaign for the three Rs — reduce, recycle and reuse. Among those Rs, the most problematic seems like recycling, and resolving it could have great impact.

The World Bank reported that the Philippines suffers from a recycling capacity gap, about 85 percent compared to Malaysia and Thailand.

Only 28 percent of key plastic resins in the Philippines were recycled, according to the report. It said the Philippines loses as much as \$890 million per year when recyclable plastic products are discarded rather than being recycled into valuable materials.

The report cited structural problems that require attention from the government. Among them are high logistics costs that limit recyclers and expensive energy costs that are exacerbated by inefficient, perhaps old, machines. These deserve to be a priority for the government.

At the same time, the authorities should launch a campaign encouraging people to reuse and reduce. That might be less costly and more attainable for now, while structural issues in recycling persist.

Reducing and reusing should appeal to consumers, especially now that inflation remains high. But even in better economic times, people might appreciate "hacks" that can lower their living expenses and at the same time address environmental problems.

Besides, some might frown on recycling because it does not address the problem of wasteful consumption. How to do that should be a topic of serious discourse throughout society, from government circles to boardrooms and living rooms.



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Grave warning

Weather-wise, since Tuesday none of us could easily find convenient scapegoats for whatever will happen in the next frantic three months or so when *El Niño* will presumably hit.

None of us can even plausibly hurl sarcasm at the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration — the weather agency has just sounded a loud enough early warning siren.

In its alert, the weather bureau solemnly predicted the extreme weather condition *El Niño* has an 80-percent chance of emerging next month.

That chance, even if it isn't 100 percent, is causing big worries, not only for the government but also for all of us already coping with an unusually overheated summer.

El Niño (the Child Jesus) is caused by the seasonal warming of the Pacific Ocean. It upsets normal weather patterns and brings heavy rainfall in some countries, and dry spells and drought in others.

First noticed by South American fishermen in the 1600s, the weather phenomenon



OUT AND ABOUT
NICK V. QUIJANO JR.

Generally, in past *El Niño* episodes, the country withered under drier than normal weather conditions, causing prolonged dry spells and even drought in many parts which lasted for one or more seasons.

In the case of this year's *El Niño*, Pagasa can't say as yet what's ahead in the next three months. It could be dry conditions and two consecutive months of below-normal rainfall; a dry spell and three consecutive months of below-normal rainfall; or drought and three consecutive months of way below-normal rainfall conditions.

But whatever happens, the consistently low rainfall over river basins will lead to catastrophic water loss.

Depressed water levels in major reservoirs, for instance, could trigger water rationing in cities and irrigated farmlands.

Skipping your normal bath routine just might soon be the order of your day. And without water, seeking to soothe parched thirsty throats itself becomes nightmarish.

Lean water months have other untold horrors.

Widespread water shortage, for instance, in upland, rain-fed and lowland irrigated farmland puts agriculture in limbo, consequently affecting what you will eat.

Not only farmland, high temperatures, and rapid evaporation of surface water during *El Niño* are plain bad for fish.

Drying fish ponds, stunted fish and fish dying off from stress, poor water quality, and disease are just some of the unimaginable horrors.

Yet still another unimaginable horror awaits.

El Niño, in fact, once it

combines with the current stubborn inflation is a "dangerous combination," says National Economic and Development Authority or NEDA chief Arsenio Balisacan.

Dangerous because such a combination will throw even greater numbers of Filipinos into poverty.

Imagine, for a moment, what more hungry mouths would mean for our frayed social fabric.

Nevertheless, this government, in fairness, has been responsible enough to recognize early *El Niño*'s dire effects and has created an "*El Niño* team."

A dedicated team, particularly a coordinated one, is a step in the right direction.

Before 1997, previous governments responded disastrously to *El Niño* episodes with the agencies concerned acting independently of each other.

It was only in 1997 that government finally got its act together, realizing that disjointed responses wouldn't get us through the crisis. Only a coordinated whole-of-government approach would.

Still, this government's functionaries aren't over the hump yet.

Easygoing government bureaucrats should be dead serious about *El Niño*, not tomorrow but yesterday.

Seriously mitigating *El Niño*'s ill effects isn't merely about pronouncing sound policy interventions or preemptive government actions or long-term strategies but about informing all and sundry about what is happening and what's going to happen.

Government has to urgently inform and educate the public on what actions are required to lessen *El Niño*'s ill effects — every step of the way and in complete detail.

predictably occurred near the Christmas season, hence the *El Niño* moniker.

Climate change, however, inflicted mayhem on that pattern.

So much so that *El Niño* can meander through other months of the year, like what is predicted for the next three months.



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City on 5 May 2023. The vessel departed from General Santos City, going to Leyte.

Vessel from Corregidor collision sinks

BY RAFFY AYENG
@tribunephil_raf

The *MV HONG HAI 189*, a Sierra Leone-flagged vessel involved in a collision with a chemical tanker in Corregidor, Bataan last week that killed two crewmembers, sank on Friday, the Philippine Coast Guard reported on Saturday.

Three Chinese nationals remain missing when *MV HONG HAI 189* rammed the oil/chemical tanker *MT PETITE SOEUR* at around 9:30 pm last 28 April, making it half-submerged.

"The capsized *MV HONG HAI 189* sank 400 yards from Sisiman Lighthouse, Mariveles, Bataan, at around 06:12 AM Friday, 5 May 2023," the PCG report said.

Further, the PCG said the sunken vessel released approximately 30 to 50 liters of fuel and other mixed substances.

Personnel of the PCG Station Bataan and Marine Environmental Protection Unit, on the other hand, assisted

in installing oil spill booms and absorbent bags and observed no additional traces of an oil spill in the vicinity waters, according to the PCG.

"They continue to monitor the situation for further measures," the report read.

Maritime incident

In a separate report, the PCG said their personnel responded to a maritime incident involving *MV AUDIE* that ran aground in the vicinity of Little Santa Cruz Island, Zamboanga City yesterday, 5 May 2023.

The vessel departed from General Santos City, going to Leyte.

According to the Captain, they experienced strong currents, causing them to run aground.

All crew remained safe, and the oil spill assessment in the vicinity waters yielded a negative result.

The Coast Guard District Southwestern Mindanao continues to monitor *MV AUDIE* for further assistance.



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Daily Tribune

WITHOUT FEAR & WITHOUT FAVOR

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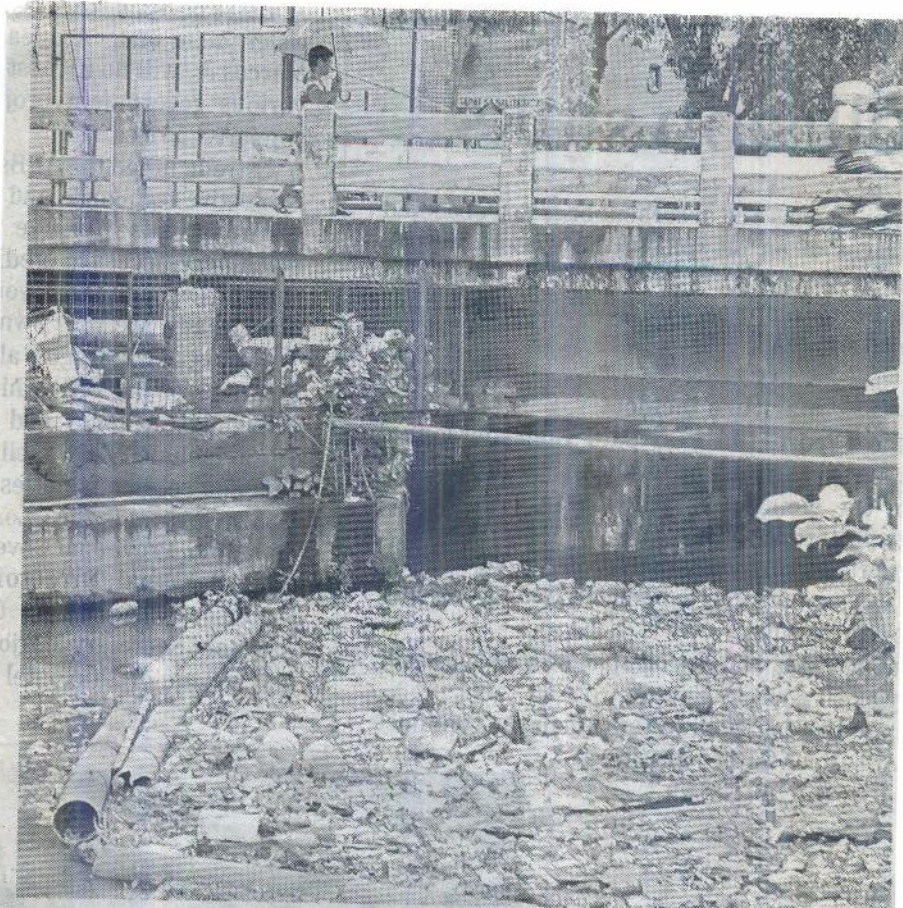
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PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEY SANCHEZ MENDOZA FOR THE DAILY TRIBUNE @tribunephil_joey
THE Foundation of Jesus bridge is nearly filled with garbage due to the lack of discipline among residents living in the nearby area of San Miguel, Tomas Claudio Pandacan, Manila on Saturday 6 May 2023.



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Manicani residents get restless with the return of mining firm

BY BOB VILLABLANCA

TACLOBAN CITY—A mining company whose operations were suspended for 15 years due to complaints from residents due to environmental pollution is back in the historic island of Manicani in Eastern Samar, creating restlessness and fear among residents that it might cause another division in the improving relations among them.

Carlos Tayag, regional director of Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) in Eastern Visayas, said Hinatuan Mining Corp. (HMC), was given a go-signal to conduct another round of mineral exploration to determine whether it remains economically viable for the company to continue with its operation on the island.

"They [HMC] have to conduct further exploration which is the reason why some residents are alarmed with the increasing number of backhoes and other heavy equipment. These will be used for the exploration," Tayag said.

Tayag said MGB Central Office granted the petition of the mining company on March 2, 2022, to extend the expired its Mineral Production Sharing Agreement (MPSA) for 15 years to cover for the years that their operations were suspended.

"The MPSA was good for 25 years but HMC was only able to operate for less than 10 years. This is not yet the renewal of their MPSA but only using the unexpired portion of their mining permit," he said.

The MPSA awarded to HMC on April 28, 1992, granted a 25-years mining permit to mine 1,164.55 hectares out of the Manicani's total size of 1,166 hectares. The 25-year MPSA was suspended in 2002, and expired on October 28, 2017.

Operations of HMC, a subsidiary of Nickel Asia Corp., were suspended after a bloody incident in 2001, wherein a vehicle rammed on the picket line of protesting residents injuring a local and two other protesters.

Animosity among residents developed pitting those who worked in the mining company against those who lost their farm lands and houses due to the mining operations, causing division among relatives in the erstwhile closely-knitted island.

Marcial Somook, president of Protect Manicani Island Inc. (Promisi), a grassroots organization formed by residents who are against the mining operation, said he is worried about the return of the mining company as this may rekindle old animosity

that already started to heal since the company stopped its operations.

He said they will continue to oppose the return of the mining operations.

"This is our home. We cannot allow just anybody to destroy it and deprive us of our livelihood. I'm sure the owner of HMC will not be happy if somebody goes to their house and destroys it. It is the same with us," he said.

Earlier, Bishop Crispin Varquez, prelate of the Diocese of Borongan, Eastern Samar, expressed his deep concern for the increasing number of mining companies operating in Homonhon, the adjacent island of Manicani, and urged government leaders and concerned agencies to take immediate action.

"We are very much disturbed by the escalated mining operations in our beloved historic island of Homonhon," the prelate said in his Easter message.

"At present, there are four active mining companies operating on the island. Their immediate and negative effects on the communities and the natural environment are very alarming," he added.

Besides the damage to the delicate ecosystem that HMC has caused in Manicani, residents also complained that mining operations have reduced the amount of land available to farmers. Manicani Island is one of the biggest sources of calamansi in the region.

Tayag, however, said conditions in Manicani Island have already normalized and that there is a strong clamor from the residents to resume the mining operations that will bring jobs to the residents.

He said HMC has been a responsible company and complied with government regulations, especially with its tax obligations.

"Even when the operations were suspended, HMC has spent millions of pesos for the upkeep on Manicani Island," he said.

Manicani Island, located 10.5 kilometers off from Guiuan, is composed of four barangays—San Jose, Banaag, Hamorawon and Buenavista. The island is home to over 3,000 residents based on the 2020 Census.

Its residents are dependent on fishing and agriculture as their main source of income.

Both the islands of Manicani and Homonhon form part of the 60,448 hectares Guiuan Protected Landscape and Seascape under Proclamation 469 issued in 1994. A large tarpaulin put up by the Environment Management Bureau about the proclamation greets visitors at the port.

During World War II, the island was converted by the US Navy into a major naval repair facility. The facility included housing for 10,000 people, a mess hall, shops, administration buildings and an outdoor

movie theater.

After the war and upon leaving Manicani, US Navy personnel dismantled and removed all buildings and utilities.



Why we need to save our coral reefs

BY HENRYLITO TACIO

"Coral damage feared as vessel grounded," said the headline of a recent issue of *Daily Tribune*.

"Extensive damage to the coral reefs that serve as a marine habitat is feared with the incident raising concerns anew about the environmental impact of mining in the country," the news report stated.

Three days after the sinking of the *MT Princess Empress* tanker off Naujan, Occidental Mindoro in February this year, the resulting oil slick reached the shores of the coastal towns of Naujan, Pola and Pinamalayan.

"Among the coastal sites that may be at risk are several marine protected areas, including but not limited to the reefs in Bulalacao, Oriental Mindoro, amounting to some 1,100 hectares of coral reefs," said the bulletin issued by the University of the Philippines-Diliman College of Science Marine Science Institute.

According to the United Nations Environment Program, oil, a complex mixture of many chemicals, can kill corals, depending on species and exposure. Once soil comes into contact with corals, it can kill them or impede their reproduction, growth, behavior and development.

Various threats

Oil spills are not the only incidents that threaten the country's coral reefs. Most of these threats are caused by human activities. As marine scientist Don McAllister, who once studied the cost of coral reef destruction in the country, lamented: "Nowhere else in the world are coral reefs abused as much as the reefs in the Philippines."

Sedimentation — the process of soils settling to the bottom of the sea — is said to be the most important single cause of reef degradation. Sediments that wash over reefs have a number of negative effects on corals, marine scientists claim.

Deforestation is the most common source of sediments. "When trees are cut down and the underbrush burned, the mountainsides become bare and the soil are defenseless against strong wind and rain," said the Coral Research Project of the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources. "During rains, runoff carries eroded soil down to the rivers that deposit it in the sea."

On its website, the BFAR singled out destructive fishing techniques as among the largest contributors to reef degradation.

"Muro-ami, a technique that involved sending a line of divers to depths of 10-30 meters with metal weights to knock on corals in order to drive fish out and into waiting nets, was extremely damaging to reefs, leading to its ban in 1986," the BFAR reported.

But that's just one. "Rampant blast fishing and sedimentation from land-based sources have destroyed 70 percent of fisheries within 15 square kilometers of the shore in the Philippines, which were some of the most productive habitats in the world," the BFAR said.

Cyanide fishing, employed since 1962 to collect aquarium fish, is another destructive fishing method, while coastal development, farming, aquaculture and land-cover change have also threatened the country's coral reef ecosystem.

Aside from human activities, natural causes of destruction among coral reefs also occur. These include extremely low tide, high temperature of surface water, predation and the mechanical action of currents and waves.

Climate change is increasing the ocean's temperature. The result: Coral bleaching. Explains John Ryan of the Washington-based Worldwatch Institute: "When subjected to extreme stress, they jettison the colorful algae they live in symbiosis with, exposing the white skeleton of dead coral beneath a single layer of clear living tissue. If the stress persists, the coral dies."

Marine rainforests

Coral reefs are the marine equivalent of rainforests and considered one of the planet's essential life-support systems. These "biological wonders," as American environmental author Don Hinrichsen called them, are among the largest and oldest living communities of plants and animals on earth, having evolved between 200 and 450 million years ago.

According to Reef Check, 'Despite its high biodiversity, the Philippines' reefs are very badly damaged. It's one of the worst-damaged in the world, on average'

The Philippines holds one of the most extensive coral reefs in the world with a sprawling area of 27,000 square kilometers strategically located in Palawan (37.8 percent), Sulu (27.8 percent), Visayas (21.7 percent), Northern Luzon (7.6 percent), Central and Southern Mindanao (3.2 percent) and the Turtle Islands (1.7 percent). There are about 400 species of reef-forming corals in the country, comparable with those found in the Great Barrier Reef of Australia.

Coral reefs provide habitat for a large variety of marine life, including various sponges, oysters, clams, crabs, sea stars, sea urchins and many species of fish. They are also linked ecologically to nearby seagrass, mangrove and mudflat communities. Coral reefs are so valued because they serve as a center of activity for marine life.

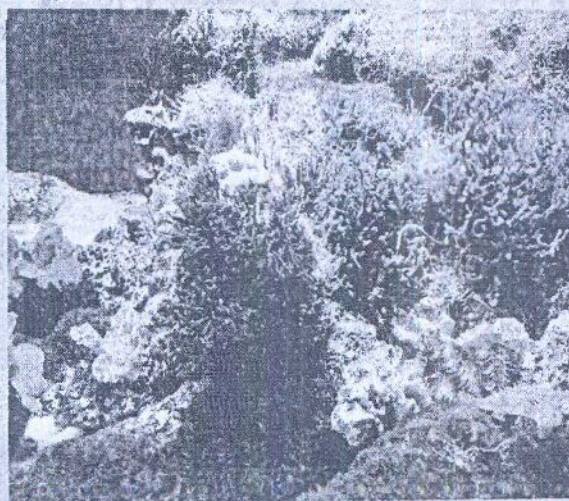
The World Atlas of Coral Reefs, compiled by the United Nations Environment Program, reported that 97 percent of reefs in the Philippines are under threat. And Reef Check, an international organization assessing the health of reefs in 82 countries, stated that only five percent of the country's coral reefs are in "excellent condition." These are the Tubbataha Reef Marine Park in Palawan,

Apo Island in Negros Oriental, Apo Reef in Puerto Galera, Mindoro and Verde Island Passage off Batangas.

"Despite its high biodiversity, the Philippines' reefs are very badly damaged. It's one of the worst-damaged in the world, on average," said George Hodgson, founder of the California-based organization.

The Philippine government has introduced many laws in an attempt to protect and save coral reefs from annihilation. But the government cannot do it alone; help from individuals is also needed to save the coral reefs.

"We are the stewards of our nation's resources," Guerrero said. "We should take care of our national heritage so that future generations can enjoy them. Let's do our best to save our coral reefs. Our children's children will thank us for the effort."



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF HENRYLITO TACIO

CORAL reefs have been called 'Eden beneath the waves.'



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Sunset City

One of my columns last month (April 2nd), talked about the Manila Bay reclamation projects that are presently happening; and apparently, it touched a raw nerve with some readers who messaged me, asking why I wasn't being more "protective" of our Manila Bay sunset. To be honest, that struck me as a strange comment, and seemed to reflect more on the person uttering it. Since when did acceptance of reclamation as a reality of Manila's past and future development, equate to being anti-Manila sunset?

Correct me if I'm wrong, but the sunset isn't going to disappear because of these developments; and if you're talking about the glory, vibrant color, and spectacle that we enjoy as the fiery tropical sun sets on our horizon, and "touches" the sea, that isn't going to vanish either. So are we actually talking about where you or I will be standing along the Bay to enjoy this sight? Because yes, that will change as these reclaimed developments come into play, but that isn't to say we are losing these sunsets.

And in fact, I go back to some of the points I made with that April 2

GripeVine. Roxas Boulevard (originally called Cavite Boulevard) didn't even exist until 1905, as it was a reclamation project of the US government. Before that time, the walled "city" of Intramuros could be seen from the Bay, and was adjacent to the waterline.

The CCP, PICC, Folk Arts Theater,



A TOAST TO OUR SUNSET, and what responsible reclamation may promise for the future of Metro Manila.

Sofitel, all of MOA, the Entertainment City of Solaire, City of Dreams, Okada, etc. – they all stand on reclaimed land; some dating back to the 1970's, and some of much more recent "prov-

enance." Solaire opened its doors in 2013, but the reclaimed land it stands on existed way before that year.

The point being made is that hindsight affords us the perspective of appreciating just how reclamation may cause a furor or ruckus as the actual reclamation is being done; but when structures are built on it and time passes, we adapt and accept these properties as our new coastline. From the sea walls of Sofitel, to that of the Mall of Asia area, we can say we've basked in and enjoyed our Manila sunsets – but for older generations, these areas all existed as part of the Manila Bay; and not as dry, habitable land.

Who today will refuse to drive along Roxas Boulevard, refuse to attend events at the CCP/PICC, abstain on principle from enjoying evenings or weekends at Solaire, City of Dreams



**HEARD IT
THROUGH THE
GRIPE-VINE:
OUR NEW
ABNORMAL**

PHILIP CU UNJIENG

or Okada? If you're truly anti-reclamation, staunchly object to reclamation on principle, be consistent and refuse to step on any of these reclaimed areas that are now seen as part of Metro Manila's landscape and urban sprawl. To complain about the ongoing projects on absolute and non-negotiable terms, then accept the past reclamations as "fait accompli" and step foot on them, is like having your cake, then eating it too.

Now I am well aware that at one point, we were talking about 25 Manila Bay projects that extend from the city of Navotas, all the way to the province of Cavite. The Philippine Reclamation Authority has only approved six of these projects: Horizon Manila (Manila), Manila Waterfront City (Manila), Solar City (Manila), the Navotas City Coastal Bay Reclamation Project (Navotas), Pasay Harbor Reclamation Project (Pasay), and the Pasay Reclamation Project (Pasay). The Manila City government approved four projects, while Pasay City approved two.

Expanding the natural and usable land of these cities of Manila, Pasay and Navotas is behind these reclamation projects. The Metro Manila Bay Sustainable Master Plan is a public document that can be reviewed online, so it's not about hidden agendas. When the proponents of these approved projects stick to the plans, it should be about the improvement, rehabilitation and



OUR GLORIOUS Manila Bay Sunset.

beautification of particular Metro Manila LGU's. It's fine to be wary of progress, to scrutinize and objectively assess change; but we also shouldn't stand in its way, when it proves it's worth, and opens up a world of exciting possibilities.

When resilience and sustainability are underlying linchpins of the approved projects, I'm certain that a better version of the Manila sunset could well be something we can look forward to. If new and improved public, open, and green spaces are part of the deliverables of these reclamation projects, then these could be something future generations of Filipinos will appreciate, and be thankful for. We're not losing the sunset; as there may be better ways to enjoy it in the years, the decades, to come.