

02 April 2023 Sunday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**



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## 'Dolomite, Baseco beaches unsafe for swimming'

People visiting the Dolomite and Baseco Beaches in Manila should not attempt to swim as Manila Bay remains unsafe for swimming, Manila Mayor Honey Lacuna said on Friday.

The coliform level of Manila Bay's waters registered at 32,595.2 most probable number per 100 milliliters (mpn/100 mL) on the real-time water quality monitoring system at the Manila Bay Baywalk station on Friday morning.

According to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Administrative Order 2016-08, Class SB water or water intended for bathing, swim-

ming and skin diving should be at 100 mpn/100 mL.

In a Facebook Live video, Fangan noted that the coliform level has gone down significantly since national government agencies started a concerted effort to rehabilitate the bay.

City government personnel would prevent people from swimming at the two beaches, she said.

The city government's department of public services and the DENR's Environmental Management Bureau in Metro Manila installed the water quality monitoring equipment at the Baywalk area. — Ghio Ong



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## EDITORIAL

# Transforming Pasig River

**T**here's an Olympic race going on in France to make the iconic Seine River safe for swimming again. It's a challenge that will be familiar to the Philippines and its decades-long effort to rehabilitate Pasig River and make it suitable again for aquatic life, transportation, and tourism.

The Seine and Pasig rivers are important features of Paris and Metro Manila, respectively, and both have been besieged by flooding and pollution problems as urbanization rapidly grew over the centuries. At different times, both rivers were dubbed as an "open sewer." In 1923, swimming was banned in the Seine because of high pollution, while in 1990, Pasig River was declared biologically dead.

Both have struggled with rehabilitation for years and through different leaderships. The late French president Jacques Chirac, who was then Paris mayor, declared in 1990 that he would launch a major cleanup of the Seine and swim in it in three years, but the plan fizzled out. In the case of Pasig River, the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission (PRRC) was established in 1999 to oversee rehabilitation efforts. While it managed to bring the river back to life, plastic pollution remained a problem. Recent developments in the cleanup of the two rivers have seen the government and private sector partnering up, with Paris working on a deadline, the 2024 Summer Olympics, while the cleanup for Pasig River is ahead of the planned construction of a major skyway that the public fears would ruin the Manila skyline.

In 2019, then President Rodrigo Duterte declared that Pasig River was "uncleanable" when he abolished the PRRC and transferred its functions to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Ironically, in 2018, the PRRC's renaturation program was awarded the Asian River Prize. The program was able to relocate 18,000 people from the floating landfills to housing blocks downstream and divert nearly 22 million kilograms of waste.

In 2021, the river earned the ignominy of being the most polluting body of water and leading source of plastic waste in the ocean. A study of rivers worldwide published in the journal *Science Advances* said the river dumps an estimated 38,000 tons of plastics into the ocean yearly, making it more pollutive than other notorious rivers such as the Ganges in India. The main culprit, according to another study released in 2010, is domestic waste which accounts for 60 percent of the total pollution, and industrial waste from manufacturing facilities such as tanneries, textile mills, food processing plants, distilleries, and chemical and metal plants that contribute 33 percent. The continuous dumping of wastes has made the river bed more silted with organic matter and non-biodegradable garbage.

Earlier this month, a river cleanup ahead of a multi-billion expressway project extracted over 90,000 metric tons of silt and solid waste from the San Juan River, one of three main tributaries of the Pasig River from where wastes flow choking drainage systems and causing floods during the rainy season. Billions have already been spent on cleaning the river for decades but this is not and should not be a one-off undertaking.

At the bottom of the river's pollution problem, as rehabilitation efforts through different administrations have shown, is the country's solid waste management and this needs to be addressed holistically. The government must strictly implement Republic Act No. 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, which provides a comprehensive management policy for the garbage problem down to the barangay and household levels. It must build more sanitary landfills because what is the point of sorting and recycling garbage if there is no proper way to dispose of them? Lawmakers must also pass a national law banning single-use plastics, which are among the most common garbage found in the river. It is not enough to relocate informal settlers, the government has to ensure that no illegal settlements will be built along the riverbanks in the future. All sewage systems connected to the river must be closed off because any law and cleanup will be futile if wastes continue flowing into it. All these must be done consistently.

Pasig River is not only cleanable, but it can be so much more: AI-generated photos published recently reimagined it with more open spaces, trees, and water-side views ideal for outdoor activities. At this point, the government must reassess whether it should build more highways or instead create more green spaces. While the river's environment may not return to that depicted in old, nostalgic paintings from the 1800s with lots of trees, vegetation, and a clean body of water, the world has become so advanced that there are many available ways to help make it more clean and pleasant once more—not virtually but in reality. Many cities, not only Paris, have successfully transformed their riversides into thriving waterfront environments. There is no reason why the Philippines can't do the same for Pasig River.



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## Manila Baywatch 2023

**E**ver since the aerial photographs of the ongoing Manila Bay reclamation spread on social media earlier in the year, reclamation has been one of the negative buzz words of today. And to be quite honest, I both understood, and didn't understand, what all the negativity was about. Understood because there is the knee-jerk reaction to say reclamation is bad for the environment. Didn't understand because it's not like the said reclamation happened overnight - it would have taken years of planning and securing LGU approval; and this is not the first time that reclamation projects have been undertaken in our fair city.

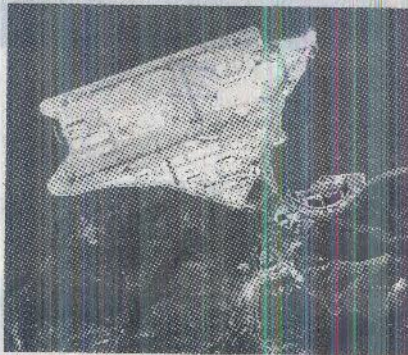
I'm old enough to remember when all of the bay city of today didn't exist at all. I even recall how unverified reports of areas leaking and sinking swirled, and became hot topics of discussion/fake news back then. And yet, look at us today, and how we take the whole Mall of Asia to Solaire, the Ayala Mall Manila Bay, City of Dreams, and Okada areas as regular places to work, to visit, and to spend countless weekend hours. It's opened up a whole new range of options on how to enjoy Metro Manila; and this bay city of Manila, Parañaque, and Pasay, is now taken for granted as part of our urban landscape.

To put things further in perspective, how many of you realize that Roxas Boulevard itself is a reclamation project dating back to when the USA occupied us as a colony? Reclamation was already popular then, and it was Architect Daniel Burnham, when visiting our country in 1905, who designed the plans at the request of Commissioner William Forbes, as part of their city beautiful trend.

So, I am aware of the possible repercussions dredging and reclamation can have on the environment. But there is responsible reclamation, and irresponsible reclamation. Responsible reclamation goes on all over the globe.

My favorite city in Japan is Osaka, and whenever we land at the Kansai International Airport, I'm impressed by how the bustling airport is located

on an artificial island in the middle of Osaka Bay. It opened in September of 1994, and in 2020, received Skytrax's awards for World's Best Airport Staff, and World's Best Airport for Baggage Delivery.



THE HONG KONG International Airport, a reclamation project, which began operations in 1998. (Photo is by Google Earth, 2010)

Hong Kong is back in business, and it's good to be reminded that the wonderful Hong Kong International Airport is built on reclaimed land on the island of Chek Lap Kok. It was inaugurated in July 1998, and we all know about its proximity to Hong Kong Disneyland - which itself is



A PHOTO that shows reclamation work on then-named Cavite Boulevard, circa 1910. And present-day Roxas Boulevard. (Adventure Manila FB page)

built on reclaimed land. The airport is one of the world's largest transshipment centers, passenger hubs, and gateways. It's an important contributor to HK's economy, with 65,000 employees, already handling 68.5 million passengers back in 2015.

In Singapore, a major reclamation project that began in 1966,

was carried out in seven phases over 30 years, culminated in the creation of Marina Bay in the mid-2000's. Changi Airport of Singapore also credits reclamation for its existence.

I'm not that much of a regular traveler to Singapore, but I've used the airport and spent days in Marina Bay, blissfully unaware of its reclamation provenance.

Perhaps most well-known for reclamation projects is Dubai; as the Burj Al Arab, the Dubai Marina, the Palm Islands, and the World Islands, are all standing on reclaimed land. The Burj, built on a man-made island was started in 1994, and took five years to complete. Most of the other projects occurred in the last 15 years.

One of the reasons so many are ready to rail against reclamation is to say it results in flooding. My daily commute is from Makati to the Manila Bulletin office at Intramuros. And can I just say that during the rainy season or when typhoons hit us, while Roxas Boulevard from Luneta to the CCP area would be flooded and require careful driving on single lanes; the stretch of Roxas Boulevard from the corner of Gil Puyat to EDSA would be fine. In fact, when driving within the MOA area, or on to City of Dreams to take the Skyway, it'll be clear driving.

So I'd surmise that newer technology, higher sea walls, better drainage systems, and efficient garbage disposal within the MOA area, all contribute to it being relatively flood free, even during the worst of storms. Flooding is more often caused by clogged sewage, and that we know, is a problem even when far from reclaimed land. For me, it's dangerous, and the height of ignorance, to just pronounce unequivocally that reclaimed areas are more prone to flooding.



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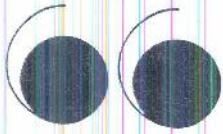
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**NEWS**

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# NGOs slam missed chance to prevent seabed mining



**Deep-sea mining would go beyond harming the seabed and have a wider impact on fish populations, marine mammals, and the essential function of the deep-sea ecosystems in regulating the climate**

**Sylvain Kalsakau**  
Vanuatu representative

and said no to mining," she said. But as the two-week meeting wrapped up, she remained "very worried" that the door

could be opened to mining applications later this year.

The Jamaica-based ISA, established under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, has authority over the ocean floors outside of its 167 member states' exclusive economic zones (EEZ), which extend up to 370 kilometers from their coastlines.

### Harm to ecosystems

It has so far awarded seabed exploration contracts only to research centers and companies in well-defined areas of potential mineral wealth.

Industrial exploitation of nickel, cobalt or copper is not expected to begin until the adoption of a mining code that has been under discussion for nearly 10 years—including at the latest talks in Kingston.

For years, NGOs and scientists have warned of the damage seabed mining could inflict on deep-sea ecosystems.

Other countries are increasingly echoing concerns on deep-sea ecosystems: Canada, Australia and Belgium among others have insisted that international seabed mining cannot begin without strict rules.

"The conditions do not exist for the exploitation of the seabed to begin," insisted Marcelino Miranda, representative of Mexico, on Friday.

Other nations—among them France, Germany, Chile and Vanuatu—are pushing more explicitly for a "moratorium" or "pause" on exploitation.

"Deep-sea mining would go beyond harming the seabed and have a wider impact on fish populations, marine mammals, and the essential function of the deep-sea ecosystems in regulating the climate," Vanuatu's representative, Sylvain Kalsakau, said during the negotiations.

"We encourage our

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UNITED NATIONS—Ocean advocates have warned that the door may fly open for undersea mining in the near future in the absence of solid environmental rules that more and more nations demand.

As two weeks of negotiations concluded on Friday over possible environmental rules restricting large-scale mining of the seabed, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) voiced fear that the industry may soon be given the green light.

Several nations called for a moratorium on such mining at the International Seabed Authority (ISA) council meeting.

"The first thing to highlight is that the political atmosphere has shifted quite radically since that time last year," Emma Wilson of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

"There wasn't a single state at that point that had stood up



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fellow Pacific states who have expressed interest in deep-sea mining to step back from the brink," Kalsakau said.

Nauru, impatient with the pace of progress, invoked in June 2021 a clause allowing it to demand that a mining code be adopted within two years.

Once that deadline is reached, on July 9, Nauru's government could request a mining contract for Nori (Nauru Ocean Resources Inc.), a subsidiary of Canada's The Metals Company.

**'A lot of anxiety here'**

But without a code in place, the 36-member council is divided over the process for reviewing an application for a mining contract—and it looked on course to part without agreement, with a draft seen by AFP calling for further talks on the matter.

The continuing uncertainty is "creating a lot of anxiety here," said Pradeep Singh, a law of the sea expert and fellow at the Research Institute for Sustainability in Potsdam.

Nauru Ambassador Margo Debye repeated on Friday that her country would wait for the conclusion of a July session before filing an application, hoping that the mining code could be adopted.

However, many observers and negotiators say this is unlikely.

"It is now clear that there is still a long way to go and that the two-week session in July will be largely insufficient to finalize the code," Belgian Ambassador Hugo Verbist said on Friday.

And the 36 members of the ISA's executive body failed to agree at this session on the process for reviewing an application for an exploitation contract that would be filed in the absence of a mining code.

"Walking like sleepwalkers towards an uncertain legal situation beyond July 9 has become a reality," Verbist said, lamenting this "legal loophole" created by the lack of a decision.

"Governments are recklessly leaving the backdoor open for deep-sea mining to sneak through and start operating later this year," said Greenpeace's Louisa Casson in a statement.

If The Metals Company starts gearing up for a launch of production in late 2024, NGOs fear that other industry groups will spy an opening—and file their own applications when

the two-year clause ends.

A few weeks after the historic adoption of a treaty to protect the high seas, "this deeply irresponsible outcome is a wasted opportunity to send a clear signal (...) that the era of ocean destruction is over," Casson added.

**PH situation**

In the Philippines, seabed mining within the country's territorial waters, has caused alarm in local communities.

In December 2020, the Philippine government gave permission to the first large-scale offshore mining in the country.

JDVC Resources Corp. will mine for magnetite—a kind of iron oxide used to make steel—within a 1,903-hectare area in the seabed 14 kilometers off the municipality of Gonzaga in Cagayan province. The concession area has a potential magnetite ore reserve of around 632 million tons.

Environmental groups have warned that magnetite was toxic and that offshore mining may bring irreversible damage to the ecosystem. The supposed danger was dismissed by the company.

In January this year, the Inquirer reported that Filipino fishermen were being adversely affected by quarrying and reclamation works in Manila Bay as their fish catch dwindled.

According to the Environmental Management Bureau, dredging operations in various areas of the bay cover about 13,530 hectares by the San Nicolas Shoal Seabed Quarry Project of VIL Mines Inc. (8,530 ha), and by Seabed Quarry Project of the Philippine Reclamation Authority (5,000 ha).

**Trade-offs**

According to marine scientist Fernando Siringan of the University of the Philippines-Marine Science Institute, quarrying disturbs the seafloor and leaves it too muddy for fish to stay.

Dredging the sand could also release dormant cysts of red tide species that, in the right conditions, could reproduce and repopulate the water surface, causing algal blooms that are toxic to marine life.

Local anti-mining network Alyansa Tigil Mina (ATM) called on the government to adopt a precautionary principle on seabed quarrying and offshore mining.

"There should be a halt in seabed quarrying projects con-

sidering government has still to undertake economic valuation or natural capital accounting of our marine ecosystems. Without knowing the value of our marine life, there is no way to determine the trade-offs that come with destructive seabed quarrying and offshore mining," Jaybee Garganera, ATM national coordinator, said in a statement last month.

According to the group many coastal communities in the country, which are dependent on the sea for their livelihood, would be adversely affected should seabed quarrying continue.

In June last year, the Inquirer reported that a number of foreign companies have signified interest in offshore mining.

**Foreign interest**

The Offshore Mining Chamber of the Philippines (OMCP) said at least 12 foreign companies had gotten in touch with their member-companies on the possibility of seabed mining opportunities in the country.

Among these companies were Primetals Technologies of Austria; Duro Felguera of Spain; and Japanese companies Nakanishi Shipbuilding, Kurimoto Iron Works, Kansai Design Co. and JTrade Co.

The OMCP, founded in 2019, is comprised of seven offshore mining companies that include Agbiag Mining and Development Corp., Cagayan Blue Ocean Offshore Aquamarine Services Corp., JDVC Resources Corp., Northern Orient Resources Development Corp., Advanced Technology Resources Mining and Business Process Technology Provider Corp., Mineralogic Resources Corp. and Royal Line Mining Corp.

To date, only JDVC has the go-ahead from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to conduct large-scale offshore mining in the country.

In May last year, the DENR issued Administrative Order No. 171-2022 imposing a moratorium on the acceptance of new applications for special exploration permits or government seabed quarry permits, following a directive from former President Rodrigo Duterte.

Prior to the issuance of the AO, the Mines and Geosciences Bureau said that it accepted 10 government seabed quarry permit applications. —REPORTS FROM

AFP, DEXTER CABALZA AND INQUIRER RESEARCH INC



TITLE: Harness huge potential of PH  
maritime sector

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## Editorial

### Harness huge potential of PH maritime sector

**T**HE government has a roadmap for unlocking the economic potential of the maritime sector. Unfortunately, executing plans has not been a strong suit of Filipinos. Of course, having a relatively new government renews hopes. But if the Marcos administration is to get the most out of the country's water resources, the first step may be developing new thinking that places maritime concerns ahead of other national priorities.

Many Filipinos say the Philippines is a maritime nation, yet national attention seems more focused toward inland infrastructure development, for instance, favors land transportation over ships and ferries.

In fairness, most past presidents tried to change that. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo had a program to develop a national nautical highway system that included roll-on, roll-off facilities. Rodrigo Duterte, toward the end of his term, released a new Maritime Industry Development Plan (MIDP) that extends to 2028. That was crafted by the Department of Transportation and the Maritime Industry Authority or Marina.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. seems committed to continuing his predecessors' work. While campaigning for the presidency, Mr. Marcos pledged to modernize and upgrade the country's ports. "Perhaps, we can make the Philippines a logistics center, considering our strategic importance in terms of our geographical position," he said.

Even then, development programs for the maritime sector seem like an afterthought. Many ports, especially in remote areas, still lack basic things like computers, internet connectivity and reliable power supply.

President Marcos wants to change that. He said recently, "Given that the Philippines is a maritime nation, I believe that it is time for us to make the maritime industry once again a top priority. While we already hold a dominant position in the world of global shipping, I certainly believe that we can do more, especially here at home."

He noted that the vital ingredient to successfully realizing his vision for the maritime sector was the Filipino seafarers. The Philippines supplies 25 percent of global maritime manpower. And in 2022, Filipino seafarers remitted \$6.71 billion to their families. Together with the money sent home by overseas workers, those dollar injections contribute about 10 percent to the gross domestic product.

Of course, maritime is more than just the seafarers.

Policymakers and ordinary citizens should realize that. Helping that sector can also boost agriculture and tourism, as well as help combat the impact of climate change.

Meanwhile, coastal waters, as well as rivers and lakes, are polluted. The Philippines is reportedly one of the top contributors of plastic waste in the world. Also, various development projects have damaged mangroves, forests, coral reefs and other coastal resources.

Rehabilitating them has been slow-going. These are some of the troubling signs that reflect the true state of the maritime sector.

As mentioned earlier, though, the government hopes to turn

things around. The MIDP 2028, according to a recent statement, covers eight priority programs that include enhancing maritime transport safety and security; promoting environmental sustainability and implementing digitalization; modernizing, upgrading and expanding the domestic and overseas shipping industry, including the local shipbuilding and ship repair industry; promoting a highly skilled and competitive maritime workforce; and adopting an effective and efficient maritime administration government system.

#### Perilous transport

The reforms cannot come fast enough, at least for maritime safety. Just weeks ago, the MT Princess Empress sank near Oriental Mindoro. It was carrying 800,000 liters of oil, some of which have leaked and have threatened fishing communities and tourist destinations. More recently, a ferry carrying 250 people caught fire while off Basilan in Mindanao. At least 31 people were killed.

Because of the country's poor maritime safety record, the sea acts like a barrier between communities. Poor connectivity among islands may explain why Filipinos seem so tribal and divided.

Still, what some view as barriers are seen as resources and opportunities by others. The Philippines has more than 36,000 kilometers of coastline, home to tens of millions of Filipinos. Many stand to benefit from addressing maritime concerns.

Generally, the government's lofty aim is to make the Philippines a maritime hub. To succeed, priorities and mindsets need to be adapted to that.



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## Lawmaker wants orders vs El Niño

A veteran lawmaker yesterday urged President Marcos to issue an official directive for specific government agencies to initiate measures that will mitigate the impact of El Niño in the country.

Albay Rep. Joey Salceda, who chairs the House technical working group on measures creating a Department of Water Resources, said it would be best for Marcos to issue an executive order directing concerned government agencies to spearhead measures to address the ongoing El Niño weather phenomenon, which could stretch up to 2024 and cause a "national water crisis."

"I commend PBBM for the executive order creating the apex body on water security. The first step is to acknowledge the problem, which he has by being clear about the existence of a water crisis. Now, it is time to issue a re-

lated directive to mitigate the impacts of El Niño," he said.

As chair of the technical working group, Salceda recommended several measures for adaptation, which include the development of a "small scale short gestation period irrigation system."

This measure involves the National Irrigation Authority, provincial engineering office and the Department of Agriculture. If done, this will allegedly accelerate the "shallow tube well" irrigation development in selected areas.

"Fastrack the construction of small water impounding projects. Remind barangays that they have an obligation to set up rainwater catchment facilities through the Department of the Interior and Local Government," Salceda said.

He also sought the "formulation and implementation of agricultural measures for mitigating the adverse effects of



A resident walks on a dried up fish pond in Candaba town, Pangasinana yesterday.

ERNIE PENAREDONDO

droughts, including measures designed to increase cropping intensity, to optimize unit area productivity and aimed at decreasing water duty and diversifying cropping system."