

14 August 2023, Monday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

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■ The campaign aims for full compliance and effective implementation of the EPR Act of 2022 by industries and other entities through attainment of time-bound waste recovery targets.

## UNDP, DENR boost EPR drive

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) teamed-up with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for a nationwide campaign that will drive the recovery of waste materials and prevent leakage of waste into the environment. The campaign is in line with the implementation of Republic Act (RA) 11898, otherwise known as the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Act of 2022.

Dubbed as "Loopforward: Linking Opportunities and Partnerships Towards Circular Economy through EPR," the campaign aims for full compliance and effective implementation of the EPR Act of 2022 by industries and other entities through attainment of time-bound waste recovery targets. It highlights the relevance of the EPR concept and law, gain better understanding among its stakeholders, and convene and gain commitments from the country's biggest private firms referred to as the "obliged enterprises" under the law. It also seeks to gather support and open possible areas for collaboration among national government agencies, local government units, and development partners.

During the Loopforward launch, Senator Cynthia Villar, who pushed for the passage of the EPR Act, delivered her message of support while Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyza was the keynote speaker. Meanwhile, Climate

Change Commission Secretary Robert Borje and UNDP Philippines Resident Representative Selva Ramachandran delivered special remarks as well.

Among the highlights of the program were the talks on the social dimension of single-use plastic in the informal sector by Dr. Emma Porio of the Ateneo de Manila University, and another on climate financing by UNDP Climate Action Programme Team Leader Floradema Eleazar, as well as panel discussions on enabling EPR implementation by key officials from the Department of Finance, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, the Department of Labor and Employment, the Department of Science and Technology, the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the Department of Trade and Industry, with representatives from Holcim Philippines Inc., San Miguel Foods, Plastic Credit Exchange, Nestle Philippines Inc., Universal Robina Corporation, SM Prime Holdings Inc., Philippine Alliance for Recycling and Materials Sustainability, and CEMEX Holdings Philippines.

Throughout the event, the DENR facilitated the onsite registration and submission from private companies of their respective EPR programs either as an Obligated Enterprise, Collective or Producer Responsibility Organization. An exhibit on exemplary EPR programs from select enterprises and organizations was also featured.



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# Manila Standard



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## Villar cites relevance of EPR Law to efficient waste management

**By Macon Ramos-Araneta**

SENATOR Cynthia Villar has underscored the spirit of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Act of 2022, saying the law as “not a burden, but a call to partnership and cooperation” among its various stakeholders.

“By embracing the EPR and the circular economy, we are ready to pave the way for a more sustainable future,” Villar stressed.

Villar made the remarks in a speech during the EPR campaign launch at the Conrad Hotel in Pasay City.

Villar cited the theme of the event or-

ganized by the DENR as “LOOPFORWARD: Linking Opportunities and Partnerships Towards Circular through EPR.”

Villar exhorted the people to unite in supporting the EPR Act and in advancing a circular economy.

“This law offers a better approach to plastic waste management than merely

expecting citizens to segregate and manage it, or leaving the local government units across our more than seven thousand islands to handle overwhelming plastic waste,” Villar said.

She was the main author and sponsor of the EPR Law or Republic Act No. 11898.



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# P1.4b set for Manila Bay

## rehab

**N**OTWITHSTANDING controversies over massive reclamation projects at the Manila Bay, the Department of Environment and National Resources (DENR) is getting another P1.4 billion in new appropriations to sustain the cleanup and rehabilitation of Manila Bay pursuant to a Supreme Court order, Quezon City Rep. Marvin Rillo said on Sunday.

“The DENR’s Operational Plan for the Manila Bay Coastal Management Strategy will be receiving another P1.4 billion in 2024. The sum is in addition to the P1.5 billion earmarked (for the same operational plan) in this year’s national budget,” Rillo said.

“We are all for the complete environmental restoration of Manila Bay for the enjoyment of future generations of Filipinos,” he added.

Rillo is vice chairman of the House Committee on Metro Manila Development and a member of the House Committee on Appropriations.

Following President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s instruction, the DENR last week ordered the suspension of 22 reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

Rillo said the operational plan for Manila Bay was pursuant to the Supreme Court’s 15-year-old ruling directing the DENR and a dozen other agencies to restore the sea inlet’s waters to Class B, and make them suitable and safe for public swimming, skin-diving and other forms of seaborne recreation.

At present, Manila Bay’s waters are largely unsafe for public swimming due to severe contamination with human waste and the heavy presence of disease-carrying bacteria and viruses.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonio Yulo-Loyzaga earlier expressed grave concern that the reclamation projects, which are now under review, could obstruct the DENR from fulfilling its duties under the Supreme Court’s 2008 mandamus.

The DENR chief said the reclamation projects could upset the operations of existing and future sewage treatment plants (STPs) to be built around Manila Bay.

The STPs are meant to capture and clean Metro Manila’s wastewater before they drain into the bay.

insurgency holdouts



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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS  
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THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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# Manila Bay reclamation projects 'continue' despite Marcos' order - Pamalakaya

VEL SANTOS

Despite the order of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" R. Marcos Jr. to halt reclamation projects in Manila Bay, fisherfolk group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) on Sunday, Aug. 13, claimed that dredging activities intended for reclamation continue in Cavite.

In a statement, the group said they spotted vessels that are engaged

in dredging operations off the shores of Rosario, Noveleta, Tanza, and Naic in Cavite.

"These dredging operations that complement various reclamation projects in Manila Bay are supposed to be covered by the suspension order from the President," Pamalakaya Chairperson Fernando Hicap said.

Cavite fisherfolk, according to Pamalakaya, lose around 80 to 90 percent of daily income since dredging

activities began two years ago.

"We reiterate that unless an official Executive Order or a legislation banning reclamation is issued, President Marcos Jr's verbal declaration is toothless and holds little weight," the head of the group said.

The Manila Bulletin has already sought the side of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), but the agency has yet to comment on the matter.

During a Malacañang media briefing on Aug. 10, Environment Sec. Maria Antonia "Toni" Yulo-Loyzaga clarified that all reclamation projects in Manila Bay are suspended pending review. This was after the chief executive claimed that one of the projects has already been reviewed.

Loyzaga said a suspension order was already issued to temporarily stop Manila Bay reclamation projects.

Asked when the suspension order

took effect, the DENR chief said: "I have a copy of the suspension so I think that the PRA (Philippine Reclamation Authority) would also have a copy. As soon as the President speaks, that would be in effect..."

Prior to the order of Marcos, various environmental groups have urged the DENR to stop the reclamation projects in Manila Bay, noting potential negative long-term and irreversible impacts of the reclamation to the environment.



## Bay reclamation still on despite suspension order

DESPITE the declaration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to suspend all reclamation projects in Manila Bay, dredging activities intended for reclamation continue in Cavite, a fisherfolk group claimed.

The Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) reported seeing vessels that are dredging off the shores of Rosario, Novleta, Tanza, and Naic in Cavite on Sunday.

This is just four days after the President's announcement suspending reclamation projects in the bay.

"These dredging operations that complement various reclamation projects in Manila Bay are supposed to be covered by the suspension order from the President," said Fernando Hicap, Pamalakaya national chairman.

The dredging is carried out by the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) and San Miguel Corp. (SMC) as part of the dump-and-fill operations of the Manila Waterfront Reclamation and the Bulacan Aerotropolis Project.

Hicap said that small fishers in Cavite have been losing 80 to 90 percent of their daily income since the dredging started two

years ago.

"We reiterate that unless an official Executive Order or a legislation banning reclamation is issued, President Marcos Jr.'s verbal declaration is toothless and holds little weight," said Hicap.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said all 22 reclamation activities were suspended following the presidential order on August 7.

"The declaration is really that all of these projects are suspended at this point. So all are under review. We have to take our time, really beginning with those that are ongoing because they're in fact already impacting the areas, and then we will graduate to all those still not yet begun," DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said during a press briefing on Thursday.

The DENR did not identify the suspended projects that had been granted Environmental Compliance Certificates (ECCs).

Under Executive Order 74, no reclamation project shall be approved by the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) without the required Area Clearance and ECC to be issued by the DENR.

**JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL**



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**INQUIRER**

REGIONS  
**SOLDIER KILLED,  
9 WOUNDED IN  
BASILAN AMBUSH**

# SENATOR CALLS FOR INQUIRY INTO MANILA BAY PROJECTS

STORY BY MARLON RAMOS

Sen. JV Ejercito urges the Senate blue ribbon committee to look into the reclamation projects approved by the local governments on grounds that these could be midnight deals. 'All stakeholders and agencies concerned have to be summoned,' he said.

## Senator calls for inquiry into Manila Bay projects

FROM A1

By Marlon Ramos  
@MRamosINQ

Sen. JV Ejercito on Sunday urged the Senate blue ribbon committee to look into the "midnight gold rush" approval of 22 reclamation projects around Manila Bay.

Specifically, Ejercito questioned the authority of local government units (LGUs) to enter into contracts with private companies, many of which are owned by the Chinese government, to dredge and dump sand off the shores of Manila Bay.

"If we want to get to the bottom of these reclamation projects, all stakeholders and agencies concerned have to be summoned [to a Senate investigation]," Ejercito told the Inquirer.

The senator said he didn't think then President Rodrigo Duterte supported these reclamation projects. "Probably the people around him conspired to have these 'midnight gold rush'

[deals] approved," he said, without elaborating.

Ejercito said the blue ribbon panel, chaired by Sen. Francis Tolentino, should review an order supposedly issued by the Philippine Reclamation Authority that allowed local governments around Manila Bay to approve the reclamation activities.

The senator, who had also served as mayor of San Juan City for nine years, said any project involving properties owned by the state should be approved by national government agencies.

### Possible overreach

During a Senate hearing last week, Public Works Secretary Manuel Bonoan said his department was not involved in the approval of the reclamation projects, thus the possible overreach by the LGUs.

"Is it proper for LGUs to award the contracts for the reclamation projects? From what I know, all bodies of water, including Manila Bay, are patrimonial assets owned by the state," he also told radio dzBB's



JV Ejercito —SENATE PRIB

Bantay Balita sa Kongreso.

"That's why I don't understand what happened here and why the LGUs were authorized to grant the contracts," he said. "It's one of the contentious issues here."

Last week, President Marcos suspended all reclamation projects at Manila Bay pending a comprehensive government review.

This came days after the US



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Embassy in Manila raised concerns over the impact of these projects on the environment plus the involvement in the reclamation of a Chinese construction company that Washington had blacklisted three years ago.

According to Ejercito, individuals behind the approval of questionable projects should be held liable for "destroying" one of the country's famous tourist spots.

The senator often cycles to the Senate building, located along the coast of Manila Bay in Pasay City.

"I used to enjoy the fresh air while riding my bike. Now, you will inhale sand (particles) because of the reclamation projects in Manila Bay," he lamented.

**Dredging activities**

In November last year, Sen. Risa Hontiveros filed a resolution calling on the Senate to investigate reclamation activities not just in Manila Bay, but in other coastal communities as well.

International environmen-

tal group Oceana earlier said there were 52 ongoing reclamation projects across the country as of February.

Adding to these concerns are reports by Cavite fisherfolk that seabed mining has continued in different parts of Manila Bay for dump and fill projects, despite Mr. Marcos' order suspending reclamation activities.

Speaking to the Inquirer, Pamalakaya chair Fernando Hicap said they saw at least five dredging vessels off Rosario, Noveleta, Tanza and Naic in Cavite as of Sunday.

This was just four days after the President directed the review of reclamation activities in the bay.

Hicap said dredging activities should be covered by the suspension orders since they complement ongoing reclamation projects.

**'Twin evils'**

The bay's fisherfolk often refer to reclamation and seabed mining projects as the "twin evils" of the bay, as both destroy its corals and seabed.

In January, the Inquirer reported how the bay's fisherfolk, especially in Bataan province, were seeing less fish since the projects started, as the noise and dredged-up sediment have also driven away fish from usually productive grounds.

"It seems they are still continuing mining the bay and exploiting a convenient loophole in Mr. Marcos' orders," Hicap said. "While it's true that these are separate activities, dredging can only happen if there are reclamation activities."

He reiterated their call for Mr. Marcos to issue an official executive order, or to marshal Congress to pass a law that would declare Manila Bay and other fishing grounds in the country as reclamation- and mining-free zones.

"Their effects on the bay and other fishing grounds across the country are already well-documented and fisherfolk are suffering for it," Hicap said. "Unless Mr. Marcos gives weight to his declaration, these suspension orders will be toothless." —WITH A REPORT FROM

KRIXIA SUBINGSUBING INQ





OPINION

## COMMONSENSE

MARICHU A. VILLANUEVA

### Agree to disagree

**M**en and women of applied sciences are people with expertise who are able to provide more dispassionate views and impersonal manner of looking at problems and issues at hand. But like any other professional, scientists also differ very much in their views while looking at the same picture.



This much we get much from our scientists in the Cabinet of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., or (PBBM).

PBBM has two science experts in his Cabinet. They are, namely, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, and Department of Science and Technology (DOST) Secretary Renato Solidum Jr. Loyzaga got appointed to the DENR in July last year and a month later, Solidum was named to head the DOST.

Known for her expertise in climate and disaster resilience, Loyzaga has experience in leading and working with the National Resilience Council, Manila Observatory, Philippine Disaster Resilience Foundation, to name some from 2007-2016. During this period, she was appointed to the DOST's Committee on Space Technology Applications and to the UNESCO's National Commission's Committee on Science and Technology. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Government from Georgetown University and Political Science degree from the Ateneo de Manila University.

On the other hand, Solidum is a Geology graduate from the University of the Philippines and obtained his masteral degree in Geological Sciences in the University of Illinois and completed his Ph.D. in Earth Sciences in Scripps Institution of Oceanography in the University of California. Prior to his Cabinet post, Solidum concurrently served as the DOST Undersecretary for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change and as officer-in-charge of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology where he has worked since 1984.

Now, let us examine the official views of the DENR and DOST chiefs on the issue of reclamation. Cases in point are the 22 reclamation projects nationwide, including those around the Manila Bay area that were suspended upon orders of PBBM last week. It was informally disclosed last Monday (Aug.7) during a dialogue with national and local government officials in Bulacan on the severe flooding caused by two successive typhoons "Egay" and "Falcon" in Central Luzon.

The President mentioned about the suspension of all reclamation projects, except for one that has already undergone review. Upon clarification with PBBM two days later at Malacañang, the DENR Secretary announced a total of 22 reclamation projects "are all suspended and under review" by the DENR until further notice.

"I have a copy of the suspension (order). As soon as the President speaks, I supposed this took effect when he said this in Bulacan," Loyzaga retorted as she brandished a piece of paper as proof of the written, official Presidential directives to the DENR.

**This much we get much from our scientists in the Cabinet of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr., or PBBM.**

For this purpose, Loyzaga cited, the DENR will conduct a "cumulative impact assessment" of each and every 22 projects as required by Executive Order No. 74 involving reclamation activities all over the Philippines. Loyzaga vowed to immediately constitute a "scientific team" the DENR will provide with a program of work on the review of all the reclamation projects.

Offhand, Loyzaga could not give a specific timetable on how long the review process. She promised though the DENR will do a "transdisciplinary work" on these reclamation projects. "This is not just inter-disciplinary or multi-discipline but we learn from communities, experts from practice - not just from scientists who are just professors - physical scientists, oceanographers, geologists, as well as climate scientists and social scientists on board," Loyzaga pointed out.

Loyzaga clarified these projects will undergo review by Presidential decision because "the DENR has no authority to suspend" these reclamation projects.

According to Loyzaga, all the affected reclamation projects have been approved by the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) and their respective local government units during the previous administration. She stopped though identifying if it was PRA during the term of former President Rodrigo Duterte.

In our *Kapihan sa Manila Bay* breakfast news forum last Wednesday, Solidum was asked on the DOST position on PBBM's suspension of reclamation projects in relation to climate change impact. "I will give you the scientific analysis and you conclude," Solidum riposted.

In broad strokes, Solidum explained reclamation or creating new lands in coastal areas are being done all over the world. "In other areas, the ideal reclamation will be an island reclamation. This means do not connect it to another reclamation so that the waters can still pass through. (But) climate change has no effect with reclamation. It's the other way around," Solidum pointed out.

As example, Solidum noted, the reclaimed areas facing Manila Bay coastline are more exposed to storm surge and tsunami. "When you reclaim and you append, or you connect the reclaimed land to an existing land, if the drainage was not properly done, and not well engineered, then you can be sure, it will cause flooding to the areas it connected to," the DOST chief asserted.

The new reclaimed area, he warns, becomes more exposed to sea actions. But on the other side that used to face Manila Bay, lesser threats from storm surge or tsunami, he pointed out.

Loyzaga agreed "there are many ways of doing reclamation correctly" and cited as good examples the entire Luneta (Rizal Park), the Intramuros and the entire Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) reclamation grounds in Pasay City. "These are all reclaimed areas. So I would not say categorically, that island reclamation is better because it really depends on the specific physical and social context of the area," Loyzaga pointed out.

"But Secretary Solidum is of course, the Secretary of the DOST, so we respect his own inputs into this process," the DENR chief declared.

When people of science agree to disagree, the decision becomes no longer science-based but turns into something else.



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## San Miguel offers to clean up Bulacan and Pampanga rivers

**S**AN Miguel Corp. president and chief executive officer Ramon S. Ang offered an extensive cleanup of polluted river systems and waterways in and around Bulacan to solve the province's perennial flooding problem.

Ang committed to implement the cleanup using San Miguel's own resources at no cost to the government and the people of Bulacan.

Ang made the pledge to Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga in a recent meeting, where he presented the status of SMC's massive river cleanup initiatives including Pasig River, Tullahan River and San Juan River.

The company has already spent some P3 billion to de-silt and remove solid wastes from the polluted waterways. Ang also outlined plans to fully shift its river rehabilitation efforts to Bulacan in the coming months.

San Miguel, which has multiple investments in Bulacan—including the MRT-7 project, the Bulacan Bulk Water Supply facility and the biggest development in

the country to date—the P740-billion New Manila International Airport—has in recent years been a prime mover and advocate for cleaning up major river systems in Metro Manila.

“Our Pasig River cleanup is almost complete. After about two years, we are nearing our target of 1.4 million tons of silt and waste removed. We have also started de-silting and waste extraction activities at the Meycauayan River and Maycapiz/Talipit River. This is part of our plan to clean up rivers in the Bulakan-Obando-Meycauayan-Marilao-Bocause-Guiguinto River System, which is critical to addressing flooding throughout the southern part of Bulacan,” Ang said.

The firm's flood mitigation program for Bulacan initially covered rivers surrounding the future site of the New Manila International Airport. However, upon

the request of local government units of Bulacan, San Miguel expanded the program to other tributaries outside of the Marilao-Meycauayan-Obando River System.

“It's very unfortunate every time there is a typhoon, so many people in Bulacan have to suffer. Flooding has been a problem in the province ever since. With the growth in population, the emergence of settlements and developments, and no extensive and sustained effort to clean up the rivers, the situation has only gotten worse,” Ang said.

“But I am confident that with this project to extensively clean up our rivers and with the support of our provincial and local governments and the DENR, we can significantly increase the carrying capacity of our rivers and help solve flooding once and for all,” he added.

Ang also addressed allegations by some that the airport project is the cause of flooding in the province, citing that flooding had already been a major problem, long before government approved the airport's construction in the province, just north of Metro Manila.

“There are many contributing factors to flooding. Bulacan has many low-lying





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# Addressing Pampanga, Bulacan flooding

**B**ulacan and Pampanga have been placed under a state of calamity, with 22 towns in Bulacan and 16 in Pampanga still under heavy flooding from the rains caused by Typhoons "Egay" and "Falcon," and the southwest monsoon. Floods with depths reaching seven feet have persisted for about two weeks and affected the daily life of the residents.

In coming up with long-lasting solutions to the flooding problem, there is a need to employ the watershed land use planning approach. This is an integrated area approach that considers flood-prone areas as parts of watersheds with uplands and lowlands, that have interconnected ecological processes. The flood-prone areas we're concerned about are actually parts of the interconnected Pampanga and Bulacan watersheds, drained mainly by the Pampanga and Angat rivers. Public and private efforts so far are jointly focused on addressing problems related to natural water flows.

Aside from heavy rainfall caused by atmospheric events, we can trace the causes of flooding, firstly, to the rampant denudation of forests in the Sierra Madre mountains. Trees absorb water and slow its movement to the lowland, while at the same time preventing soil erosion that could result in the silting of the river system. The silted rivers in the coastal towns of Pampanga and Bulacan easily experience overflowing of their banks, especially during abnormally high rainfall events. The silting and resulting shallowing of the rivers are also traceable to the accumulation of ashfall and lahar

## COMMENTARY

MELITON B. JUANICO

ejected by Mount Pinatubo in 1991, and the garbage dumped into the rivers by residents. The flooding is further exacerbated by the subsidence caused by the pumping of groundwater by residents and fishpond owners in an already very level terrain.

Considering the above causes of flooding, certain actions need to be given urgent attention. First, intensified reforestation should be conducted in denuded parts of the Sierra Madre mountains, especially those whose slopes are above 50 percent. Second, dredging should be extensively done in the silted rivers, including parts of Manila Bay at the mouth of major rivers. An example of private sector participation in this activity is the dredging being done in the silted Marilao-Meycauayan-Obando River System by San Miguel Corp. Third, river widening should be done, and concrete channels or canals in major rivers should be established.

Actually, this was already done in the Pampanga River by the Department of Public Works and Highways in the 1990s under the first phase of its Pampanga Delta Development Project. The river channeling activity under the project's second phase should have moved up around Calumpit and moved down along the Labangan River. But this was aborted by the strong lobby

of the Calumpit local government, which claimed that a sizeable part of its area would be eaten up by the project. The river widening solution should also be extended to the widening of transportation channels coursing through the fishpond structures.

Fourth, water-impounding structures should be set up on the higher levels of the river basins and watersheds for the purpose of stalling the onrush of water that leads to flooding downstream. The government plans to set up a 200-hectare water-retarding basin in the Candaba Swamp above the Pampanga River, as well as a small water-impounding project in Cuyapo, Nueva Ecija. More of these projects should be set up on the higher elevations of the river basin.

Fifth, the pumping of groundwater that creates subsidence should be regulated. Incidentally, the saltwater intrusion that also results from this activity has already reduced the agricultural areas as they are converted into fishponds.

Lastly, there is a need for an intensified information, education, and communication campaign among stakeholders for the implementation of these projects that would benefit them in so many ways, including the enhancement of their socioeconomic development.

Meliton B. Juanico is a retired professor of geography at the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines Diliman, and is a practicing licensed environmental planner.



# No Bulacan airport reclamation

## BIZ BUZZ



**A**mid the issues surrounding Manila Bay reclamation works, San Miguel Corp. clarified that no reclamation is involved in its New Manila International Airport project in Bulacan, stressing it was redeveloping the existing land that had been inundated by flooding.

"The project site has exist-

ing, valid land titles indicating its original status as land. Due to natural processes over time, this land had become prone to regular inundation," San Miguel president and CEO **Ramon Ang** said, stressing that the project site consists of legitimately titled properties, which he had been slowly buying over the past few years.

Apart from flooding, he said that fish pond conversion and over-extraction of groundwater

**B5**

## BIZ BUZZ: NO BULACAN AIRPORT RECLAMATION

**FROM B1** in the property made it "more susceptible to land subsidence."

"Instead of creating new land, we are redeveloping it to its former state, ensuring its productive and sustainable use for the future," the billionaire said.

The land redevelopment is being conducted by San Miguel with international experts and partners, including global maritime services expert Royal Boskalis. —**TYRONE JASPER C. PIAD**

### Imported vs local chicken

Here's a tale of two rival fast food chains, both of which are successful both here and overseas. One, in fact, is particularly proud of its success against its rival that is doesn't hesitate to toot its own horn in this front.

But there's in issue that's facing one of these fast food chains below the radar, and it's making the local suppliers of this raw material unhappy.

Biz Buzz hears that one of these two food chains appar-

ently prefers importing chickens instead of patronizing local ones, sacrificing taste for higher profit margins.

Indeed, customers have noticed of late that the fried chicken this chain serves—one of its flagship products—has become slightly drier and more bland.

Whatever the company's reason is for preferring international chicken suppliers, its staunchest rival continues to buy from local chicken farmers to keep the high quality of its fried chicken and its customers happy.

So the question is: will this popular food chain respond positively to the popular clamor for it to return to its local chicken sources? Or will the shortsighted profit motive prevail? *Abangan!* —**DAXIM L. LUCAS INQ**



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## Land reclamation in Verde Island Passage flagged

A COALITION of communities, sectors and advocates of the Verde Island Passage (VIP) welcomed the decision of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. to suspend all the ongoing land reclamation projects in the Manila Bay area pending the cumulative impact assessment by experts.

Although long overdue, the group called "Protect VIP" said the order highlights the fact that Manila Bay is highly vulnerable and needs protection against destructive development activities.

In the same vein, Protect VIP said the president and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) should also look into the vulnerabilities of the VIP. The DENR is expected to lead the cumulative impact assessment of the land-reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

The group expressed concerns on the land reclamation activities that form part of the ongoing construction of liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals and power plants in the region, particularly Batangas. The latter is one of five provinces surrounding the Verde Island Passage, a region described by scientists as the center of the center of shorefish biodiversity.

The group also said they hope that the suspension of the land reclamation in Manila Bay was not merely because of

geopolitical concerns raised by the United States but by a genuine concern to protect the environment. Protect VIP added that the Chief Executive should also order the suspension of ongoing land reclamation activities in Batangas and other areas in the VIP, one of the most productive marine ecosystems in the world.

"We of course welcome the move of the government to protect, albeit belatedly, the environment of Manila Bay. It is only a matter of curiosity for us if the motivation is environmental or geopolitical," Protect VIP Convenor and Catholic priest Rev. Fr. Edwin A. Gariguez was quoted in a statement as saying. "If it is the former, then the President should also order the DENR to review the status of gas terminals around the VIP that involve land reclamation, displacement of [fishermen] and surrounding communities and destruction of marine habitats."

"It is only then that we can be convinced that both the government and DENR are sincere on its new stance on reclamation," Gariguez added.

The group said the Verde Island Passage is at risk of hosting over 20 gas facilities, which host communities and advocates are opposing due to their impact on the environment, fisheries and the local economy. **Jonathan L. Mayuga**



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areas. Another is land subsidence caused by over-extraction and the depletion of ground water. In fact, that is one of the reasons why we invested in putting up the Bulacan Bulk Water System Project some years back—to provide potable water to residents without having to resort to unsustainable use of ground water,” Ang said.

“Degradation, siltation, and pollution of our rivers are of course major causes of flooding. Because of these, rivers become shallow and their flood carrying capacity is severely diminished, resulting in river overflow and floods. The proliferation of fish ponds in coastal areas has also contributed to severe flooding in the province,” he said.

San Miguel has already started cleaning up rivers around the airport project site as part of the overall design and long-term maintenance of the country’s largest international gateway.

These flood mitigation efforts are seen to also benefit towns near the airport.

“We are deeply invested in the future as well as the well-being of Bulacan and its residents. We would not pour in billions in resources if we didn’t consider all possible risks, including flooding in the province. As with any major undertaking of this magnitude, extensive studies were done even before construction started. And even now, we continue to work with experts and to consistently ensure we adhere to the highest environmental and social standards and regulations,” Ang said.

#### Heavily-silted Pampanga River

Ang said heavily-flooded areas during the last typhoon, particularly Calumpit and Hagonoy, located far from the airport

project, were affected by overflow from the heavily-silted Pampanga River aggravated by the release of water from some dams.

San Miguel is already looking to extend its river de-silting and cleanup initiative beyond Bulacan’s rivers, to other critical tributaries throughout Central Luzon.

“With our experience in cleaning up Tullahan and Pasig Rivers, the modern equipment we have invested in over the years, and the technical know-how of our personnel, I think we are more than ready to take on the challenge of expanding the efforts to the rest of Bulacan and also Pampanga,” Ang added.

Since 2020, the company has been undertaking major river cleanup programs at no cost to government, to help mitigate flooding in and around Metro Manila.

Apart from its ongoing cleanup of the Pasig River, last year, San Miguel completed its P1-billion Tullahan river cleanup project. It extracted more than 1.12 million metric tons of silt and solid wastes from the river.

Ang said the conglomerate has cleaned up some 4.45 kilometers out of an initial 13-kilometer target along the Talipit/Maycapiz River and the Meycauayan River. A total of 543,266 metric tons of silt and solid waste have now been removed.

Meycauayan River, one of the tributaries in the MMORS, has been named as one of the world’s top 10 tributaries that emit the highest share of plastics to the oceans.

Others in the list are the Pasig River, Tullahan River, Pampanga River, Libmanan river, Rio Grande de Mindanao and Agno river.



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30% WATER SYSTEMS LOSSES BARED

# SOLVE WATER WOES BEFORE EL NIÑO WORSENS, HOUSE URGED

By Jeannette I. Andrade  
@jiandradeINQ

Speaker Martin Romualdez on Sunday vowed to lead the House of Representatives in finding solutions to the country's water woes, amid forecasts of a strong El Niño weather pattern over the next six months.

He said he expected House deliberations on the government's P5.768-trillion budget for 2024 to focus on solving the problems of the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA), which reported that nearly half of the country's 532 water districts were wasting a third of their water supply.

"Patching up this water systems losses means more water for all at a time when El Niño remains a very serious threat to our daily convenience and food production," the Speaker said.

Two weeks ago, the Philip-



Martin Romualdez —PHOTO  
FROM MARTIN ROMUALDEZ FB PAGE

pine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration reported an increased likelihood of below-normal rainfall because of El Niño, which is expected to persist until the first quarter of 2024.

While the weather pattern is still weak and the southwest monsoon is expected to bring increased rainfall, El Niño is

forecast to strengthen toward the end of year until the dry season next year.

"The ongoing deliberations of the House committee on appropriations, chaired by Rep. Zaldy Co, is the perfect opportunity to explore solutions, including the rehabilitation of water supply systems and modernizing LWUA," Romualdez said.

Romualdez said he met on Aug. 7 with LWUA chairperson Ronnie Ong, who sought the lower chamber's assistance in reducing, if not totally eliminating, the nearly 30 percent annual water system losses of almost half of the 532 water districts in the country.

Based on LWUA data the, water districts, which serve areas outside Metro Manila, yield an average nonrevenue water (NRW) rate of 29.34 percent, which translates to an annual water loss of some 488 million

cubic meters—over half the capacity of Angat Dam which supplies water to Metro Manila and nearby provinces.

The LWUA said that there were at least 244 water districts with NRW rates exceeding 21 percent, including at least 20 water districts that have NRW rates ranging from 48 percent to 71 percent.

The Speaker further assured, "We shall direct all congressmen to commit to the President's call to conserve water by closely working with LWUA and addressing the wastage of water in their respective water districts."

President Marcos emphasized efforts to attain water security amid an impending El Niño event in his July 24 second State of the Nation Address and ordered government offices to enforce national water conservation measures. INQ



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## Maynilad moves to minimize impact of El Niño

By BELLA CARIASO

An additional 200 milliliters per day (mld) can be sourced from the ongoing projects of Maynilad Water Services Inc. in an effort to lessen the dependence on Angat Dam and as part of preparations to minimize the impact of the El Niño phenomenon, an official of the water concessionaire said.

"Actually, it (El Niño) will not only last until the first quarter of next year. It will start in the last quarter of this year and could extend into the first quarter, second quarter of next year, that's the forecast. What we are saying is we need to prepare and we need to put onstream all the new plants," Maynilad vice president and water supply operations division head Ronald Padua said in an interview with **The STAR** over the weekend.

Padua added that the additional 200 mld will come from the ongoing construction of various projects of Maynilad.

"We have new treatment plants like Poblacion, we have a plant in Cavite, what we call modular treatment plants. We already had the soft opening but we still need to finish all the activities, hopefully by next month, we can get the full 16 mld from the plant," he said.

According to Padua, Maynilad hopes to source at least 50 mld once the Poblacion treatment plant becomes operational in the last quarter of this year and an additional 150 mld will be available by the first quarter of 2023, totaling to an additional 200 mld new sources of water until next year.

He said that Maynilad also needs to sustain the full operation of Putatan plants to sustain the water level of Angat Dam.

"We also continue reactivating our deep wells and lastly, we need to bring down the non-revenue water (NRW). We have a master plan in our efforts to replace the old piles," he noted.

Padua said that when severe El Niño hit the country in 2010 and 2015, the water allocation for Maynilad and Maynilad Water reached 40 cu-

bic meters per second (CMS).

"We do not know yet the severity of the El Niño, hopefully it is a mild El Niño," he said.

According to Padua, Maynilad is short of at least 200,000 million liters per day with the current 48 CMS allocation given by the National Water Resources Board (NWRB).

"It (48 CMS) is not enough from the normal but we have augmentation as from Angat Dam, the water will reach Ipo Dam, and then La Mesa Dam. Ipo has its own watersheds so even if the water released from Angat is limited, the rains in Ipo augment our water supply for Metro Manila. Our fear is that in case the rains stopped in Ipo, that's the time, there may be the possibility to resume the water interruption," Padua said.

Maynilad announced the indefinite suspension of the nine to 11 daily water cut-off in Caloocan, Malabon, Manila, Valenzuela, Navotas and Quezon City with the improvement in the level of Angat Dam.

Padua said that Maynilad was able to bring down the number of households affected by the water interruption to 590,000 customers from the previous 1.2 million customers.

He said that from the 30 to 40 percent of customers who enjoyed 24 hours water service when Maynilad took over in 2007, it grew to 80 to 90 percent of customers who are assured of uninterrupted water supply.

Padua said that Maynilad filed a plea to the NWRB to increase the present 48 CMS allocation to prevent water interruption.

"That's our plea to return the normal allocation but we also understand the position of NWRB that we need to prepare for El Niño. We continue to cooperate to preserve the water from Angat Dam," he said.

In separate text messages to **The STAR**, NWRB Executive Director Sevilla David Jr. and Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System Deputy Administrator Jose Dorado Jr. said that they have yet to receive the request of Maynilad to increase the 48 CMS allocation.





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# Palawan mining operations halted

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

[@jonlmayuga](#)

**T**HE National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) has issued a cease-and-desist order (CDO) against the nickel ore mining operations of Celestial Nickel Mining Corp. and Ipilan Nickel Mining Corp. in Brooke's Point, Palawan.

According to the NCIP, the mining companies failed to secure a certification precondition (CP) and the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) from concerned indigenous people (IP) that have ancestral domain claim over in the area.

Officials of the mining companies were also accused of bribing members and leaders of the IP communities to support their operations.

CP is a certificate issued by the NCIP, signed by the chairperson, attesting to the grant of FPIC by the concerned indigenous cultural community (ICC) or IP after compliance with the requirement provided for in the revised guidelines for FPIC, a requirement before a company can operate within the ancestral domain of ICCs/IPs.

The order dated August 11, 2023, and signed by Marie Grace T. Pascua, NCIP's regional director in Mimaropa, cited an en banc resolution of the agency in favor of the Palawan ICCs/IPs of Brooke's Point.

They were given 5 days to comply with the cease-and-desist order upon notification.

NCIP said the order would only be lifted upon compliance of the companies to secure a CP from and FPIC from concerned ICCs and IPs.

Alayansa Tigil Mina (ATM), an anti-mining group composed of mining-affected communities and environmental advocates welcomed the move and hailed the NCIP's Mimaropa Office for "being true to its mandate of protecting Indigenous Peoples."

"By this decision, the NCIP-Mimaropa has shown that the voices and will of the IPs can prevail over the interests of the mining companies," the group said.

"The CDO order likewise gives hope to the IPs as well as the mining-affected communities that the further destruction of their environment and livelihoods can be permanently stopped."

Lawyer Gerthie Mayo-Anda, Executive-Director of the Environmental Legal Assistance Center (ELAC) underscored the need to implement the order "to prevent further damage to people and the environment."

"While we welcome the NCIP's decision, we believe that the immediate implementation of the CDO is very critical to address the IPs' displacement and the deforestation of their ancestral domain covered by mining operations. Since 2017, thousands of trees have been cut inside their sacred grounds and watersheds. The continuing threat to the IPs' livelihood, culture, and food security needs to be addressed."

"We are pleased with the decision of the NCIP-Mimaropa Office. The CDO is a victory for the IPs of Palawan and the individuals and groups bravely resisting the illegal operations of the mining companies. The order further strengthens our resolve to continue our fight against mining and to stand firm in our convictions," said Victor Colili, a Councilor of Brooke's Point, Palawan, and among the leaders opposing mining operations.



## An inside look at the beauty and benefits of mangroves

(First of two parts)

MANGROVES are often misunderstood and undervalued ecosystems. These coastal forests are sometimes perceived as “dirty” or “dead areas,” a wasteland that could be cleared in favor of sandy beaches, swanky resorts or other developments.

These myths about mangroves could not be farther from the truth. They are the only trees that thrive in salty waters and improve water quality by filtering out nutrients and sediments.

They are also teeming with life; more than 1,500 plant and animal species depend on mangroves. This includes fish and birds who use the shallow waters beneath mangrove trees as nurseries. Research now indicates that mangroves are also critical for larger mammals, such as monkeys, sloths, tigers, hyenas and African wild dogs.

Protecting mangroves and restoring damaged ones also helps combat climate change through carbon sequestration as they are some of the most carbon-rich ecosystems on the planet, storing on average 1,000 tons of carbon per hectare in their biomass and underlying soils.

But mangroves are threatened. Worldwide, a fifth of them have already disappeared. The main driver of mangrove loss is coastal development, when mangrove forests are cleared to make way for buildings and fish or shrimp farms.

“Mangroves are a remarkably diverse and important ecosystem that works in tandem with other marine ecosystems including seagrass beds and coral reefs all of which are essential not only for the health

of our ocean, coasts and the biodiversity that they support, but for the wellbeing of humans,” said Leticia Carvalho, head of Marine and Freshwater at the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). “We also need to protect and restore our mangroves as they are an important habitat and source of food supplies for many indigenous peoples and local communities around the globe,” she added.

To meet the global climate targets, the world urgently needs to reduce emissions and remove carbon from the atmosphere. Mangroves are critical in this second task. They extract up to five times more carbon than forests on land, incorporating it in their leaves, branches, roots and the sediments beneath them. The salty and oxygen-poor conditions beneath mangrove forests mean that decomposition of organic material happens very slowly. In the right environmental conditions, mangroves can store the carbon they took from the atmosphere for decades, centuries, or even millennia.

### Extreme weather and disasters

Not only do mangroves help prevent the progression of climate change, they also play an important role in limiting its impact.

As global temperatures rise, extreme weather events like storms and flood surges are becoming more frequent and severe. The trunks of mangroves absorb the impact of waves, making them an excellent front line of defense that helps to protect higher ground. Restoring and protecting mangroves and valuing their role as a nature based-solution improves resilience of coastal communities and national economies. **UNEP News (To be continue)**



To celebrate World Mangrove Day on June 26, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources—Calabarzon Conservation and Development Division recently organized a mangrove tree planting activity at Barangay Talisay, Calatagan, Batangas.