

27 August 2023 Sunday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

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## Manila Bay cleanup

In 1999, concerned citizens of Manila filed a complaint before the Regional Trial Court of Imus, Cavite against several government agencies for the cleanup, rehabilitation and protection of Manila Bay.

They alleged that the water quality of Manila Bay had fallen way below the allowable standards set by law.

They claim that the continued neglect of different government agencies such as the MMDA, DENR, DECS, DOH, DA, DPWH, DBM, Coast Guard, PNP Maritime Group and DILG in abating the pollution of Manila Bay constitutes a violation of several laws and even the Constitution.

### HIDDEN AGENDA



MARY ANN  
LL. REYES

In 2002, the RTC ordered the said government agencies to clean up and rehabilitate Manila Bay and restore its waters to make it fit for swimming, skin-diving, and other forms of contact recreation.

On appeal, the Court of Appeals affirmed the ruling of the trial court, saying that the lower court did not require these government agencies to do tasks outside of their usual basic functions under existing laws.

These agencies brought the matter before the Supreme Court saying among others that the cleaning or rehabilitation

of Manila Bay is not a ministerial act that can be compelled by mandamus.

On Dec. 18, 2008, the Supreme Court issued a writ of continuing mandamus as it affirmed the CA and the lower court and ordered 13 government agencies to clean up, rehabilitate, and preserve Manila Bay and restore and maintain its waters to SB level to make them fit for swimming, skin-diving, and other forms of contact recreation.

These 13 agencies include the DENR as the lead agency, DILG, DepEd, DOH, DA, DPWH, DBM, Coast Guard, PNP Maritime Group, PPA, MMDA, MWSS and LWUA.

Many years later, on Jan. 27, 2019, then DENR secretary Roy Cimatu officially declared the start of the Manila Bay rehabilitation. Phase One of the rehabilitation covers the cleaning up of designated esteros and waterways, start of the relocation of informal settlers, among others. Phase Two entails the rehabilitation of old sewer lines in the National Capital Region, relocation of informal settlers while Phase Three includes sustained law enforcement and monitoring,

earlier completion of the sewerage system in Metro Manila.

There was nothing in the Supreme Court mandamus, or in any of the subsequent government issuances, that prohibited reclamation activities in Manila Bay.

A number of reclamation projects had since then been approved by the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) after having obtained the required permits, including clearances from the DENR. Some of these projects have started while some have yet to commence.

Then came a statement from the US Embassy in Manila expressing grave apprehension about the effects of ongoing reclamation projects in Manila Bay, including issues involving the environment such as flooding.

Their press attache also expressed concern about reclamation projects that have links to China Communications Construction Co. which has been added to the US Department of Commerce's entity list for its role in helping the Chinese military construct and militarize artificial islands in the South China Sea. The same Chinese company, he said, has also been cited by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for engaging in fraudulent business practices.

It has been reported that it is the Gatchalian family's Manila Waterfront Reclamation Project which has tapped this allegedly blacklisted Chinese company as project contractor.

Then came a statement from the DENR saying that all reclamation projects in Manila Bay are suspended, with about 22 projects being evaluated pending a cumulative impact assessment.

According to DENR Secretary Toni Yulo-Loyzaga, they were acting on the verbal declaration of President Marcos who said that the shore along Roxas Boulevard could disappear due to the projects that were approved during the Duterte administration.

There are still conflicting figures on the total number of reclamation projects, with the PRA saying there are only 13 in Manila Bay and the DENR saying there are 22 projects, 15 of which are in the National Capital Region and seven in CALABARZON.

Yulo-Loyzaga has said that all these developments may hamper DENR's task in complying with the Supreme Court writ of continuing mandamus for the DENR to help rehabilitate Manila Bay.

Those who are pushing for the lifting of the suspension on rehabilitation activities are now saying that the DENR issued the environment compliance certificates (ECC) and area clearances for all these Manila Bay reclamation projects precisely because these projects are not inconsistent with the Supreme Court continuing mandamus for the rehabilitation of Manila Bay.

They said that no less than Cimatu signed the area clear-



ances for these projects.

The ECCs issued meanwhile provide for effective mitigation measures to prevent or minimize any temporary deterioration of water quality during the implementation of the reclamation projects.

Meanwhile, proponents of these reclamation projects are also saying that the suspension has no legal basis.

While the Supreme Court ordered the DENR as lead agency to fully implement the Operational Plan for the Manila Bay Coastal Strategy (OPMBCS) for the rehabilitation, restoration, and conservation of Manila Bay, this OPMBCS recommended only the regulation, not a ban, on reclamation in Manila Bay, particularly on reclamation in mangrove areas and mudflats which are marine sanctuaries. But none of these projects can be covered by any moratorium because they are not located in any mangrove, mudflat or marine habitat or fish sanctuary, they said.

They also pointed out that these reclamation projects are consistent with the SC's order for the agriculture department and Bureau of Fisheries to improve and restore marine life since most of the proponents in partnership with LGUs have committed to establish mangrove corridors in the reclaimed islands and fish sanctuaries in the water channels between the reclaimed islands.

They added that these reclamation projects may even hasten the cleanup of Manila Bay since they will have to dredge and remove tons of wastes and silt that have accumulated at the bottom of the sea in the project sites. And these massive cleanup projects will be undertaken at zero cost to the government, they said.

In addition, the reclamation projects will have sewerage treatment plants in every reclaimed island to ensure that waste water will be treated and will not adversely affect the water quality in Manila Bay, they noted.

These proponents have also insisted that these projects have the required notices to proceed and commence from the PRA, ECCs and area clearances from the DENR, letters of no objection from other government agencies.

Many of the project proponents, after having obtained the necessary clearances, have already spent huge funds and resources only to be asked to stop their reclamation activities due to a distorted view of the current DENR administration of the directive from the Supreme Court? Or was it because the US Embassy sounded the alarm?

The suspension also came even after the DENR itself guaranteed that these projects are safe for the environment when it issued the required ECCs.

*For comments, e-mail at [mareyes@philstarmedia.com](mailto:mareyes@philstarmedia.com)*



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# San Miguel, the P-1.5-T conglomerate, moves to solve Bulacan, Pampanga flooding

By Daxim L. Lucas @daxiNQ

The 10th of August, a Thursday, was a busy workday for billionaire Ramon Ang. Hours before other employees began arriving for work, the president and CEO of San Miguel Corp. (SMC) had begun to receive guests at the Mandaluyong City headquarters of the conglomerate that produces everything from beer, household food items, refines and retails petroleum, generates electricity and runs the most extensive network of toll highways in the country.

At 7 a.m., the helicopter of a provincial governor landed on the company's rooftop helipad, while vehicles of other town mayors and national and local government officials arrived soon after. They were followed by media vehicles carrying reporters with their television camera crew in tow.

The agenda was the severe flooding experienced by residents in the provinces of Pampanga and Bulacan three weeks prior. One specific concern was the inundation of a short segment of the North Luzon Expressway, owned by rival firm Metro Pacific Tollways Corp., which had inconvenienced thou-

Even if it's not our direct responsibility, we will do it. We will spend for it. It's for our country.

Ramon Ang SMC president



SOLVING A CRISIS Ang explains the cause of flooding as well as his plan to dredge rivers and clear waterways. —CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

sands of motorists traveling north of Manila.

And in recent days, San Miguel—whose big-ticket infrastructure projects have become a favorite target of environmentalists, some well-intentioned and some encouraged by corporate rivals—was being blamed for the flooding by local officials who were pointing at the firm's massive airport project along Bulacan's Manila Bay shoreline.

"They say this is being caused by our reclamation project. That's not true. They keep

talking without understanding the real problem first," Ang tells his assembled guests as they pore over large maps spread out over a long conference table. Of particular interest to them is a 1990s map of the province made by the National Mapping and Resource Information Agency (NAMRIA) that shows the airport project site as a solid land mass, surrounded by water channels on either side. Another map from the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources shows the same details.

"First of all, we're not reclaim-

ing any new land. These are tidelands we're building on," he adds, explaining that previous owners of the 2,500 hectares where the New Manila International Airport is being built allowed the area to be inundated so that they could be used as commercial fishponds. "We're just restoring them to their previous status."

### The real problem

Pointing at the NAMRIA map, Ang explains that there is no way the land redevelopment work for the airport is blocking the outflow of rain water from Pampanga and Bulacan into Manila Bay.

He notes that the airport project site being worked on by Dutch firm Boskalis (the biggest and best dredging firm in the world, he points out) is now like an island where excess water can flow around unrestricted.

"The real problem is the siltation of the rivers in Pampanga and Bulacan, which has reduced their carrying capacity [for water]," he says. "Because silt deposits have made these waterways so shallow in recent years, it only takes a little rain for these rivers to overflow and

flood the surrounding areas."

And in typical Ramon Ang fashion, the tycoon surprises his assembled guests by announcing that San Miguel will take it upon itself to dredge the rivers and clear the waterways of both provinces, even some that extend hundreds of kilometers away from the airport development—and even if, strictly speaking, doing so is the responsibility of the government.

### 'Small price to pay'

It is an expensive undertaking, but Ang says it is a good use of the conglomerate's resources, pointing to the fact that the recent rains brought little or no flooding to Metro Manila areas that would normally be inundated after even moderate rainfall.

San Miguel has spent P3 billion over the last three years dredging and cleaning up the Pasig, Tullahan and San Juan Rivers, removing almost two million tons of solid waste and silt in the process. Ang says this effort will now be duplicated in Pampanga and Bulacan to ensure that the flooding experienced last month will not be repeated.

Costly as this new undertaking will be, a cursory look at San Miguel's financial statements and performance in recent years shows that it has resources to spare.

## SAN MIGUEL, THE P-1.5-T CONGLOMERATE, MOVES TO SOLVE BULACAN, PAMPANGA FLOODING

**FROM B1** In terms of revenues, San Miguel is the country's largest conglomerate with the total sales of all its operating units hitting P1.5 trillion last year, after "slumping" to P725 billion when the pandemic hit in 2020. For 2024, it is again expected to hit P1.5 trillion in revenues, at least.

At the nominal value of the country's latest gross domestic product, the conglomerate is responsible for almost 7 percent of Philippine economic output in any given year. It is also the country's largest taxpayer.

And at a projected cost

of P740 billion, San Miguel's four-runway airport project in Bulacan is also the single biggest infrastructure investment made in the country's history whether by the government or the private sector.

Apart from the airport project, the conglomerate is also constructing a commuter rail system—the Mass Rail Transit, Line 7—that will connect Quezon City to Bulacan and give people a faster, more convenient commute starting next year.

San Miguel will also build an elevated toll highway along the Manila Bay shoreline that will

extend from Roxas Boulevard in the capital all the way to its Bulacan airport just a few kilometers north so that travelers can cover the distance that would normally take hours in just a few minutes.

So, apart from making good business sense, another P3 billion to mitigate flooding is a small price to pay if it means better lives for people in the surrounding communities, Ang says, as his guests exchange nodding glances.

"Even if it's not our direct responsibility, we will do it. We will spend for it," Ang says. "It's for our country." INQ



## LIMA Water secures DENR OK for laboratory services

LIMA Water Corp., the water business of Aboitiz InfraCapital Inc., secured the greenlight to continue and expand the operations of its environmental testing laboratory for the government.

In a statement, LIMA Water said it has renewed its recognition as an environmental testing laboratory of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

This allows its laboratory to conduct testing and analysis of water and wastewater to ensure the quality adheres to national standards.

Moreover, the company has also obtained the DENR's approval to expand its scope of services, now including additional recognized effluent parameters such as ammonia, nitrate, and color as part of its commitment to upholding the highest standards in effluent testing and analysis.

Effluent refers to treated wastewater discharged into a natural body of water.

To protect the environment and public health from the adverse ef-

fects of pollution, the government has established effluent standards and regulations to limit the amount of pollutants and contaminants permissible for discharge into the environment.

"Having received the DENR's recognition and approval to broaden our scope of services, we are now equipped to extend our laboratory services to other companies, assisting them in ensuring that their effluent adheres to government standards and promotes environmental preservation. With our expanded capabilities, we aim to contribute even more significantly to environmental conservation, water resource management, and sustainable practices," LIMA Water general manager Hazele Manalo said.

The company said the renewal of DENR's recognition affirms its unwavering dedication to maintaining a robust quality system, technical expertise, advanced equipment and instrumentation, as well as ensuring the consistent delivery of precise and

accurate test effluent data.

"With the recent renewal of LIMA Water's DENR recognition and the expansion of our laboratory services, we are steadfastly advancing the cause of environmental protection. These milestones hold exceptional significance as we serve a diverse range of companies within the LIMA Estate. Ensuring that the wastewater effluent quality meets the regulatory standards is an important measure to avert water contamination," Aboitiz InfraCapital Head of Water Business Anna Lu said.

LIMA Water is the sole water and wastewater services provider for LIMA Estate, a premiere smart and sustainable industrial development in CALABARZON, hosting more than 150 locators with over 65,000 employees.

Operating two wastewater treatment facilities with a combined treatment capacity of 26 million liters of wastewater daily, LIMA Water was able to treat more than two billion liters of wastewater in 2022.

- Danessa Rivera



# PRA seeks clarity on proposed tax on single-use plastic products

By LOUELLA DESIDERIO

The Philippine Retailers Association (PRA) wants clarity on how the proposed single-use plastic tax will be implemented with the measure expected to affect the retail industry, which uses plastics for its packaging.

PRA president Roberto Claudio told reporters that while the group supports the move to reduce plastic use, there is a need to clarify the implementation of the proposed tax on single-use plastic.

He said there is a need to define what single-use plastic means.

"Unless defined properly how we will do this and how we will define the single-use plastic, there will still be confusion on the implementation," he said.

If a plastic bag used for an item purchased in the market was washed and reused, he said this

should not be imposed with the proposed tax.

He also said there is a need to clarify how and who should shoulder it.

"One solution we have is to encourage the use of reusable bags," Claudio said.

If the consumer opts for a single-use plastic for their purchase from the retailer, he said the customer would then be charged for that to be able to pay the tax on the single-use plastic.

In his State of the Nation Address in July, President Marcos cited the imposition of excise tax on single-use plastic as one of the measures he wants to be passed by Congress.

In November last year, the House of Representatives approved on third and final reading House Bill 4102 or the Single-use Plastic Bags Tax Act, which seeks

to impose an excise tax of P100 for every kilogram of single-use plastics removed from the place of production or released from custody of the Bureau of Customs.

If passed into law, the bill is expected to address the country's plastic waste management problem, as well as generate revenues for the government.

According to the World Bank, Philippines, China, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam account for 55 to 60 percent of plastic waste that enter the oceans.

Every year, approximately 1.7 million tons of post-consumer plastic waste are generated in the Philippines, with an estimated recycling rate of only 28 percent for recyclable plastic waste. The balance either leaks into the environment or is disposed of as part of the mixed waste stream.



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# Creating space for plastic waste economy

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

**A** MAJOR contributor to ocean plastic pollution, the Philippines is struggling to combat the perennial garbage problem owing to the failure of various sectors to comply with Republic Act 9003, or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000.

The law promotes proper waste segregation to reduce, reuse and recycle for appropriate disposal in an engineered sanitary landfill.

Its poor enforcement by the National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC), compelled Congress to enact Republic Act 11898, or the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Act of 2022, which now passes the responsibility of recovering waste to a large-scale manufacturing company to curb ocean plastic pollution.

NSWMC is composed of various national government agencies, led by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and with compliance by concerned local government units (LGUs).

## Plastic waste producer

THE Philippines generates 61,000 metric tons of solid waste daily, 12 percent to 24 percent of which is plastic waste.

Worse, Filipinos use more than 163 million plastic sachet packets, 48 million shopping bags and 45 million thin-film bags daily.

Thirty-three percent of these is disposed of in landfills and dumpsites, and around 35 percent is leaked into the open environment and oceans.

According to a 2021 World Bank Market Study for the "Philippine Plastic Circularity Opportunities and Barriers: East Asia and Pacific Region Maritime Plastics Series,"



0.8 million tons of plastics are disposed of yearly, with about 28 percent of key plastic resins being recycled.

Still, a majority of the material value of plastics is lost to the Philippine economy each year, equivalent to a value loss of \$790 million to \$890 million.

## Threat to marine biodiversity

OCEAN plastic pollution is now considered a serious threat to marine biodiversity.

Marine turtles and other large marine mammals inadvertently ingest plastic, which they often mistake for food, resulting in the animals' untimely demise.

Plastic pollution also adversely affects corals, which are essential species-building ecosystems along with seagrass and mangroves.

Broken into microscopic pieces, plastics are also ingested by fish and other seafood, eventually posing a serious threat to the human health and well-being that eat them.

## Private sector help

AS the DENR aggressively promotes compliance with the EPR Act and moves to make waste recycling inclusive for the waste pickers, it is now getting the much-needed boost from the private sector,

specifically in waste recovery to prevent them from reaching the ocean and worsen ocean plastic pollution.

Plastic Bank empowers the social recycling movement to stop ocean plastic pollution and help alleviate poverty.

## Empowering communities

THE group has partnered with communities that act as collection agents to facilitate the exchange of plastic waste as currency for income and life-improving benefits, such as groceries, cooking fuel, school tuition, health insurance, digital connectivity and financial technology services.

The collected materials are processed into social plastic feed stock for reuse in products and packaging, helping create a new life for old plastics.

Plastic Bank currently operates in Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In the Philippines, it has gathered 19.7 million kilograms of plastic waste, or 989 million equivalent plastic bottles.

It has a total of 7,950 collection agents from the Philippines.

Globally, Plastic Bank has over 600 collection branches, and more than a third, or 216, are in the Philippines—scattered



DAVID KATZ visits one of Plastic Bank's successful collectors in Rodriguez, Rizal, on August 17. PLASTIC BANK PHOTO

all over Metro Manila, Cavite, Laguna, Pampanga, Zambales and Naga.

## Profound impact

AS a way of giving back to its partners from the communities in the country, David Katz, founder of Plastic Bank, went to pay Philippine collectors a visit from August 14 to 17.

Visited were individual collectors to whom Katz demonstrated selflessness, compassion and dedication to their families and their communities.

"Our collection members are making a profound impact on our planet and our communities with each day they spend on preventing plastic from entering the ocean," he said.

During his visit, Katz surprised select individuals by offering financial assistance to fulfill their aspirations.

## Creating space for plastics

INTERVIEWED via Zoom on August 17, Katz said Plastic Bank recognizes that 80 percent of plastics entering the oceans are coming

from areas of poverty.

In the Philippines, Plastic Bank's role is to create a space for every piece of plastic, every piece of material, and its value is revealed in a manner that people don't throw it away.

"We talked about cleaning the oceans. To keep the ocean clean, from needing to be cleaned to begin with," he said.

## A good law, a good start

ACCORDING to Katz, the EPR law is a very good start.

"It is a very strong headway as we find in many countries," he said.

While he said it is not a perfect law, he quickly said that the perfect is sometimes the enemy if you're good enough.

He said implementing the law, nevertheless, will help create the space for additional enforcement.

Katz said turning garbage into gold is all part of improving solid waste management.

"It's all part of it. The law, of course, is important. The ability to execute the law is critically important as well," he said.

## Facilitating commitments

LIKE other players, he said Plastic Bank will play a significant part so that organizations can facilitate their commitments to be able to substantiate the return of the volume of materials that they are putting into the environment, to create the space for recycled content to be used locally as well.

The EPR law, he said, also plays a significant role for the chief executive officer of a large corporation, whose duty is to shareholders first, substantiating that they must do nothing to compromise the return to the shareholders.

"The EPR law now gives us space for the CEO to commit to doing what is right in the world as well. So the compromise of shareholder return is justified. It gives the legal space for public corporations to do what is right," he said.

## Dollar earning opportunity

COLLECTING plastic waste, according to Katz, is a dollar-earning opportunity as well.

He cited that Plastic Bank has a variety of processing partners that prepare the materials they collect for export.

"We are providing a space for those processors to export the materials and receive dollars as well," he said.

## Giving the poor self-worth

MORE importantly, Katz said Plastic Bank provides an opportunity for the waste pickers to have a purpose—and be part of something big.

Having peace of mind as they earn or make money, keep earnings in a bank book, and wear a uniform while at work makes them feel proud.

"They can walk with heads high because they know they are part of something," he said, adding that having a feeling of self-worth is something Plastic Bank is also proud of.



# LGUs affected by oil spill to file class suit

BY IRE JOE V.C. LAURENTE

**CALAPAN CITY, Oriental Mindoro:** The office of Oriental Mindoro First District Rep. Arnan Panaligan is coordinating with the local government of Pola and other municipalities for the filing of a class suit against the owners of the oil tanker that sank off the waters of Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28, 2023 and caused a massive oil spill.

At a forum organized by Makabayan-Southern Tagalog Serve the People Corps on Saturday, August 26, Panaligan said that his office is in communication with Pola Mayor Jennifer Cruz for the filing of a class suit against the owners of MT Princess Empress.

"We are waiting for the sworn statements and other legal documents from the affected fisherfolks of Pola and from other towns before filing the case," Panaligan said.

"I have instructed my legal

team to coordinate with the local government units (LGUs) and people's organizations to facilitate the documents."

Gabriela party-list Rep. Arlene Brosas, who also attended the forum, said that the filing of the class suit is necessary before the affected residents can file a claim before the Oil Pollution Compensation Fund.

"It is up to the LGUs on when they are going to file the case, but they should be reminded that under the law, they only have three

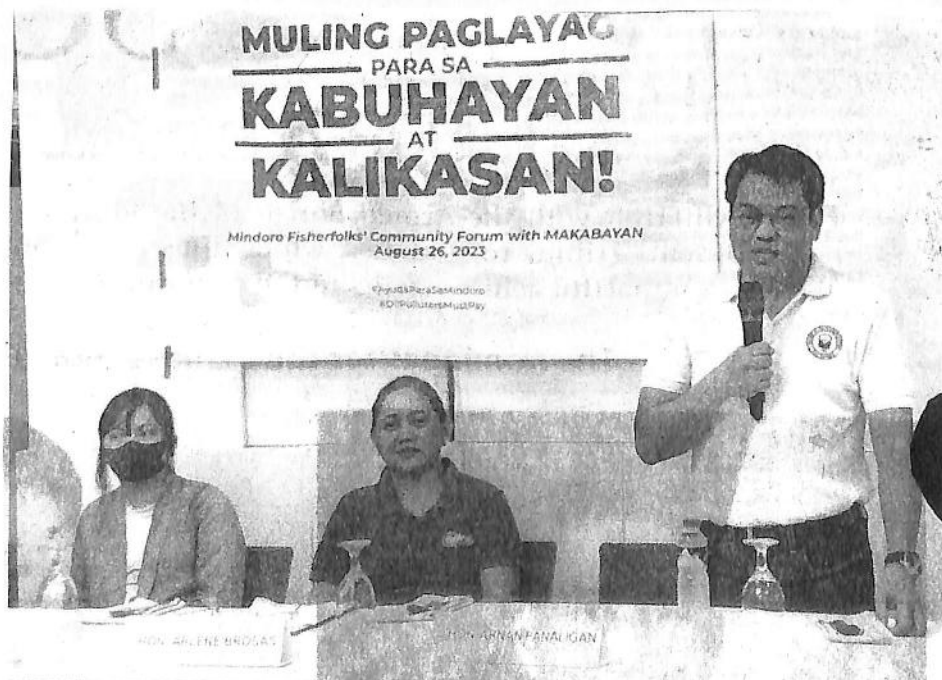
years in filing the compensation claim," Brosas said.

In a telephone interview, Cruz told *The Manila Times* that they already have the papers submitted before the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), and she is also coordinating with the Department of Justice (DoJ) for filing the necessary complaints against the owners of the oil tanker.

"It is already with the NBI and DoJ, and we were told that they are preparing the suit," Cruz said.

"We have included the names of the owners of the tanker and the charterer. We are just waiting on updates of the case."

Meanwhile, the fisherfolk who attended the forum enumerated their demands for compensation such as the retroactive P10,000 monthly aid for the fishers affected by the fishing ban, the provision of alternative livelihood that is based on the actual condition and needs of the affected communities, and the termination of projects that can destroy or harm the environment.



**SEEKING COMPENSATION** Oriental Mindoro First District Rep. Arnan Panaligan (right) talks to fisherfolk and residents affected by the oil spill caused by an oil tanker that sank off the waters of Oriental Mindoro on Feb. 28, 2023 during a forum at the Riceland 2 Hotel on Saturday, Aug. 26, 2023. PHOTO BY IRE JOE V.C. LAURENTE





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# Japan cites PH recognition of 'safe' water release

BY JAVIER JOE ISMAEL

**J**APANESE Ambassador to the Philippines Koshikawa Kazuhiko on Friday expressed gratitude to the Philippines for recognizing Japan's commitment to the safe discharge of ALPS (Advanced Liquid Processing System)-treated radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean that started on August 24.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has published a comprehensive report stating that Japan's plans to release treated radioactive water from the Fukushima Daiichi plant damaged by a 9.0 magnitude earthquake in 2011 "are consistent with relevant international safety standards."

"We are grateful for the majority of the international community, including the Philippines, that shows their understanding of the mentioned discharge, based on facts and science. This is a crucial

step for Japan toward recovery from the catastrophe," Ambassador Kazuhiko posted on X (formerly Twitter).

"Japan deeply appreciates the Philippine government's understanding of the release of treated water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant from a science-and-fact-based perspective and its impact on the ocean," Kazuhiko said in another post.

In a statement released to the media on Thursday, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said

Manila recognizes the technical expertise of the IAEA on the matter.

"The Philippines continues to look at this issue from a science-and fact-based perspective and its impact on the waters in the region. As a coastal and archipelagic State, the Philippines attaches utmost priority to the protection and preservation of the marine environment," DFA spokesman Ma. Teresita Daza said.

Meanwhile, China's customs department announced it would stop importing all aquatic products originating from Japan — meaning the ban could potentially limit other oceanic products besides seafood, such as sea salt and seaweed.

It said the move aims to protect the health of Chinese consumers from the risk of radioactive contamination caused by Japan's discharge of contaminated water from Fukushima.

Kazuhiko earlier said Tokyo would manage the annual dis-

charge volume of tritium so it would not exceed 22 trillion becquerels (Bq), which is equivalent to the target discharge management value for Fukushima Daiichi before the accident in 2011.

"It is worth noting that other countries also discharge tritium into the sea in compliance with their own domestic laws and regulations; for instance, according to China Nuclear Energy Association website, China, discharging 112 trillion Bq from Yangjiang Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in 2021. The amount of tritium in the ALPS-treated water is far smaller than the amount of tritium discharged from many nuclear power plants and other facilities in other countries," Kazuhiko said.

Japan will also take "all possible measures to ensure the safety of the discharge into the sea even after it begins and will not discharge anything that could adversely affect the health or environment," he added.



# 'Fukushima water samples within safe limits'

**T**OKYO. Seawater samples taken following the release of wastewater from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant showed radioactivity levels well within safe limits, operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco) said on Friday.

The discharge of some of the 1.34 million tons of water — collected on site in the 12 years since the facility was damaged by a tsunami generated by a 9.0-magnitude earthquake — on Thursday prompted China to ban all Japanese seafood imports.

Tepco took what it called rapid tests on Thursday afternoon after the water release into the Pacific Ocean began, and said on Friday the results showed that radioactivity levels were within safe limits.

"We confirmed that the analyzed value is equal to the calculated concentration and that the analyzed value is below 1,500 bq/L," Tepco spokesman Keisuke Matsuo told a news conference, using the abbreviation of becquerels per liter, which is a measure of radioactivity. The national safety standard is 60,000.

The results were "similar to our previous simulation and sufficiently below" the safety limit, Matsuo said.

"We will continue to conduct analysis every day over the next one month and even after that, maintain our analysis effort," he added. "By providing swift, easy-to-understand explanations, we hope to dispel various concerns."

Japan's Environment Ministry said it had collected seawater samples from 11 different locations on Friday, the results of which would be released on Sunday.

The country's fisheries agency also pulled a flounder and a Gurnard fish on Friday morning from designated sampling spots near the pipe that released the Fukushima water.

"By publishing those data every day in a highly transparent fashion, we will demonstrate our actions based on scientific evidence," said Trade Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura, who is in charge of nuclear policies.

Tepco says the water — more than 500 Olympic pools' worth



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**TESTING THE WATERS** An employee of Mothers' Radiation Lab Fukushima, a citizens' testing center, tests seawater samples taken near the disaster-damaged Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, in the city of Iwaki, northeastern Japan on Friday, Aug. 25, 2023. AP PHOTO

— from cooling the remains of three reactors has been filtered of all radioactive elements except for tritium, and is safe.

This is backed by the Inter-

national Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which said on Thursday that samples taken from the first batch of diluted water prepared for discharge showed that tritium

levels were well within safe limits.

"IAEA experts are there on the ground to serve as the eyes of the international community and ensure that the discharge is being carried out as

planned consistent with IAEA safety standards," IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi said in a statement.

Most analysts agree, although environmental pressure group Greenpeace has said the filtration process, known as ALPS, does not work and that a vast amount of radioactivity will be released into the ocean.

Japan's move infuriated China, which says the action contaminates the ocean, and widened a ban on aquatic produce in place for 10 Japanese prefectures to cover the whole country.

Nishimura on Friday echoed Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in urging China, Japan's biggest market for seafood, to reverse the ban.

"The Japanese government ... will strongly demand baseless regulations to be immediately terminated," the Trade minister said.

South Korea's government, which is trying to improve relations with Japan in order to counter China, has endorsed the water release, although some ordinary people are alarmed.

Matthew Miller, a United States State Department spokesman, said Washington "is satisfied with Japan's safe, transparent and science-based process." **AFP**



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## ACB, MPIC renew partnership for biodiversity conservation

**T**HE Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) and Metro Pacific Investments Corporation (MPIC) have recently renewed ties to boost biodiversity conservation efforts through various programs and activities.

The renewal of the partnership extends joint activities and collaboration in the next three years.

Under the partnership agreement, which was signed during the recently concluded Asean Biodiversity Heroes Forum in Manila last August 11, ACB and MPIC committed to working further to mainstream the values of biodiversity and implement joint programs and activities for ecosystem restoration.

"We are happy to work side-by-side with MPIC as one of our private sector partners in championing biodiversity

conservation in the country and in the whole of Asean. This partnership renewal is not just a recognition of the successes of our previous collaboration, but this speaks a lot about the effectiveness of our work in integrating biodiversity across various sectors," said Dr. Theresa Mundita Lim, ACB executive director.

During the initial partnership forged in 2021, ACB and MPIC jointly implemented regional conservation initiatives, such as the Asean Green Initiative, the seventh Asean Heritage Parks (AHP) Conference, business and biodiversity dialogues, and the Asean Biodiversity Heroes recognition program.

MPIC is also supporting Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, one of the 55 AHPs in the region, through its Shore It Up! Project.

AHPs are protected areas in the region that were recognized for their rich biological resources and effective management. The ACB serves as the secretariat of the AHP program.

These activities resulted in increasing biodiversity awareness and inspiring meaningful actions and synergies among youths, private, and public sectors; the protection of around 5,300 mangroves in the country, and the improvement of the flora and fauna among the Asean member states that eventually contributed to ecosystems restoration and coastal and marine conservation.

"Being a business involved in essential services, MPIC has embraced a holistic approach in doing sustainability. We underscore the importance of protecting nature and the environment and it is important for us

to partner with ACB since we have been doing many good initiatives together," said June Cheryl Cabal-Revilla, chief financial officer and chief sustainability officer of MPIC.

"Renewing our partnership is a testament to our commitment in supporting and in participating in many initiatives so we can collectively protect nature and have a good future for everyone," Cabal-Revilla added.

The signing of the partnership renewal instrument was led by Lim and Cabal-Revilla, in the presence of Senate President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda, who is one of the recognized Asean Biodiversity Heroes, the highest distinction given to Asean citizens with outstanding contributions to biodiversity conservation in the region.

*Jonathan L. Mayuga*



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INITIATIVES  
SERVICE

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# GSIS to build six million houses for gov't workers

By CHINO LEYCO

**T**he Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) said it will build six million affordable houses for government employees under the Pambansang Pabahay Para sa Filipino Program (4Ps).

"We are championing the right of every government employee to own a home," stated Wick Veloso, GSIS president and general manager, emphasizing that the 4Ps program aims to provide homes for 30 million Filipinos.

According to Veloso, the Marcos administration has intensified its efforts to address the country's housing needs, and as a result, the "GSIS will do its part to support this program."

"Our commitment is to create a significant impact and positive difference as we support the housing

program and, at the same time, help the overall economy as construction of homes has a big multiplier effect," Veloso assured.

GSIS has adopted a three-pronged approach to enhance the 4Ps and support the affordable housing initiative's flagship program. These three initiatives have been introduced to help more Filipinos attain their homes.

The first initiative, Lease with Option to Buy (LWOB), is an alternative way to purchase a home or property from GSIS without paying a down payment. This option is available for approximately 15,000 residential properties owned by GSIS nationwide.

The second initiative, Housing Accounts Restructuring and Condonation Program (HARCP), has been extended until 2025.

HARCP provides GSIS housing loan borrowers with a chance to

bring their accounts to their current status, encouraging full payment with the waiver of penalties and partial discount on interest. This effectively reduces the balance on housing accounts.

Lastly, the third initiative involves constructing new low-cost housing units for government workers.

The initial projects include high-rise housing complexes in Fairview, Quezon City, and Cogeo, Antipolo, which are expected to be completed by 2025.

More projects under this initiative are in collaboration with the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD).

Information about GSIS properties for sale and lease, as well as general guidelines, application forms, checklists of requirements, and frequently asked questions under LWOB, are available on the GSIS website.