

24 August 2023 Thursday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**



# Need to assess impact of Manila Bay reclamation projects underscored

By RAYMUND ANTONIO

**T**he National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) may need to evaluate the suspended reclamation projects in Manila Bay for possible impact on the economy and society, Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said on

Wednesday, Aug. 23.

In a Palace press briefing, the official disclosed that NEDA was "not party" to the approval of the projects despite big infrastructure projects being part of the agency's mandate.

"We are not party to the approval of these reclamation projects," Balisacan told reporters.

He added that even with the suspension meted by President Marcos on the reclamation projects, NEDA's views "have not been sought for advices or for our perspective."

"But we'll ultimately have to be involved, as you know, NEDA approves big infrastructure projects, particularly those that will have impact on the

Bay reclamation projects came on the heels of environmental concerns raised by various groups, as well as the massive flooding suffered by residents of nearby provinces.

President Marcos had earlier suspended all of the 22 reclamation projects in Manila Bay, which the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said were approved during the Duterte administration.

The DENR has assembled a team of scientists and experts for a cumulative assessment of the environmental impact of the Manila Bay reclamation activities in view of the recent flooding that happened in Bulacan and Pampanga.

economy and society and in the case of Metro Manila, the whole of Metro Manila," Balisacan explained.

"Given the significance and importance in our socio-economic landscape of Metro Manila, NEDA should be part of that exercise (inspection)," the NEDA chief stressed.

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## NEDA asserts role in reclamation projects, cites economic impacts

THE National Economic and Development Authority said it needs to be part of discussions on the suspended reclamation projects in Manila Bay, citing their impact on the economy.

In a Palace briefing, Socioeconomic Planning chief Arsenio Balisacan said NEDA was not consulted on the issue.

"We have not been sought for advice yet or for our perspective but we'll ultimately have to be involved.

As you know, NEDA approves big infrastructure projects particularly those that will have an impact on the economy and society and in the case of Metro Manila, the whole of Metro Manila," Balisacan said.

"We are not a party to the approval of these reclamation projects, but given the significance and importance in the socioeconomic landscape of Metro Manila, NEDA should be part

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### NEDA...

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of that exercise," he added.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resource earlier announced that all 22 reclamation projects in Manila Bay are under review and are deemed suspended -- even the one that President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. mentioned was allowed to continue.

"Actually, upon clarification with the President and you will see in the suspension, all are under review," DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. earlier said all reclamation projects in Manila Bay except one have been suspended due to problems in their implementation but did not say what the exception was.

"Until we can get a very good sense of what scientifically is going to happen in this area, and until we can get a

very good sense of how the rule of law can be followed in this area, we want to proceed with much caution," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

"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 in fact still not yet begun," Loyzaga added.



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## Waterworld Manila



Thomas M. Orbos

### STREET TALK

**A** RECENT study made by the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA) has indicated that the sea level around Metro Manila has increased three times the global average. This means that aside from the present effects on sea level rise due to climate change, there are other factors that affect our national capital region that we should closely examine. One factor that cannot be denied is the rapid urbanization and congestion in Metro Manila that has led to a "coupling effect" as they say, meaning that the present sea level rise has combined with the urban land subsidence in this particular area in our country. This should be a red flag for us living in this crowded metropolis and should have both the concerned LGUs and the national agencies act as aggressively as possible to confront this creeping disaster.

The alarming study was based on data collected from 1901 up to 2022 with the substantial increase traced to 1965 when rapid urbanization and migration to Metro Manila significantly began. Among the factors brought about by rapid urbanization that contributed to the so-called "coupling effect" are: groundwater extraction, water impoundment or channelizing, deforestation, pollution, and landscape changes. We in Metro Manila are familiar and, in a sense, guilty of all of these.

brought about by rapid urbanization that contributed to the so-called "coupling effect" are: groundwater extraction, water impoundment or channelizing, deforestation, pollution, and landscape changes. We in Metro Manila are familiar and, in a

The alarming study was based on data collected from 1901 up to 2022 with the substantial increase traced

to 1965 when rapid urbanization and migration to Metro Manila significantly began. Among the factors

sense, guilty of all of these.

To be fair, the government is doing what it can to address the floodings that yearly hound us. The MMDA and the DPWH is currently implementing the Metro Manila Flood Management Project funded by the World Bank and the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, with a 50-year component for a 50-year drainage plan. This would be a substantial part of our mitigation efforts. In terms of responsiveness, all Metro Manila LGUs are all equipped and ready every time floodings occur. Regular relocations of informal settlers along riverways and dredging activities, even with the help of the private sector, notably San Miguel Corporation, continue year-round.

But there is no one-off solution to this nor can this be done in one sitting. This will be a generational concern and will get worse before it can even begin to stabilize. Given the magnitude of the problem, several

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# BusinessMirror

*A broader look at today's business*



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solutions, aside from the ones being undertaken now, need to come into play. Incorporating the water impounding plan of the DENR is a very good consideration, as it also will aid in providing additional water supply to the metropolis while channeling floods to needed areas. We see this in many other countries in Europe and our developed neighbors in Asia such as Singapore, South Korea and Japan. More drastic measures, at this point, need a serious thought. A "Jokowi" solution might also be necessary. I am referring to the current Indonesian president, Jokowi Widodo, who has undertaken a massive program to move to a new capital, Nusantara from Jakarta, which has experienced an increase in sea levels similar to our own capital region. This new capital will be located in East Kalimantan in the island of Borneo, separate from the island of Java where Jakarta is located. We may not need such a drastic action. Metro Manila can still remain to be the capital region, but

it needs to expand especially further east towards the provinces of Rizal and beyond.

Those of us living in this metropolis have grown up since our childhood days with floods as part of what is the norm. It used to be that the floods we remember by with the rains brought about by the typhoons that brought it—Millennia, Ondoy and further back, Yuling in the '70s. It will most likely not to be the case anymore with floods happening most surely every time it rains, monsoon or not. The hapless reclamation in Manila Bay will most definitely lead to this, no matter what their advocates will say. The floods will happen more and more. Government action must step up and civilian preparedness as well as vigilance must now be more pro-active than ever to give our future Metro Manilans a fighting chance against the floods of our future Metro Manila. With the floods threatening us, the time to act was yesterday, with the deadline to move today.

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## 46% of PH may suffer from dry spell by end-2023 – PAGASA

By ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) projected that by December 2023, 46 percent of the country may suffer from a dry spell, while 43 percent may experience a dry condition.

In its climate outlook forum on Wednesday, Aug. 23, PAGASA said 39 provinces, mostly in Luzon, may suffer from dry spells by the end of December 2023, while 36 provinces, mostly in Visayas and Mindanao, may experience dry conditions.

However, by the end of February 2024, 48 percent of the country may experience drought (40 provinces, mostly in Luzon), while 40 percent may experience a dry spell (34 provinces, mostly in Visayas and Mindanao).

According to PAGASA, a dry spell is defined as three consecutive months of below-normal rainfall or two consecutive months of "way below-normal" rainfall, whereas a dry condition is defined as two consecutive months of "below-normal" rainfall.

Meanwhile, drought is defined as a prolonged dry condition characterized by five consecutive months of "below-normal" rainfall or three consecutive months of "way below-normal" rainfall.

PAGASA noted that there is a 50 to 70 percent chance of below-normal rainfall in most parts of the country from November to December.

Rainfall will be way below to below-normal in most parts of the country, with the exception of some provinces in Davao Region and Caraga, where it will be near normal.

By January to February 2024, there is a 40 to 60 percent chance of below-normal rainfall in most parts of the country.

PAGASA on Wednesday said the El Niño climate phenomenon has

strengthened from a "weak" to "moderate" event, which means a longer and more severe impact on the country in the coming months.

El Niño is a climate phenomenon characterized by the unusual warming of surface waters in the eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, resulting in below-average rainfall, causing dry spells and droughts in some areas of the country.



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# THE PHILIPPINE STAR

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## LPA off Cagayan may develop into cyclone

The trough of a low-pressure area (LPA) will continue to bring rain in Luzon as it moves closer to Philippine landmass, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration.

PAGASA said the LPA was monitored 445 kilometers east of Aparri, Cagayan as of yesterday.

State weather forecasters said the LPA may develop into a tropical cyclone in the next few days.

The weather system is strengthening the southwest monsoon and its trough is bring-

ing scattered rains over Cagayan Valley and the Cordillera Administrative Region.

Scattered rains are forecast over the Visayas, Mindanao, Bicol, Mimaropa, Zambales, Bataan and Quezon due to the southwest monsoon.

PAGASA said it is also monitoring a tropical depression outside the Philippine area of responsibility.

The cyclone was spotted 3,060 kms east of Northern Luzon and is moving southwest at 15 kms per

hour. It was carrying maximum sustained winds of 45 kph and gustiness of up to 55 kph.

- Romina Cabrera



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## NWRB chief's replacement won't affect El Niño preps — MWSS

By BELLA CARIASO

The government's preparations for El Niño will not be affected after National Water Resources Board (NWRB) executive director Sevilla David Jr. was replaced, Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System deputy administrator Jose Dorado Jr. said yesterday.

In an interview with **The STAR**, Dorado said that Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga signed Special Order 2023-500 designating Director III Ricky Arzagon as officer-in-charge executive director of NWRB on Aug. 11.

"It will not affect as the preparations for the El Niño were already set," Dorado.

Dorado said customers will continue to enjoy uninterrupted water supply despite the 48 cubic meters per second (CMS) water allocation given to Maynilad Water Services Inc. and Manila Water.

"Actually, we even decreased the water flow from Angat Dam as the water supply from Ipo is still high, at more than 100 meters. We requested (the NWRB) to bring down the water flow to avoid the spilling level of Ipo Dam. We are using the water from Ipo Dam to provide water to La Mesa Dam," Dorado told **The STAR**.

As of 6 a.m. yesterday, the water level of Ipo increased by 0.22 meters after it reached 100.28 meters compared to its previous level of 100.06 meters.

"Even if the water allocation (for Maynilad and Manila Water) is only 48 CMS, we have sufficient water," Dorado added.

The water level of Angat Dam slightly dropped by 0.04 meters after it reached 198.08 meters compared to its previous level of 198.12 meters.

It is still 18.08 meters higher than its minimum operating level of 180 meters.

Meanwhile, the Senate yesterday tackled proposed measures that mandated the creation of rainwater harvesting facilities in the country amid a looming water shortage crisis due to climate change and the El Niño phenomenon.

"The growing incidence of extreme and prolonged drought demands that we find innovative opportunities that will be our tool in this era where climate change lies at the very heart of what the future holds for all of us. And rainwater harvesting is one such innovative opportunity that we can utilize to our advantage," Senate public works committee chair Ramon Revilla Jr. said.

During the hearing, senators learned from representatives of the Department of Public Works and Highways of the existing Rainwater Collection System project, which targets public schools as rainwater harvesting locations.





# Envoy confirms release of Fukushima water

**J**APAN'S Ambassador to Manila Koshikawa Kazuhiko on Tuesday confirmed his country's decision to initiate the discharge of ALPS (Advanced Liquid Processing System)-treated radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean.

"If there are no interference due to weather or sea conditions, the day of the initiation of discharge into the sea is expected to be August 24," Koshikawa said in a statement.

On March 11, 2011, a 9.0 earthquake triggered a tsunami that smashed into the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant, destroying its cooling systems that resulted in the meltdown of three of its reactors.

Koshikawa said the Japanese government has already requested the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco) to prepare to discharge treated radioactive water into the sea, adding that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has published a comprehensive report stating that Japan's plans "are consistent with relevant international safety standards."

Citing the IAEA's report, the ambassador said treated water "will have

a negligible radiological impact on people and the environment."

"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," he said.

China has opposed the release of treated radioactive water into the sea for health reasons and environmental concerns.

"Having gone through unprecedented hardships since the Great East Japan Earthquake, the government of Japan has been and will continue to provide the necessary information in a transparent manner in close collaboration with the IAEA," Koshikawa said.

"And if some event occurs, such as radioactivity levels exceeding standards, appropriate measures, including not discharging or sus-

pending the discharge, will be taken," he added.

The release has been endorsed by the UN's nuclear watchdog — the International Atomic Energy Agency — which said it will have staff on-site on Thursday.

With around 1,000 steel containers holding the water at the site, Tepco says that it needs to clear space for the next stage of the lengthy, expensive and risky decommissioning of the plant.

That is the removal of molten nuclear fuel and radioactive rubble from the wrecked reactors, an operation so dangerous that Tepco will need to use robots and not humans.

The plant operator will carry out four releases of treated water from Thursday until March 2024, with 7,800 cubic meters of water released each time, its documents showed.

The first discharge will take about 17 days. About 5 trillion becquerels of tritium will be released this fiscal year, Tepco added.

China has accused Japan of treating the ocean like a "sewer," banning imports of food from 10 of Japan's 47 prefectures even before the water release and imposing strict radiation checks.

Beijing on Tuesday summoned Japan's ambassador "to make solemn representations," while Hong Kong and Macau, both Chinese territories, banned the import of "aquatic products" from the same 10 regions.

Analysts said that while China may have genuine safety concerns, its strong reaction is also, at least in part, motivated by its economic rivalry and frosty relations with Japan.

The South Korean government, which is seeking to improve ties with Japan, has not objected, although many ordinary people are worried and have staged protests.

Social media posts in China and South Korea have included false claims about the release including doctored images of deformed fish with claims they were linked to Fukushima.

Japan has sought to counter online misinformation as well as win over skeptics at home and abroad, with everything from study tours of Fukushima to livestreams of fish living in the wastewater.

This outreach, backed by the IAEA, has spread to Pacific islands, where Western nations conducted nuclear weapons tests in the 20th century.

**BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO, AFP**



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## Japan begins final preparations for Fukushima water release

TOKYO, Japan (AFP) - The final preparations to discharge waste water from the crippled Fukushima power plant in Japan began Wednesday, its operator said, a day before the scheduled release into the Pacific Ocean.

Tokyo had announced on Tuesday that the operation into the Pacific would begin on Thursday, prompting an angry response from China and partial import bans on Japanese seafood by Hong Kong and Macau.

The operator of the plant, TEPCO, said Tuesday that it diluted a cubic meter of the waste water with around 1,200 cubic meters of seawater and allowed it to flow into position in a pipe.

This water will be tested and then from Thursday released into the sea together with more water stored at the site that will be transferred and diluted, TEPCO said in a statement.

The Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear power station was knocked out by a massive earthquake and tsunami that killed around 18,000 people in March 2011, sending three of its reactors into meltdown.

TEPCO has since collected 1.34 million cubic meters of water -- almost 540 Olympic swimming pools' worth -- used to cool what remains of the still highly radioactive reactors, mixed with ground-water and rain.

A special system has filtered out all radioactive nuclides except for tritium, levels of which will be well within safe limits, according to TEPCO.

The release has been endorsed by the UN atomic watchdog, which said it will have staff on site on Thursday for the start of the release, which is due to take several decades to complete.

China had already accused Japan of treating the ocean like a "sewer," banning imports of food from 10 of Japan's 47 prefectures even before the release and imposing strict radiation checks.

China on Tuesday summoned Japan's ambassador "to make solemn representations," while Hong Kong and Macau, both Chinese territories, announced bans on imports of "aquatic products" from the same 10 regions.

Analysts said that while China may have genuine safety concerns, its strong reaction is also at least in part motivated by its economic rivalry and frosty relations with Japan.



# El Niño strengthens from 'weak' to 'moderate', says PAGASA

By ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ

The El Niño conditions in the tropical Pacific Ocean have strengthened from "weak" to "moderate," the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said in a climate outlook forum on Wednesday, Aug. 23.

PAGASA said a "moderate" El Niño event is currently occurring in the tropical Pacific and is predicted to further intensify in the next few months, possibly into a "strong" episode.

Its increasing intensity is a reflection of its growing impact on the climate pattern and its resulting effects.

El Niño is a climate phenomenon characterized by the unusual warming of surface waters in the eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, resulting in below-average rainfall, causing dry spells, and droughts in some areas of the country.

Although El Niño brings below-average rainfall, PAGASA said "above-normal" rainfall conditions may still occur in the western part of the country during the southwest monsoon or "habagat" season, which runs from May to September.

PAGASA said the widespread impact of El Niño will probably be felt as early as October 2023, when the southwest monsoon season begins to weaken.

El Niño's effects may persist until February-March-April 2024, with a "strong" event possible during its peak between November 2023 and January 2024, it added.

According to PAGASA-Climate and Agrometeorology Division Assistant Weather Services Chief Ana Liza Solis, a weak El Niño is like having a low-grade fever or "sinat," a moderate El Niño is like having a moderate fever, and a strong El Niño is like having "convulsions."

"Kapag may strong El Niño, mas nagprolong ang effect ni-to. Posible makaapekto pa sa next dry season months ng 2024. (When

an El Niño is strong, its impact will last longer, possibly affecting the next few months of the dry season in 2024," she said.

PAGASA said there is a 40 to 50 percent probability of "below-normal" rainfall throughout the country by October.

Luzon may experience "below to near-normal," while Visayas and Mindanao may have "near-normal" rainfall.

According to PAGASA, there is a 50 to 70 percent chance of below-normal rainfall in most parts of the country from November to December.

Rainfall will be "way below to below-normal" in most parts of the country, with the exception of some provinces in Davao Region and Caraga, where it will be near normal.

By January to February 2024, there is a 40 to 60 percent chance of below-normal rainfall in most parts of the country.

The effect of lack of rainwater due to El Niño can be seen towards the end of the year.

PAGASA projected that by the end of December 2023, 46 percent of the country may experience dry spell (39 provinces, mostly in Luzon), while 43 percent may have dry conditions (36 provinces, mostly in Visayas and Mindanao).

By the end of February 2024, 48 percent of the country may experience drought (40 provinces, mostly in Luzon), while 40 percent may have a dry spell (34 provinces, mostly in Visayas and Mindanao).

Dry spell is defined as three successive months of below-normal rainfall or two consecutive months of "way below-normal" rainfall, while a dry condition is defined as two consecutive months of "below-normal" rainfall.

Meanwhile, drought is defined as a prolonged dry condition characterized by five consecutive months of "below-normal" rainfall or three consecutive months of "way below-normal" rainfall.



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## Envi groups urge schools to ensure toxic-free environment for learners

**E**NVIRONMENTAL groups urged schools to ensure a toxic-free environment as hundreds of thousands of students troop to schools for the opening of classes on Tuesday, August 29.

The call was made as toxic watchdog group BAN Toxics, in coordination with Toro Hills Elementary School and Nick Joaquin Senior High School in Quezon City, conducted an on-site inspection of school facilities and pushed for school compliance on existing regulations on sound chemicals and waste management.

"We laud the teachers and school personnel for continuously preparing and cleaning the schools despite the limited time before the school opening," Thony Dizon, toxics campaigner of BAN Toxics said in a statement. "Ensuring a safe and healthy environment for the students and teachers should be promoted and prioritized."

Toxic watchdog group BAN Toxics partnered with QES Technology Philippines, Inc.—a service provider for SCIAPS X-200 HH XRF Analyzer, to screen for heavy metals in random locations like kindergarten rooms, Grade 1-3 rooms, walkway railings, painted walls and doors, and teacher's tables and students' chairs. The group also checked some used crayons and other art materials.

"The XRF results went well as the painted coatings screening turned out to be low and within the 90

ppm [parts per million] threshold limit under the DENR Chemical Control Order for Lead and Lead Compounds," Dizon added.

"It is good to know that the schools we screened follow the existing regulations on the use of lead-safe paints as mandated by the Department of Education."

DepEd Order No. 4 s. 2017 mandates the use of only lead-safe coatings or paints in all pre-school, elementary, and secondary schools. Use of lead-safe paints reduce children's exposure to toxic lead via lead-containing paint and dust, thus, avoiding health impacts including learning disabilities, anemia, and disorders in coordination, visual, spatial, and language skills.

"Assessing schools and evaluating their compliance is one of the steps under the Toxic-free and Waste-free School Program [TFSP] of BAN Toxics. We encourage other schools to follow by mainstreaming the program into their systems," said Dizon.

Meanwhile, EcoWaste Coalition raised a red flag over the sale of watercolor sets with black plastic casings containing known components of health-damaging brominated flame retardant (BFR) chemicals.

Of the 20 watercolor sets with black plastic components analyzed, 10 were found to contain bromine ranging from 1,724 to 6,527 ppm and antimony ranging from 251 to 1,125 ppm. The

rest of the samples had traces of bromine and/or antimony.

The samples were purchased from August 16 to 21 for P24 to P60 per set from retail stores selling school supplies in Makati, Manila, Marikina, Pasay, Pasig, and Quezon Cities, and subsequently screened for bromine (a key component of BFRs) and antimony (a component of antimony trioxide, a common BFR synergist) using an X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) analyzer.

The detection of chemical elements bromine (atomic number 35 and chemical symbol Br) and antimony (atomic number 51 and chemical symbol Sb) on the black plastic of the analyzed art materials indicates the likely use of recycled plastic from electronic waste (e-waste) containing BFRs. The plastic casings of TVs, computers, and other electronic gadgets are usually black, producing black plastic when recycled.

"The use of recycled e-waste plastic in school supplies, toys, and other consumer products provides a direct route of exposure to BFRs, especially among children. Stringent control measures are required to halt the unregulated use of recycled plastic e-waste in the manufacture of consumer articles which spread BFRs into new products and into children's hands, mouths, and bodies," said Aileen Lucero, national coordinator, EcoWaste Coalition.

Jonathan L. Mayuga