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NEWS

Plastic Bank: Picking up the pieces for trash collectors

By Jane Bautista
@janebautistaINQ

Unable to finish school and forced to work at an early age, Reynaldo Balingit has been collecting trash for a living. Now at 40, he supports his wife and his five children who are all married.

Balingit had collected a total of 1,279 kilograms of plastic waste since March, when he became a registered member of Plastic Bank—a Canada-based social enterprise aimed at redefining garbage collection as a dignified source of income.

His monthly average collection of 255.8 kg of plastic waste was converted into cash and on Aug. 15, he was not only paid the cash equivalent of that trash volume, but was also given an additional "incentive" pay and a fishball cart which Plastic Bank said was his alternative source of income and "a path out of poverty."

Balingit cried with relief as Plastic Bank founder and chair David Katz, accompanied by his chief relations officer, Taylor Leigh Cannizzaro, handed over the cart to Balingit during his visit to the Philippines in August.

"I'm really thankful. My wife takes medication and I have an in-law going through dialysis. We really need this," Balingit said.

'Banking for the poor'

Interviewed by reporters on Aug. 16 after he inspected Plastic Bank's projects in the Manila district of Tondo, Payatas in Quezon City, and Rodriguez town in Rizal province, Katz said his enterprise does "banking for the poor," using an app through which plastics

When we keep calling it waste, no one wants to go get it. When I say it's a resource, 'Oh, resources, I can go get'

David Katz
Plastic Bank founder

and other scrap materials serve as the currency for registered waste collectors and junk shops.

"Junk shops pay very little. So here we are. We give the pay and then we can give a bonus on top," Katz said, referring to the incentive pay.

Plastic Bank said its registered garbage collectors can earn around ₱10,000 a month. Plastic Bank's Philippine operation, which is based in Luzon for now, has already registered around 8,000 collectors and more than 200 junk shops.

To become a member, one only needs to download the Plastic Bank app. Collectors who cannot yet be registered because they don't have mobile phones could bring their scraps to registered junk shops, which can record the transaction.

Camille Nunez, marketing manager of Plastic Bank Philippines, said the benefit of a garbage collector joining Plastic Bank is that "they earn incentives



'REALLY THANKFUL' Reynaldo Balingit (left) is shown at the pedal of the fishball cart donated by David Katz (middle) and his chief relations officer Taylor Leigh Cannizzaro. —PHOTO COURTESY OF PLASTIC BANK

on top of the market price that they receive from the junk shop."

"Usually [the incentive pay] averages at around ₱8 to ₱15 [per kilo]," she said. "And if you're a member of Plastic Bank, it could be times two."

Given the health risks involved in garbage collection, collectors are also provided with health benefits, particularly accident insurance in case of emergencies, Nunez said.

'Social impact'

Another benefit of becoming a Plastic Bank member, Katz said, is that garbage collectors and junk shops become more adept and knowledgeable in electronic banking.

"It's part of our social impact program to provide them these kinds of training, not just about the environment, not just about teaching them about high recyclability of materials, but also to empower them to become savings owners," he said.

Plastic Bank conducts an ecosystem mapping in different areas to evaluate junk shops that wish to be registered, assessing their technological capacity as they use the app.

Plastic and other waste materials collected by the junk shops will then be classified, then transported to "affiliated Plastic Bank processors," Katz said.

"These affiliated processors will again clean these materials and [convert them into] a new kind of plastic material," he said, explaining how the waste is repurposed as yarns and other packaging materials.

Producers' responsibility

Plastic Bank said its programs complement the goal of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to improve income sources among trash collectors and thus provide better lives.

Environment Secretary Ma-

ria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga had earlier advocated promoting their welfare, describing them as the "backbone" of garbage collection services in the country.

She also called for the implementation of such laws as Republic Act No. 11898, which aims to ensure "producers' responsibility" in the management of plastic waste.

Katz said his enterprise could help the government meet the objectives of the law, also known as the Extended Producers Responsibility (EPR) Act of 2022, which requires companies with total assets of more than ₱1 billion to establish a recycling system on their plastic waste.

He said Plastic Bank's database could monitor compliance among big businesses, and this could "prove exactly how much material they collected."

"What we built is a technology for EPR schemes. So it allows the [business] putting out 10 million kg of plastic to participate in collecting that material back," he said.

'Material resource'

Katz emphasized that plastic waste should be regarded as a "material resource" among industries.

"Because when we keep calling it waste, no one wants to go get it. When I say it's a resource, 'Oh, resources, I can go get,'" he said.

Katz said Plastic Bank also wants to remove the stigma on people who are involved in recycling.

"It has been so stigmatized that if someone looks at you recycling, it's like, 'Oh, you must be poor,'" he said. **INQ**



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Pope to release 2nd 'Laudato Si' on Oct. 4

VATICAN—Pope Francis said on Wednesday he will release a follow-up environmental document to the 2015 encyclical "Laudato Si'" (Praised Be) on October 4, the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Speaking at the end of his general audience August 30, the pope said he plans "to publish an exhortation, a second Laudato Si,'" at the end of a Vatican-supported ecumenical initiative that will run from September 1 to October 4.

The Season of Creation will begin, Pope Francis said, on September 1, which is the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. This year's theme is "Let Justice and Peace Flow."

"Let us join our Christian brothers and sisters in the commitment to care for creation as a sacred gift from the Creator," Francis urged at his public audience.

"It is necessary to stand with the victims of environmental and climate injustice, striving to end the senseless war on our common home, which is a terrible world war," he added. "I urge all of you to work and pray for it to abound with life once again."

Pope Francis announced last week that he is writing a second part to his 2015 environmental encyclical Laudato Si'.

The pope said with this new writing he is updating Laudato Si' to cover "current issues."

The Holy See Press Office director, Matteo Bruni, confirmed to Catholic News Agency (CNA) on



LAUDATO SI' Movement Philippines welcomes Pope Francis's second document on the protection of the environment. (From left) Robert Samson of the CBCP-ECEA, Rev. Irma Balaba of the NCCP, Atty. Maya Quirino of the Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center and Bro. John Din of LSMP at a news briefing on August 29 for this year's Season of Creation. CNA/WES

August 21 that "the pope is working on a letter updating Laudato Si' with regard to the recent environmental crises."

Laudato Si' is the second of three encyclicals published in Pope Francis's pontificate thus far. It was released in June 2015.

The theme of the encyclical, which means "Praise be to you," is human ecology, a phrase first

used by Pope Benedict XVI.

The document addresses issues such as climate change, care for the environment, and the defense of human life and dignity.

Pope Francis said on August 30 that the second part to Laudato Si' would be the kind of papal document known as an "exhortation."

Francis has so far published

five apostolic exhortations during his pontificate, including Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel) and Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love).

The feast of St. Francis of Assisi was also the date in 2020 that Pope Francis chose to release his most recent encyclical, Fratelli Tutti, about fraternity and social friendship.

Catholic movement awaits 2nd papal document

A CATHOLIC movement in the Philippines has welcomed Pope Francis' upcoming document aimed at protecting the environment.

The Laudato Si' Movement Philippines said what is needed are "concrete actions" to address most pressing environmental issues, which they hope will be tackled in the second part of the Laudato Si' encyclical.

"Laudato Si' is very general in its orientation... so people are asking for concrete actions; and I presume that's what will come out in the second part," said Bro. John Din, Laudato

Si Movement Philippines (LSMP) national coordinator.

In Manila, this year's commemoration of the Season of Creation was launched on August 29 by three networks: the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines' Episcopal Commission on Ecumenical Affairs (CBCP-ECEA), the Philippine Council for Evangelical Churches and the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP).

At a news briefing, activities for the month-long observance were announced, including the Weekly Walk for (and with) Creation.

Other initiatives, organizers said, aim to highlight environmental concerns, sites of struggle, and sites of care, such as oil spills, Manila Bay reclamation, seabed quarrying, and the proposed Kaliwa Dam.

"Today, all together, we are collaborating as one family as inhabitants of creation-of the whole world-to work together to save our planet," said Robert Samson of CBCP-ECEA. Hannah Bruchhaus/CHA and Joseph Ryan Moscoso/CBCP News



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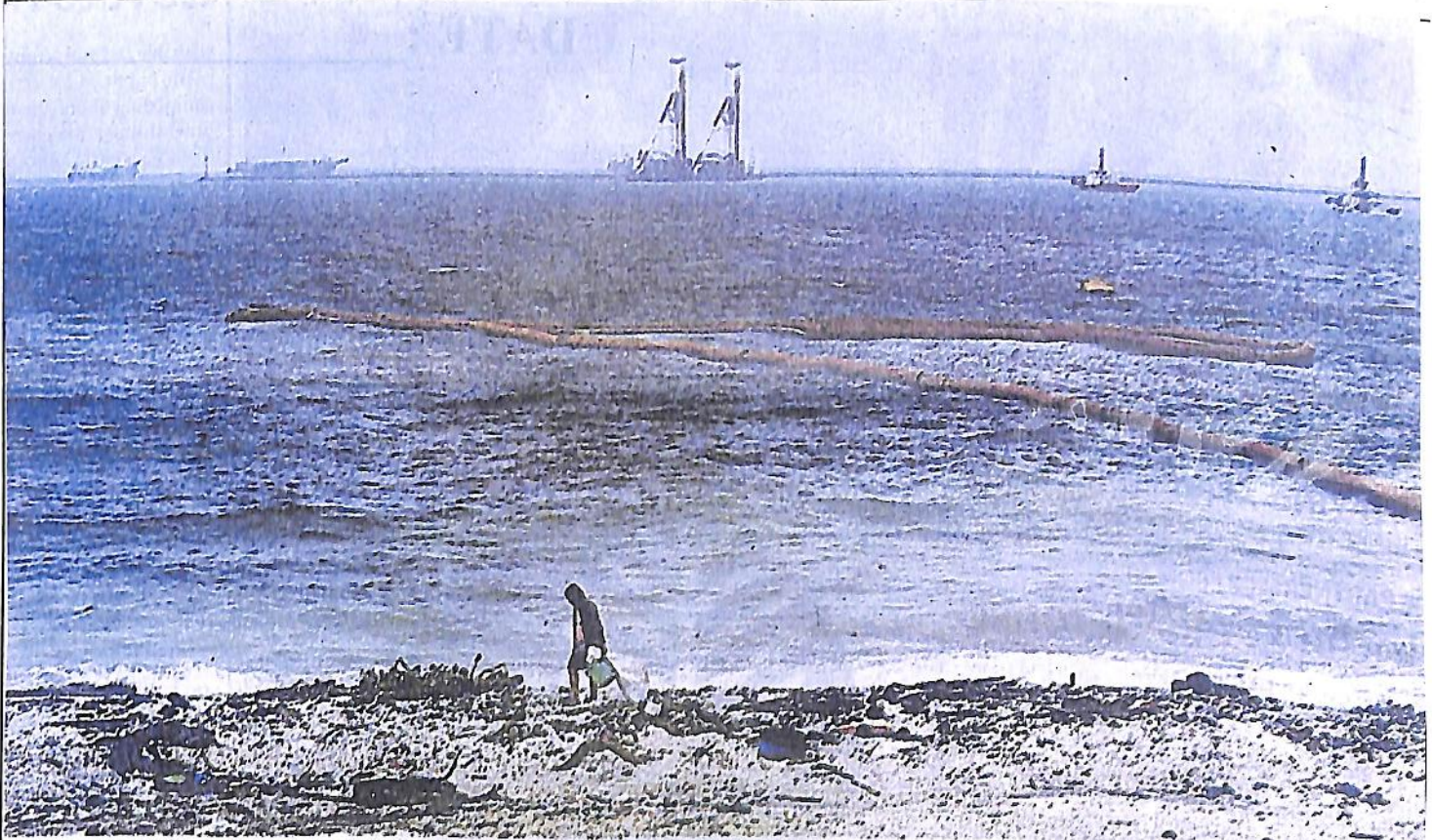
The Manila Times



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WASHED ASHORE A worker of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority on Saturday, Sept. 2, 2023, picks up trash swept to the shoreline of the Dolomite Beach in Manila by strong waves caused by the southwest monsoon or habagat. Enhanced by Typhoon 'Hanna,' Typhoon 'Saola' (formerly 'Goring') and Severe Tropical Storm 'Kirogi,' which remains outside the Philippine Area of Responsibility, the heavy monsoon rains have also swamped parts of the country, including Metro Manila, over the past week, displacing thousands of residents and damaging crops and infrastructure estimated at half a million pesos. PHOTO BY MIKE ALQUINTO

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Metropolitan Manila Development Authority personnel collect garbage that washed up on the Manila Bay Dolomite Beach along Roxas Boulevard in Manila yesterday.
ERNIE PENAREDONDO



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Miners told: Maintain pockets of biodiversity in mining areas

MINING companies should keep pockets of biodiversity or forest ecosystems within their mining tenements intact for the purpose of wildlife conservation.

Theresa Mundita S. Lim, executive director of the Asean Centre for Biodiversity, said these pockets of biodiversity can provide safe haven to plant and animal wildlife during mining operations, where forests are shaved and mountains are carved to extract minerals.

"These pockets of biodiversity could later on be a source of recruits when the company begins to rehabilitate mined-out areas," Lim told the *BUSINESSMIRROR* in an interview at the sidelines of the Philippine Nickel Association Inc. (PNIA) Nickel Initiative event held in Makati City on Tuesday.

A former director of the Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Lim was invited as one of the panel of experts to talk about biodiversity conservation in mining areas.

Member-companies of PNIA, besides discussing fiscal and regulatory regimes and other challenges faced by the nickel industry, also looked into enhancing the development impact of the mining sector's environment and social development programs.

Dante Bravo, president of PNIA, touted as the largest grouping of nickel-mining firms in the Philippines, expressed support to the DENR's ongoing review of Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programs (EPEP) as well as the agency's Social Development and Management Programs (SDMP).

"Any industry development effort should translate to sustainable economic

development, particularly to impact communities. PNIA members have consistently demonstrated how we deliver beyond compliance to uphold the welfare of our host communities and to progressively rehabilitate the environment," Bravo said.

Lim, who advocates the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation, said mining companies could also help conserve the country's biodiversity by protecting and conserving areas within or near their mining tenements.

Lim said mining companies should also comply with the provisions of the Philippine Mining Act, which mandates progressive rehabilitation.

This means that during mining operations, areas that have already been mined out should be rehabilitated, while the company is starting to extract minerals in other areas.

Before mining, Lim said mining companies should establish baseline data and identify threatened or endangered species, whether plants or animals, so that they can later measure the success of their rehabilitation.

"Of course, they need to conduct a study to establish baseline data so that they will know what we are about to lose and what we need to bring back after mining," she said.

Lim also encouraged mining companies to plant native trees, instead of fast-growing species, or grow protection forests rather than production forests, to conserve biodiversity.

"That's why they need to establish baseline data before mining because it is important to know what naturally occurs in that area," she said. *Jonathan L. Mayuga*



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Online illegal wildlife trade threatens endemic hornbills

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

THE global illegal wildlife trade has been threatening the already endangered wildlife that may lead to their extinction.

Closer to home, law enforcers are having a hard time catching the bad guys, who are openly offering online the illegally caught wildlife.

With the use of the Internet, smartphones and social media, illegal wildlife traders are becoming bolder, although cautious with wildlife law enforcers zeroing in on online illegal racket.

So-called middlemen, or conduits between sellers and buyers, have become smarter to avoid arrest through detection by system-generated programs.

They use misspelled words, special characters, or emojis, that allow them to do business without being spammed or flagged.

Transnational crime

GLOBAL illegal wildlife trade is considered a transnational crime.

A report titled, "Addressing Illegal Wildlife Trade in the Philippines," said the value of IWT worldwide is estimated at \$10 billion to \$23 billion a year, making it the fourth most lucrative illegal business after narcotics, human trafficking and arms.

The report was by the Asian Development Bank, Germany's Global Environment Facility and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

The value of IWT in the Philippines is estimated at P50 billion a year (roughly \$1 billion). This includes the market value of wildlife, their resources, ecological role and importance, damage to habitats incurred during poaching, and loss in potential ecotourism revenues.

The Philippines, a source, consumer and transit point of IWT, is a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity, an international treaty that seeks to curb biodiversity loss.

Philippines' most traded wildlife

THE Philippines' most-traded wildlife are the Philippine forest turtle, Palawan pangolin, hawksbill turtle,



LUZON rufous hornbill PHOTO BY LIZA DEL ROSARIO, CONTRIBUTED BY EMERSON SY

blue-naped parrot, Southeast Asian box turtle, Palawan hill mynah, Asian leaf turtle and tokay gecko.

Lately, however, assorted native bird species have been targeted by hunters to cater to the increasing domestic demand and for export, catching the watchful eye of wildlife trade watchdog Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce (Traffic).

Traffic is a leading nongovernment group working globally against illegal trade in wild animals and plants for both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

Unchecked

THE group's recent study revealed that illegal trade in wildlife remains unchecked and is even more rampant online.

The study, "Farmers of the Forest in Cages: The Online Trade of Hornbills in the Philippines," found out that over 100 Philippine endemic hornbills are offered for sale online, and dozens have been seized in recent years.

Josef Job G. Raymundo, Emerson Y. Sy and Serene C.L. Chng said in the Traffic study that 143 live hornbills were offered for sale between 2018 to 2022. Of these, 73 percent were the endemic Luzon tarictic hornbill.

Meanwhile, 66 hornbills were seized in 24 incidents from 2018 to 2022.

The study was able to detect that two-thirds of the recorded traders

were in Central Luzon and likely sourced wild hornbills within or from nearby provinces.

Worrisome

FOR the authors, the situation is "very worrying."

More than half of the endemic hornbills were nestlings about to fledge. This means the birds were being targeted for illegal trade when they were most vulnerable.

"Illegal trade, both online and offline, will only make things worse for these endemic hornbills, which have low reproduction rates and breeding success," said Chng, Traffic senior program officer.

Nesting hornbills were offered for sale in May 2022.

Online data via Facebook

ONLINE trade data were shared through Facebook, which, in turn, had rapidly removed more than 1,800 Philippine wildlife trade groups between 2020-2022, the report said.

However, as new groups were quickly formed, it became evident that crackdowns must take place consistently and rapidly, and go beyond the removal of posts for long-term impact.

The study found out that traders had also developed more inventive and evasive strategies, including using misspelled words, codes and emojis to avoid being detected by the platform's algorithm.

The study authors urged Facebook to permanently shut down groups



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PALAWAN hornbill PHOTO BY ADRIAN CONSTANTINO, CONTRIBUTED BY EMERSON SY

involved in illegal wildlife trade, hold administrators of the groups accountable by suspending or deactivating individual accounts, and work with enforcement agencies to break the illegal trade chain.

Smuggling 'forest farmers'

HORNBILLs are called "farmers of the forest" because of their feeding habits.

They eat fruits and swallow seeds, which they "plant" together with their bird droppings anywhere they go.

While hornbills are a restricted-range species, their important ecosystem function cannot be over-emphasized.

Trapping in the Philippines is worse than ever, Sy told the BUSINESSMIRROR via Messenger on August 19.

Trapping is also a big problem in Indonesia, where some of the birds from the Philippines are smuggled into.

"For Philippine hornbills, there were also reports of smuggling to India. Similarly, there's the report in Indonesia, where Mindanao rufous hornbills were seized," he said.

Hornbills in Asean

ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) Executive Director Theresa Mundita S. Lim said hornbills are commonly found in Southeast Asian countries.

There are 27 species of hornbills in the Asean.

Citing a report of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, Lim said four species are listed as least

concern, five are endangered, four are near threatened, 11 are vulnerable, and three are critically endangered.

Lim agreed that illegal wildlife trade is prevalent and is a major threat driver of biodiversity loss.

Human pressure

"ANTHROPOGENIC [man-made] factors, such as illegal wildlife trade, imperils the Asean region's rich biodiversity and ecosystems. If biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation aren't halted, Asean's economic trajectory may be derailed," Lim told the BUSINESSMIRROR via Messenger on August 23.

Of the 19 threatened hornbill species in Asean, 75 percent, or 14, are affected by illegal wildlife trade.

"Some species that are captured are just considered 'bycatch' by poachers, who are really after the coveted helmeted hornbill," she said.

Regional initiatives

LIM said Southeast Asian countries, including the Philippines, are sources, channels and target markets for illegal wildlife trade.

To stop the worsening situation, the heads of the government of the Asean member states, Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Russia and the United States signed the ninth East Asia Summit Declaration on Combating Wildlife Trafficking in November 2014.

The declaration mentioned ACB's role as an operational center of excellence in spearheading biodiversity conservation and management alongside regional initiatives—such as Heart of Borneo, Coral Triangle Initiative, Asean Heritage Parks, Greater Mekong Sub-Region—that safeguard and boost the region's biodiversity.

Monitoring of ports

IN a telephone interview on August 18, Police Maj. Robert Alvin Gutierrez, station chief of the Philippine National Police-Maritime Group (PNP-MG), Northern National Capital Region (NCR), told the BUSINESSMIRROR that they are always on their toes in monitoring the country's ports to prevent the smuggling of

contraband, including wildlife.

"Since September last year, we have conducted over 140 operations in the Northern NCR against illegal wildlife trade," he said.

Unfortunately, the country's coastline is vast and wide and some wildlife traders that use motorized banca are able to dock anywhere, he said.

Smart traders

WORSE, Gutierrez also confirmed that illegal wildlife trade is now happening online and is targeting native birds.

"It doesn't happen on the coastlines anymore. It happens online," he said.

The PNP-MG NCR based in Navotas was able to rescue almost 300 wildlife species since September last year.

According to Gutierrez, authorities are having a hard time arresting unscrupulous traders involved in the illegal wildlife trade because they have become smarter and smarter.

"They are getting smarter. Sometimes, they ask for advance payment and disappear the moment they suspect the police are unto them. They are also asking for IDs now," Gutierrez said.

Transaction via Messenger

THE illegal traders who use different accounts also transact business via Messenger, he said.

On August 16, a special operation held at a fast food parking area along McArthur Highway in Barangay Ibayo, Marilao Bulacan, resulted in the arrest of a 46-year-old man in violation of the Wildlife Act.

Seized from the suspect were a live emerald dove and seven live java sparrow.

While transactions were being made via Messenger, Gutierrez said, actual trading was also happening face-to-face.

The police conduct surveillance and detective work that takes up to months until they are able to arrest the suspects.

Gutierrez said the PNP-MG conducts follow-up investigation to unmask the big fish involved in unscrupulous activities that target Philippine wildlife.



Coming to terms with reclamation

THE recent backlash against reclamation projects in and around Manila Bay has been entirely justified, if only in the context of inviting scrutiny of a great deal of disruptive construction activity, most of which was approved and begun in an opaque and somewhat underhanded manner. The scrutiny is necessary because the government has more or less already signaled that it does not seriously intend to force any of the activity to stop for very long.

That is not to say that all of it should be; despite the impressions both advocates and opponents of reclamation try to create in the public, reclamation as a concept is not a black-and-white issue. Some projects are clearly unacceptably detrimental; some have trade-offs between benefits and disadvantages that have to be subject to judgment and public attitudes; some are largely innocuous; and some are actually beneficial to the point of meeting some necessity.

But with President Marcos Jr.'s verbal order to suspend the 22 ongoing reclamation projects having no real legal force (according to experts in that sort of thing) because it was never issued in any written form and with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in the hands of a secretary who makes the last guy — you know, the one whose biggest achievement was building a beach made out of cement and kitty litter in downtown Manila — look like a true eco-warrior, it appears the government's plan is to simply wait until public interest moves on to other things and then let everyone get back to business as usual. As the public collectively has the attention span of a housefly, it shouldn't take too long. So, it is up to others to scrutinize the



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projects, explain them to the public affected by them, and challenge them if necessary — but to do so objectively, which seems to be a completely alien concept to reclamation protestors and advocates alike. If a thorough, realistic, and reliable judgment is to be made on reclamation projects that are either already underway or proposed, an effort needs to be made to thwart the misinformation being spread by either side of the reclamation issue.

In that context, two articles that appeared in this paper within the past week or so need to be called out. The first was a weak rejoinder to criticisms of reclamation projects provided by an official of the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) — an agency that, quite frankly, probably shouldn't even exist — while the second was what appeared to be a thinly disguised promotional press release by a noted architecture firm. As the firm in question does not, at least according to the portfolio posted on its website, have any projects connected to any of the ongoing reclamation work at the moment, I'll leave its name out of it; the substance of its argument is the important bit anyway.

From the PRA, the argument in favor of reclamation is that it can act as protection against storm surges and "will likely prevent flooding," which was obviously a response to speculations that the ongoing projects have caused flooding in coastal cities to worsen, especially in Manila. No evidence for either of those claims has been presented, but those who drew

the conclusion that floods are worse now than when they were before the reclamation projects started did not go on record in the mainstream media to say that, whereas the assistant general manager of the PRA did go on record, so the agency gets the black mark in this case. In all the various pitches for the projects by those with a commercial interest in them, "coastal protection" has never been cited as one of the benefits; at best, the point that has been emphasized is that since the reclaimed areas are inconsequentially small compared to the size of the entire bay, their impact on flooding in any respect, either good or bad, would be likewise inconsequential.

From the architecture firm, land reclamation is described as "a forward-looking approach to urban development" that is automatically sustainable because it "allows cities to preserve valuable ecosystems and resources from urban sprawl by expanding spaces without encroaching on existing natural land." Examples of successful reclamation developments cited include Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai.

This argument falls flat for two glaring reasons. First, it completely dismisses the fact that the bay (or whatever body of water might be involved) is "existing natural land," just with water covering it; as a matter of fact, the water actually makes it somewhat more three-dimensionally complex than most equivalent areas of dry land and therefore more difficult to utilize in a non-destructive way.

Second, comparing the environment and circumstances of Metro Manila to places such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Dubai — the first two are island city-states with no natural alternatives to expand, while Dubai

might as well be, occupying a sliver of territory between the sea and an uninhabitable desert — is completely ridiculous. Manila can expand to the north, south and east (and is in fact doing so), so if space were the most important consideration, the reclamation projects would be completely unnecessary. The only one that is justifiable in this regard is the New Manila International Airport project because it happens to be an airport the metro area badly needs, and an airport requires a large, flat area of land near enough to the city it is intended to serve to make it useful.

The primary mission of the PRA, because its mandate is to be "self-sustaining" — it is actually a government-owned and -controlled corporation (GOCC), even though it falls under the authority of the Office of the President — is to create revenue-generating land, with that revenue coming mainly in the form of property and other taxes. That is why the agency probably shouldn't exist; it is, by design, completely one-dimensional, whereas any reclamation project has many dimensions that must be considered. A better way to assess whether a reclamation project should be done is to remove that single dimension prioritized by the PRA from the calculus and ask a few other questions. Does the project meet one or more critical public needs? Will the benefits from the satisfaction of these needs outweigh the possible costs, such as displaced populations or environmental damage? And finally, are there alternatives, and do the alternatives have better answers to any of those questions than the proposed reclamation project?

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Responsible reclamation

There's much talk in social and traditional media about the reclamation at Manila Bay. Allow me to give my opinion, starting with the matter on the other side of the many issues that reclamation of land has been attributed to - from the impact on the environment, to the coastal ecosystem, and even on the landscape of the famous Manila Bay sunset.

There is responsible reclamation and many projects around the world have proven that it works. Countries like the Netherlands have a long history of doing reclamation out of necessity, due to their rising sea levels.

Compare the Netherlands of today with that of 400 years ago, and you'll be surprised with the resulting additional land area, attributable to its reclamation history. Then there's Disneyland Hong Kong, the Marina Bay Sands

in Singapore, the Osaka airport - they all occupy reclaimed land.

And don't get me wrong; I'm actually happy all 22 reclamation projects nationwide, with a good number concentrated around Manila Bay, were suspended. This allows the DENR, the responsible government agencies, and LGU's to make a thorough study, and verify which projects are deserving of their permits and clearances, and which aren't.



MAKING THEIR sentiments felt at the DENR (photo from mb.com.ph)

I mentioned responsible reclamation - and these would be those designed and positioned so as not to create or worsen flood risks.

A number of the projects may not have any effect on existing drainage systems or the heavily silted Metro Manila rivers and waterways. But those that do have impact, should definitely be halted!

When properly designed, these off-shore projects should in principle, not impede the outflow of waterways draining into the Manila Bay. These projects are separate islands with water channels



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

in between, allowing the inland water to flow freely into the bay.

However, when there is irrefutable evidence that the projects are blocking our inland waterways from draining into the bay, and on to the sea - then these projects should be given the evil eye!

Based on scientific studies, what causes land subsidence is ground water extraction, and there are responsible reclamation projects that have avoided this. One need only look at the previously reclaimed land in Pasay, where the CCP Complex and MOA now stand, to register that after 40 years, there is no evidence of land subsidence. Despite being reclaimed in the 1980's, the dependability, resilience, and safety of these reclaimed land have been demonstrated time and time again, in the face of typhoons and storms.

If we're so ready to enjoy reclamation projects of the past, plus those abroad; why frown on any form of reclamation now, when design and technology has actually improved the process?

The crux of the matter, in my estimation, is to ensure that the final



A TYPICAL SCENE of Metro Manila flooding in 2023. (Photo from mb.com.ph)

approved reclamation projects are of merit, and will truly be useful, helpful, and practical for the community, and the LGU. And of course, that they're designed to specs that take into consideration the environment. Blanket condemnation doesn't take into account the reality that responsible reclamation also exists. We should be vigilant on this matter.

By the way, I'd like to inform those who may have forgotten, that some of the best venues many enjoy for cultural and entertainment events are sitting on reclaimed land - among them the CCP, the MOA, Ayala Manila Bay, Sofitel, Conrad, Solaire and Okada.



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SEP 03 2023

TITLE:

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Planting trillions of trees worldwide

In a period marked by climate change and environmental challenges, planting of trillions of trees worldwide is a visionary solution to combat the climate crisis.

The planting of trillions of trees is a practical and essential strategy to mitigate climate change and secure a sustainable future for generations to come.

The urgency of tree planting cannot be overstated. The rise in global temperatures, extreme weather events – like recurrent and more devastating super typhoons, massive flooding, vast forest fires – among others, all over the world are indeed clear indicators of our planet's perilous state.

In January 2020, the World Economic Forum launched a program to “grow, restore, and conserve one trillion trees around the world and in a bid to restore biodiversity and help fight climate change.”

At the COP26 summit in Glasgow in November 2021, 110 world leaders pledged to end and reverse deforestation by 2030. The countries which signed the agreement reportedly cover some 85 percent of the world's forests.

The US, UK, Germany, Norway, Netherlands, and several other donor-countries committed US\$12 billion of public funds and US\$7.2 billion of private funds to protect and restore forests throughout the world.

We had been advocating a “Trillion Trees Program” in the Philippines and in the international community since our earlier years as Speaker of the House, as founding chairman of the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP), as well as in the various international organizations which we are privileged to serve.

As we have repeatedly mentioned in this column, we believe reforestation and tree farming, on the scale and intensity the planet needs, can and must become a significant jobs-creating economic stimulus for developing countries, if not all countries, that the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the

regional banks, parliaments, political parties, and civil society should champion.

Massive tree planting can become a virtuous, indeed a forever,

cycle of planting, cultivating, harvesting, processing timber, and replanting that can generate tens of millions of jobs worldwide for poor young men and young women in the emerging countries, apart from addressing food shortage and expanding upland agriculture, and especially, contributing in a most significant way in the battle against climate change and environmental degradation.

We proposed much earlier that these programs can be organized through what we may call “Billions of Trees Foundations” managed by civil-society groupings, and strongly supported by governments, parliaments, and the political parties, or perhaps, even better, undertaken by governments themselves, and actively supported even managed by the private sector.

In 1933, during the Great Depression, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt formed the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), composed of six million young jobless Americans, mostly from the East, which, in less than 10 years, built more than 800 parks and planted three billion trees nationwide.

Roosevelt put the then younger Douglas MacArthur, before he became the legendary World War II hero, in charge of the CCC—Civilian Conservation Corps—or Roosevelt's Tree Army.

Planting trillions of trees worldwide is a gigantic undertaking that demands international cooperation and sustained effort. However, the benefits are vast, ranging from economic prosperity and improved quality of life.

It is imperative that we embrace tree planting as a global mission, working together to restore our planet's health and vitality.



PEACE-MAKER

JOSE DE VENECIA JR.
FORMER SPEAKER
OF THE HOUSE



London is now the world's largest low-emissions zone. Was the fight worth it?

BY JESS SHANKLEMAN
& OLIVIA RUDGARD

EVERY driver in London, as of Tuesday, is now subject to strict pollution rules, completing one of the world's most ambitious vehicle emissions policies and taking the British capital closer to having healthy air.

While the final expansion of the ULEZ, or ultra low emissions zone, is only a continuation of clean air charges that have been tightening since 2008—under Boris Johnson when he was mayor of London and now his successor Sadiq Khan—this last phase has been the most controversial. That's because the £12.50 (\$15.72) per day levy for most non-compliant vehicles now hits those living in outer boroughs of London, where people tend to be more car dependent and have lower incomes.

The ULEZ expansion wasn't even guaranteed until July when London's High Court ruled against Conservative-led local authorities who had sued over the plans to grow the zone.

The pollution charges particularly target older diesel vehicles, which tend to create more harmful concentrations of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) in the air than petrol because of the differences in the way the fuel is combusted. For Khan, the battle to tackle these emissions has been worth it. As a sufferer of adult onset asthma, he's made London's air quality a personal mission. And while some political opponents think the mayor has gone too far with the ULEZ,

others say he isn't doing enough to reduce traffic smog.

In order to get a sense of the likely impact of the latest ULEZ expansion, it helps to look at the ways transport and pollution in the city have already changed since the previous phase was rolled out four years ago. Here's what to expect from London's newest clampdown on tailpipe emissions and the influence it's having on clean air policies worldwide.

'Magic' guidelines

A DECADE ago London had NO₂ levels that were among the worst of major world cities, and that has improved dramatically alongside the expansion of the ULEZ. At its most severe, NO₂ can lead to reduced lung development and respiratory infections in children and breathing difficulties in early adulthood, as well as premature death.

The decline in NO₂ pollution seen since 2017 can't just be attributed to ULEZ. Internal combustion engine cars, both diesel and petrol, have become much cleaner over time as standards have tightened. There are more affordable electric vehicles on the market and buses and taxis have also become less emitting.

The benefit to London's outer-borough residents, which have the highest number of deaths linked to air pollution, has been used by Khan as a major argument for its expansion. Analysis released by the mayor's office in June suggests that, based on analysis of income, education, crime levels and other factors, poorer Londoners

and those from immigrant communities are more likely to live in areas with worse air quality.

Yet even with the expanded ULEZ, no Londoners will live in areas that meet the tougher new World Health Organization's annual average guidelines of 10 micrograms per cubic meter of air for NO₂ or 5 micrograms per cubic meter of air for PM_{2.5}, which are fine particles emitted by cars, industry and other harmful sources.

"I don't think the expansion of ULEZ will be sufficient in the longer term," said Frank Kelly, a professor at Imperial College London who has worked on air pollution science for 30 years. "Even though it's had a big impact in central and inner London, the concentrations of pollutants still are too high. So other measures will need to be introduced in due course if we're going to get down to those magic WHO guidelines."

'Hammering down on diesel'

SIMON BIRKETT, who founded the campaign Clean Air in London, said he'd like to see the next mayor take things a step further and completely ban diesel vehicles on the city's roads. But already sales of new diesel cars in London have been declining, he noted, falling to about 5,400 in 2022, from a peak of almost 69,000 in 2016. "The ULEZ has been hammering down on diesel," Birkett said.

At the same time, London has seen a huge growth in the number of electric vehicles on the roads, from less than 3,000 registered a decade ago to almost 75,000 by the first quarter of this year.

The drivers most likely to be stung by the



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ULEZ expansion are commercial van owners. Unlike cars, the van market is still dominated by diesel—more than 90 percent of vans are diesel-fueled. Data suggests that just under half of vans registered to addresses in the outer boroughs of the city are not ULEZ compliant, though the mayor's office disputes the relevance of this data, arguing that many of those vehicles are not actually driven in London. It uses data collected from road-monitoring cameras, which suggests 80 percent of vans are ULEZ compliant.

Some small business groups have raised opposition to an extra charge on vans, citing the financial burdens this can create for their business. In response to concerns, Khan expanded a vehicle scrappage scheme, once only available to a limited number of recipients, to all drivers of non-compliant vehicles. Still, this only covers those people living in London and not those on the borders who may need to commute into the capital daily.

The scheme offers £2,000 (\$2,515) for a car driver to scrap a non-compliant vehicle, or £7,000 (\$8,804) for a van. The scrappage grant is worth even more if drivers opt to take a voucher for public transport as part of the payment. During the previous phase of the scheme, introduced two years ago, some 15,000 cars, vans and motorcycles were scrapped.

One of the biggest arguments against the ULEZ expansion has been that new areas brought into its scope have poorer public transport options than central London, where the policy started. People in outer

London are less likely to live within walking distance of a bus stop or train station. In areas with less access to public transport, people are more likely to have a car.

In response, Khan is also pledging more funds for public transport, paid for by any fines charged under the ULEZ scheme. This includes a bus "Superloop," which promises travel for £1.75 around outer London. The full network has yet to be introduced and consultations are still ongoing.

Toxic politics

WHILE previous ULEZ phases were rolled out without much controversy, this final expansion into the suburbs has become politically toxic, potentially costing Khan's Labour Party the chance to win Johnson's former parliamentary seat in the outer London borough of Uxbridge in July.

That loss has split Khan and Labour leader Keir Starmer, who in July said the mayor should "reflect" on the ULEZ after the election defeat and said the country needed to find a new way of tackling transport pollution. It also prompted Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to try to capitalize on the division, declaring he's "on the side of motorists," launching a review of pollution cutting policies, such as low traffic neighborhoods and 20 mile-per-hour speed limit zones.

While the mayor's office claims that nine in 10 drivers will comply with the new rules, that figure has been contested. Like the van data, this figure comes from traffic cameras, whereas Bloomberg's

analysis of Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency data found that at least 15 percent of cars licensed in outer London will not be compliant with ULEZ.

Valuable lessons

NOW the largest in the world, the progress of London's pollution charging zone has been watched by mayors from Bogota to Montreal, who've been inspired to introduce their own control districts for vehicle emissions.

"London's Ultra Low Emission Zone has been a reference for Bogota's air quality agenda," Claudia Lopez, the mayor of Bogota, said in 2021. Montreal's mayor Valerie Plante, who is laying the groundwork for a low-emission strategy in her city, has also highlighted ULEZ's achievements.

Meanwhile, Giuseppe Sala, mayor of Milan, said in a recent Guardian article that he's been particularly impressed by the measures designed to ease the burdens of ULEZ's expansion — from the scrappage scheme to public transport investment — as he seeks to curb his city's traffic problems.

To be sure, all cities have their own unique vehicle pollution concerns, but Birkett said London has at least provided real data on what actions can work at scale.

"While diesel is a particularly serious problem in Europe, that requires large, strong ultra low emission zones, ULEZ expansion in London has valuable lessons for other cities around the world," he said. *With assistance from Mathieu Dion and Jack Ryan/Bloomberg*



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND
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Luzon dams release water

By **ROMINA CABRERA**
and **RAMON EFREN LAZARO**

Three dams opened their gates yesterday following days of heavy monsoon rains enhanced by Typhoon Hanna and two other tropical cyclones outside the Philippine area of responsibility, according to data from the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration.

Both Binga Dam and Ambuklao Dam in Benguet as well as Ipo Dam in Bulacan have opened their floodgates

to release water as the reservoir water level have approached their respective normal high water levels (NHWL) or spilling levels.

Binga Dam was a few meters away from its NHWL of 575 meters and had six gates open at three meters.

In Ambuklao Dam, four gates were opened at two meters as its reservoir water level reached 751.94 meters, nearing its high water level of 752 meters.

Ipo Dam, on the other hand, further opened one of its gates to 0.30 meters yesterday from 0.15 meters on Friday as its wa-

ter level reached 100.95 meters, just shy of its high water level of 101 meters.

Meanwhile, Bustos Dam in Bulacan had three sluice gates raised, discharging a total of 132 CMS of water on its downstream river system for the third day yesterday, the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office (PDRRMO) of Bulacan said.

As for the Angat Dam, monsoon rains raised the water elevation to over the 200-meter level, only 10 meters away from its high water level of 210 meters.

Records from the Bulacan PDRRMO showed that water elevation of Angat Dam as of 8 a.m. yesterday was at 200.59 meters compared to the previous day's level of 199.23 meters.

Angat dam is the main source of potable water for Metro Manila residents, while Ipo dam diverts water from the Angat and Ipo Rivers into the La Mesa reservoir and Balara filtration plant.

Bustos Dam, on the other hand, supplies irrigation water to some 25,000 hectares of irrigated ricelands in Bulacan and parts of Pampanga.