

27 September 2023 Wednesday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**





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## Project delays in Manila Bay 'not good' for PH investors

DELAYING a decision on reclamation projects in Manila Bay "will not do the country good," Palawan Representative Jose Alvarez said.

According to Alvarez, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will soon decide on these reclamation projects.

Earlier, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ordered the suspension of the reclamation projects due to environmental concerns.

Alvarez, the sponsor of the DENR's proposed P23-billion budget for 2024, said it will not benefit the country—in terms of investments—if the DENR holds out on its decision on the matter.

"The result of the impact assessment is forthcoming because the investors are also waiting for it," Alvarez, adding that "There are 18 companies with approved environmental compliance certificates (ECCs), and two of them started the project until they were temporarily suspended."

"It is not healthy for our investment environment that a project that has been approved has been temporarily halted with no definite date of resumption. We believe the DENR will be coming up with a decision shortly, without sacrificing the stakeholders in Manila Bay," Alvarez, quoted by reports, further said.

Alvarez said the planned reclamation projects only cover 3% of the entire Manila Bay, but the DENR is committed to ensuring that such projects would not be detrimental to the public.

"The DENR, being part of the Executive, will do what is mandated of them: conduct a cumulative impact assessment of Manila Bay reclamation projects. They have gathered experts and scientists to help them assess the reclamation project, whether it will cause floods, any irreversible environmental impact, how the garbage will be handled," he said.

DENR SCIS - Public Information Division

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## DENR pushes more air quality monitoring stations in Metro Manila, other urban areas

**A**IR quality in Metro Manila has improved but the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said there's a need to put up more air quality monitoring stations while maintaining all 33 existing air quality-monitoring stations.

Juan Miguel Cuna, DENR Undersecretary for Field Operations in Luzon and Visayas, told the **BUSINESSMIRROR** in a telephone interview that it will cost around P5 million to P10 million depending on the gadget to put up in an air quality monitoring station.

According to Cuna, air quality on Monday and Tuesday has improved considerably, compared to what was experienced last Thursday and Friday, with readings in most cities indicating air quality is "good."

On Thursday and Friday, air quality in Metro Manila suffered due to smog, while in

parts of Calabarzon, smog was aggravated by volcanic dusts emitted by the restive Taal Volcano. The smog and vog in the NCR and Calabarzon prompted local government units (LGUs) to suspend classes and issue emergency public health advisories, such as the wearing of face masks and staying at home to avoid health problems.

Except for one or two areas where air quality is fair, almost all areas in Metro Manila have now better air quality, which classified PM2.5 and PM10 levels to be good.

Cuna said the DENR needs to rehabilitate, if not upgrade its existing air quality monitoring stations and acquire more units to be put up in strategic locations.

"The last time we bought a unit for air quality monitoring was in 2016. We are continuously requesting for budget to put up air

quality monitoring stations," said Cuna.

He said the DENR would ask Congress to allocate budgets to boost the capacity of the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB), which he once held as director, in monitoring air pollution in major cities.

According to Cuna, the DENR is looking at partnering with the private sector for the maintenance of the existing air quality monitoring station gadgets.

"We need he help of the private sector to maintain our air quality monitoring stations. Aside from electricity and internet, we need to secure and protect these facilities," said Cuna.

Budget-wise, the DENR official said the DENR is hoping for an additional budget for the purpose of strengthening its air quality monitoring capacity, as well as other regulatory functions, as part of its mandate to implement the Clean Air Act.

"We continuously ask Congress for budget allocation for our air quality," he said, adding that with the recent smog that blanketed Metro Manila was due to smoke from motor vehicles

plying Metro Manila coupled with fog, which was aggravated by thermal inversion.

The last two are natural phenomena but smoke-belching vehicles are to be blamed for the emission of smoke from motor vehicles, underscoring the need for the Land Transportation Office (LTO) and Local Government Units (LGUs) to revive the crackdown on smoke belchers.

Air pollution brought about by smoke from motor vehicles can cause a number of health problems, such as heart attacks. It can also trigger asthma, while long-term exposure can lead to lung cancer.

Health experts advised the public to stay at home and wear facemasks all time when in Metro Manila when the air quality is poor, due to smog, or vog in the case of volcanic activity that aggravates pollution caused by smog.

The DENR is proposing a total budget of P24,571,827,000 for 2024 on top of the P1.1 billion automatic appropriations for the agency under the National Expenditure Program (NEP) prepared by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

Specific for programs to improve air quality, the DENR is proposing a budget of P145 million for 2024, but this does not yet include appropriations for additional air quality monitoring stations. **Jonathan L. Mayuga**





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The Manila Times  
www.manilatimes.net

## Regions

WEDNESDAY  
September 27, 2023 A9

# Vog can't trigger eruption – Phivolcs

BY CLAIRE BERNADETTE MONDARES

**T**HE continuous emission of sulfur dioxide, forming a volcanic smog (vog), from Taal Volcano is not an indication of its possible eruption, Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) director Teresito Bacolcol said Tuesday.

Bacolcol issued the statement to assure the public that the current activities of the active volcano in Batangas will not trigger an eruption.

"A volcano, when it's about to erupt, there will be a lot of earthquakes. In fact, prior to the 2020 eruption of Taal Volcano, we recorded [just in a day] 125

volcanic earthquakes," Bacolcol said at the media forum.

"Now, these earthquakes are small in magnitude and only our instruments and those living around the vicinity of the volcano can feel it."

The Phivolcs director said a volcanic earthquake is caused by the destruction of rocks when magma

rises up to the surface of a volcano. He said that the agency has not recorded any volcanic earthquakes for the past four days.

Recently, Calabarzon region (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal and Quezon), especially the areas near the Taal Lake, has been covered by a thick vog as Phivolcs recorded an emission of 4,569 tons of sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) from the volcano on Sept. 21, 2023.

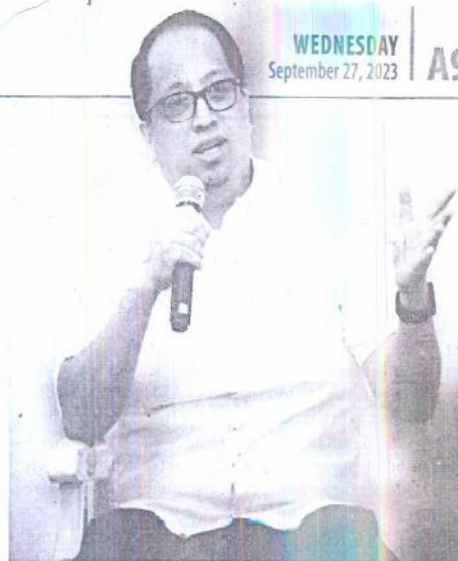
Bacolcol said that vog has been affecting the region since the first week of September where an average of 3,402 tons of SO<sub>2</sub> has been degassed from Taal Volcano per day.

The vog, which is formed when the volcanic gas particles were

trapped during a thermal inversion, consists of fine droplets that include SO<sub>2</sub> which is acidic and can cause irritation to the eyes, throat and respiratory tract.

"The pollutants, for example the fumes coming from the vehicle cannot move up through a vertical dispersion because of being trapped in the warm layer during the thermal inversion," Bacolcol said.

Despite the current activity of Taal volcano and considering its effect on the health of the public directly exposed to it, the Phivolcs chief clarified that the agency is considering other parameters to upgrade the alert level of a certain volcano, thus Taal remains in Alert Level 1.



Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology director Teresito Bacolcol explains the recent cause of volcanic smog during the weekly 'Kapihan sa Manila Hotel' forum hosted by former senator Joey Lina and former press secretary Sonny Coloma on Tuesday, Sept. 26, 2023.

PHOTO BY MIKE ALQUINTO

He also said that the duration of a volcano under a certain alert level is also not an indication of its possible eruption.

"A volcanic eruption is a combination of different factors. We have to look at seismicity (the number of earthquakes). The emission of sulfur dioxide is also

not just the basis to raise an alert level. There are also other parameters that we look at before we raise the alert level, including the number of earthquakes," Bacolcol said. "Currently, there are 24 active volcanoes in the country and there is always a possibility that they will act up simultaneously."





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# 691 individuals affected by smog, 'vog' – DOH

By MERLINA HERNANDO-MALIPOT

The Department of Health (DOH) on Tuesday, Sept. 26, confirmed that 691 individuals suffered adverse reactions due to smog and volcanic smog or "vog," particularly in areas near Taal Volcano and Metro Manila.

As of Sept. 25, data from DOH showed reported cases of adverse reactions in the province of Batangas where 76 cases have been recorded in Agoncillo town, 18 cases in Alitagtag, and 208 cases in Balete.

DOH data further revealed there were three cases in Balayan, two in Batangas City, two in Calaca, and four in Calatagan.

There were 16 cases reported in Lemery, 52 in Lipa, 21 in Nasugbu, and 23 in San Jose.

San Pascual reported 135 cases, while 27 in Teresita, 40 in Tanauan, two in Taysan, and 62 in Tuy.

DOH has also recorded admissions to local hospitals.

Two individuals were admitted in a hospital in Lian, while one patient was admitted in Tuy.

## Better air quality

The air quality assessment in Metro Manila and Batangas was categorized as "fair" and "good," respectively, based on the data from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Environmental Management Bureau (DENR-EMB) and air quality monitoring of Batangas State University as of Sept. 25.

Meanwhile, the Department of Science and Technology, Philippine

Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (DOST-Phivolcs), issued a reminder that Taal Volcano is still under Alert Level 1.

Phivolcs explained that this alert level signifies ongoing abnormal conditions and potential for eruptive activity.

In response to the smog in Metro Manila, the DOH, in collaboration with the Metro Manila Center for Health Development (MMCHD), has issued an alert memorandum and health advisory.

Masks have also been distributed to address the situation.

The Health Department, working closely with its regional counterparts in Calabarzon and Mimaropa, has been providing logistical and medical assistance to affected areas.

Continuous monitoring and support from relevant government agencies are ongoing to ensure the well-being of residents and mitigate health impacts caused by smog and vog, the DOH said. (Zekinah Elize Espina)





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# Bicameral panel OKs PPP Act, green reforms seen

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ @joveemarie

**T**HE congressional bicameral conference committee has approved the proposed Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Act, which includes “innovations” to boost green projects, Official Development Assistance (ODA), and returns of public-private projects to the government.

House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Joey Sarte Salceda said Congress will likely ratify the proposal by Tuesday.

According to Salceda, they have introduced several amendments to include provisions to encourage green financing, allow commercial involvement in ODA for PPP projects, and boost the returns of the government on PPP projects by allowing an internal rate of return as a basis for bidding and negotiating PPP projects.

“I proposed several amendments to my colleagues and counterparts, all of which were accepted in some form. But the major ones are these

three,” said Salceda, the chairman of the technical working group that drafted the House version of the bill.

Salceda also pushed to elevate the PPP Law into a code so that future amendments would be made to the code instead of in a scattered way.

“With my amendment, for example, the code explicitly allows projects involving green growth, low-carbon, carbon avoidance, sustainable development, and the use of alternative assets such as carbon credits, such as those pursuant to Article VI of the Paris Agreement, or ecosystem services. This opens

the door to PPPs involving the generation and trading of carbon credits and other innovative climate finance mechanisms,” he added.

The lawmaker said the country needs one common set of rules to strengthen investor certainty and confidence.

“We have a lot of potential in the market for carbon credits because we are a low-per-capita emissions country with moral ascendancy and experience in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation and mitigation. In December 2022, [Environment] Secretary Toni Yulo said that they needed an enabling law to establish a carbon credit market in the Philippines. With this, you can already create that market through PPPs. I expect unsolicited bids from RE companies first, who are tax-exempt on the sale of their carbon credits. They stand to benefit the most,” Salceda said.

Salceda added that he also introduced amendments that will allow more ODA to finance PPPs.

Under the proposal, Salceda said that ODAs, when used to finance PPPs, are executive agreements and therefore do not require treaty approval.

“The amendment also allows

‘blended finance’ or the participation of the private sector on the side of the financing country in the use of ODAs for PPP projects,” he added.

“This is already standard practice among European countries that finance ODAs. The proposal will help diversify the ODA portfolio. Japan dominates our ODA sources, but France comes in at a distant second and is willing to do more if we can make these amendments,” he said.

Salceda said they also introduced a provision allowing a maximum rate of return for private PPP partners as a bidding parameter or a negotiation term in crafting PPPs.

“Anything in excess is remitted to the National Treasury, like San Miguel Aerocity’s franchise, which allows a 12-percent internal rate of return. The Public Service Act amendments also provide for this,” he said.

Salceda also brought up additional amendments, such as allowing local water districts in PPPs to combine to maximize efficiency and reduce consumer bills.

The proposal also allows all government agencies and instrumentalities to undertake PPPs.





## editorial

# 'Carbon tax will make goods more expensive'

**T**HE worsening effects of climate change have made it imperative for all nations to implement the necessary measures that will prevent global temperature from increasing. These measures have one goal: to significantly reduce carbon emissions that harm the ozone layer, which protects Earth's inhabitants from UV rays. The catchphrase nowadays is, "net zero," which means cutting carbon emissions to as close to zero as possible, according to the United Nations.

The costs of adaptation measures implemented by certain sectors like the maritime industry are painful at the outset, especially since these will be put in place at a time when the world continues to grapple with the fallout from the conflict in Eastern Europe. It could raise the costs of some commodities initially, particularly since ships carry more than 80 percent of world trade. Countries like the Philippines that import huge volumes of food and fuel and raw materials, such as mechanically deboned meat, would have to be ready for the possible impact of this development.

Based on the latest data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the country's food imports continued to outpace agricultural exports in April to June. While food imports declined by a tenth to \$4.32 billion in the second quarter from last year's \$4.84 billion, the figure was significantly higher than earnings from agricultural exports, which reached only \$1.61 billion. These figures show that it may take a while for the Philippines to significantly reduce its reliance on foreign producers and shipping companies that will transport its food requirements.

The Philippines is not the only country in the world that is reliant on the maritime industry. Unfortunately, vessels are a big source of emissions. In 2018, vessels pumped about one billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in 2018.

It is for this reason that a number of countries have called for a levy to be imposed on greenhouse gas emissions of shipping vessels in June. The move is expected to hasten the green transition of the shipping industry, which is said to be responsible for about 3 percent of man-made carbon dioxide emissions. Bloomberg reported that France, Spain, Norway and Portugal are among 22 nations that supported "the principle of a levy on the GHG emissions" of the international shipping sector and that the European Commission supports it.

The country's economists have earlier voiced their concerns over calls to impose a levy on greenhouse gas emissions of shipping lines. (See, "**Carbon tax seen to hike goods' prices," in the BUSINESSMIRROR, June 28, 2023**). Experts said a carbon tax will have the same effect as a tariff that will make goods more expensive. However, this is the price that citizens of this planet must be prepared to pay, whether they are from rich or poor countries, to stop climate change from further destroying their only home.

The cost of transitioning to a greener world may be onerous but it is something that even low- and middle-income countries must bear. We can only hope that the adaptation measures would immediately produce the results the world needs to help prevent global warming.





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PRIORITY MEASURE

# BILL ESTABLISHING NEW FISCAL REGIME FOR MINING PASSED

**By Dempsey Reyes**  
@dempseyreyesINQ

The House of Representatives approved on final reading a bill introducing a new fiscal regime for the country's mining sector—one of the priority measures of the Marcos administration—during a session that ended past midnight on Tuesday.

Voting 272-4-1, the lower chamber approved House Bill No. 8937, or the proposed measure enhancing the fiscal regime for the mining industry. The proposed measure will impose margin-based royalties and windfall profits tax on miners.

The bill was sponsored by Albay Rep. Joey Salceda, chair of the House ways and means committee, and Nueva Ecija Rep. Mikaela Angela Suansing.

HB 8937 imposes royalty payments on large-scale metallic mining operations within mineral reservations with its rate of roy-

alty payments of 3 percent of the gross output; large-scale metallic mining operations outside mineral reservations with margin-based royalty on income from its operations; and small-scale metallic mining operations with royalty worth one-tenth of 1 percent of gross output.

### Tax on windfall profits

It will also impose a margin-based windfall profits tax gained from mining operations for each taxable year.

Small-scale miners are also required, under the bill, to register with the Mines and Geosciences Bureau and the Mining Board of the concerned local government.

They will be encouraged, as well, to organize into cooperatives to make them qualify for the awarding of a People's Small-Scale Mining Contract.

Mining firms will also be mandated to submit reports on all its sales and exports of minerals, mineral products and raw ores to the Bureau of Internal Revenue. INQ





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## Royalty fees await large miners in fiscal proposal

**A** BILL seeking a new fiscal regime for the mining sector—approved on third and final reading last Tuesday by the House of Representatives—tweaks the National Internal Revenue Code (NIRC) of 1997.

The measure, embodied in House Bill (HB) 8937, creates four new sections—151-A, 151-B, 151-C, and 51-D—in the NIRC, or Republic Act (RA) 8424 (as amended).

Once enacted, the House-approved measure will subject large-scale metallic mining operations within mineral reservations to a royalty rate of 4 percent of the gross output of the minerals or mineral products extracted or produced.

A margin-based royalty on income from metallic mining operations would be imposed on large-scale metallic mining operations outside mineral reservations.

The bill said large-scale metallic mining operations within mineral reservations shall be subject to a royalty rate of 4 percent of the gross output of the minerals or mineral products extracted or produced by metallic mining operations, exclusive of all other taxes.

It said large-scale metallic mining operations outside mineral reservations shall be subject to a margin-based royalty on income from metallic mining operations.

It added that pursuant to Sec-

tion 13 of the People's Small-Scale Mining Act of 1991, there shall be levied one-tenth of one percent of the gross output of the minerals or mineral products extracted or produced by small-scale metallic mining operations.

In addition to the taxes imposed under the NIRC, a windfall-profit tax would also be imposed for each taxable year on income from metallic mining operations.

Under the bill, all metallic mining contractors shall provide the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) with a copy of approved marketing contracts and sales agreements, including those submitted to the Mines and Geosciences Bureau, on all sales and exports of minerals, mineral products, and raw ores.

It also mandates the Mines and Geosciences Bureau to require metallic mining companies to submit a report for each shipment before leaving the loading ports. The report shall be shared with the Department of Finance (DOF) and the BIR, the measure reads.

The BIR shall be entitled to examine and audit for tax purposes all sales and exportations of minerals, mineral products, and raw ores, including the terms and conditions of all sales commitments.

HB 8937 received affirmative votes, four negative votes and one abstention. *Jovee Marie N. Dela Cruz*





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# Danish firms seek clear rules on seabed, foreshore leases for RE investments

By MYRNA VELASCO

Danish investors who are staking huge capital in the country's renewable energy (RE) sector are battling for clear and transparent rules that shall be instituted by the Philippine government on foreshore and seabed lease arrangements, primarily for offshore wind (OSW) farm installations.

In an interview, Denmark Ambassador to the Philippines Franz-Michael Mellbin noted that the unresolved concerns on foreshore lease as well as on the utilization of seabed for offshore wind farm projects have been emerging as a troubling concern for foreign investors, especially those which signed up for service contracts with 100-percent foreign equity.

The envoy, nevertheless, said the current comfort level of investors rests on the fact that the government, primarily the Department of Energy (DOE), has been giving assurances that these concerns will be squarely addressed in the policy-framing as well as on regulatory enforcements.

"It is correct to say these things need clarification, but I am also happy to say that the government has made it very clear that it is aware of these problems and need to be solved; and that they want to ensure that there is a clear transparent process

toward approvals," the ambassador stressed.

Foreshore would refer to the parcel of land that demarcates high and low water marks—and that typically stretches at least 20 meters from the interior limit of the shoreline.

The lease on foreshore has been igniting dilemma for foreign RE service contractors because of the Philippine Constitution's prohibition on ownership of land by foreigners, hence, this is a major concern currently being sorted out by the DOE in collaboration with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

The other major concern of RE investors touches on seabed lease because some components of offshore wind facilities will be installed at ocean floors, hence, the regulatory regime on that sphere must also be cleared up.

"These things need to be clarified—there's a need to chart a clear pathway forward and what regulations shall be set for these issues; and how do you get approvals from specific agencies," Mellbin conveyed.

The ambassador further said that when the lease agreements are entered into with investors, it is also crucial to define the rules of the government agencies involved—specifically the local government

units (LGUs) which may be claiming jurisdiction over project sites.

In line with that, Mellbin specified that the rules must be very straightforward in delineating the specific government agency that will serve as counterparty in the warranted lease agreements.

"Because there's a tradition in this country for local government units to also access authority in the near-coast area; and that needs to be clarified—which will have authority because coast is important," the Danish envoy pointed out.

At this stage, it has been sounded off by the DOE that a legal opinion has to be sought from the Department of Justice (DOJ) to clarify the legal grounds for regulations that must be applied to these lease agreements.

Following that process, it is targeted that a memorandum of agreement (MOA) will be signed by the energy department with the DENR to explicitly identify the roles that each agency will carry out when it comes to foreshore and seabed lease covenants for RE projects.

Mellbin further opined that for the service contract-holders and the foreign investors, "what's important is: whoever is responsible must set clear rules to follow; and that the procedures are transparent and predictable."



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# Invasion in plain sight: China's island-building in WPS

**SPECIAL REPORT**

By Kurt Dela Peña @AdrianINQ

(Last of two parts)

According to data from the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI), China has already set up close to 30 outposts in the disputed areas of the South China Sea (SCS), occupying six reefs that are within the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

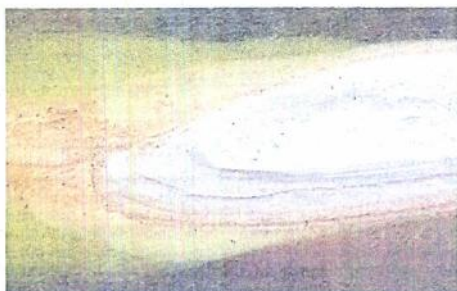
These reefs are the Calderon Reef (or Cuarteron), Kagitingan (Flery Cross), Burgos (Gaven), McKennan (Hughes), Panganiban (Mischief) and Zamora (Subi). AMTI said China also "controls" Scarborough or Panatag Shoal, which lies off the coast of Zambales and was seized by Beijing in 2012 by maintaining constant China Coast Guard (CCG) presence in the area.

AMTI, which has been closely monitoring developments in the SCS, also noted how China had engaged in unprecedented dredging operations and artificial island-building in the Spratlys since 2013, creating 1,295 hectares (3,200 acres) of new land along with a substantial expansion of its presence in the Paracels.

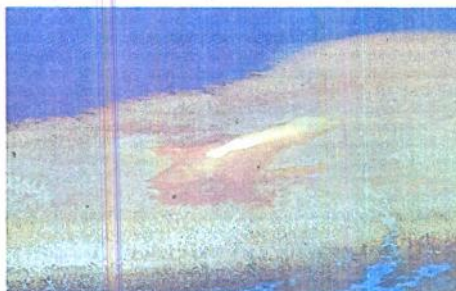
Spratlys and Paracels are considered two of the most prominent geographic features of the SCS. Part of the Spratlys is the Kalayaan Island Group, where more than 400 Filipinos live, specifically in Pag-asa Island.

**New island?**

Based on photos provided to Inquirer.net by a professional civilian photographer who



AN 'AI' JUST AS ALARMING An artificial island appears to be taking shape near Sabina (Escoda) Shoal, about 135 kilometers west of Palawan, based on these recent photos obtained by Inquirer.net from a civilian photographer who flew over the site on a private plane. Near the area is a group of suspected Chinese maritime militia vessels (lower photo). —CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



recently flew over the area on a private plane, a new artificial island is apparently being developed by China close to Sabina (Escoda) Shoal, which is 135 kilometers west of Palawan.

Taken last month, the photos showed the buildup of layers of sand with an apparent slope down toward the center. Maritime militia boats could also be seen near the man-made island.

In an interview, Julio Amador III, president of the Foundation for National Interest and founder of FACTS Asia, said that "while illegal, China's artificial island-building strengthens its strategic position in the region."

Despite the historic 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) that invalidated China's sweeping claims, "[it] kept insisting that it had administrative jurisdiction over the SCS, naming the region according to its internal nomenclature."



China is sustaining activities that seem to mimic "economic activities," a very important justification for claiming features under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

**Basis for EEZ**

In a book he wrote on the

maritime dispute, retired Supreme Court Senior Associate Justice Antonio Carpio explained that based on UNCLOS, "naturally formed" islands capable of hosting human habitation and economic life of their own are entitled to 370 km (200 nautical miles) of exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

As to man-made features, however, the convention maintains that "artificial islands, installations and structures do not possess the status of islands" and thus may not have a territorial sea (reckoned at 370 km from the baselines) of their own to speak of.

"Their presence does not affect the delimitation of the territorial sea, the EEZ, or the continental shelf," says Article 60 (8) of UNCLOS.

China's man-made islands, Amador said, are thus "illegal before international law."

As decided by the PCA and further explained by Carpio, out of the seven reefs occupied by China in the Spratlys, five, including four within WPS, are high-tide elevations entitled to a 370-km territorial sea.

The other two reefs—Panganiban and Subi—are low-tide elevations.

It was also determined that

Subi Reef is within the territorial sea of Pag-asa Island, which is occupied by the Philippines. "Thus, Subi Reef is subject to the sovereignty of the Philippines and only the Philippines can erect an artificial island on Subi Reef," Carpio said.

**Power projection**

Geopolitical analyst Don McLain Gill said "artificial islands are a way for China to not only secure its presence in the disputed maritime territory but also project power and establish more ardent A2/AD capabilities against Southeast Asian and extra regional states." A2/AD refers to "anti-access/area denial."

"These also serve as a sort of permanent offshore base to more effectively check US military capabilities in the region. China is thus able to leverage its geography in this way," Gill told Inquirer.net.

Such a strategy affects not only Philippine security and the country's exercise of its sovereign rights but also its economic interests in the greater SCS.

For as quantified also by Carpio, China's continuing assertion of its "nine-dash line" puts 80 percent of the Philippine EEZ at risk, covering 381,000 square kilometers of maritime space.

Earlier this month, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. put it more succinctly: All these island-building—along with the recurring harassment of Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and Filipino civilian vessels by the CCG—are tantamount to an outright "pananakop"—Filipino for invasion. **AG**

# INVASION IN PLAIN SIGHT: CHINA'S ISLAND-BUILDING IN WPS

**FROM A3**

Amador warned that if China's artificial island-building would go unchecked, the logistical deployment of air and naval assets, or the movement of personnel, armaments and cargo, will exponentially be easier for its military.

**'First wrong move'**

"Chinese air and naval assets will be able to interdict foreign-flagged vessels with relative ease," he said. "There will be an exponential increase in the presence of (Chinese) naval and air assets, on top of its maritime militia."

And with the potential increase in sea and air encounters

comes higher chances of miscalculation.

"The overarching rationale of the gray zone principle is to unjustly compel the aggrieved party to make the first wrong move or decision that will preempt and justify a commensurate military response, thereby unnecessarily giving countries like China the false impetus to retaliate with an even sizable response," he said.

With the fishing moratorium that China is imposing on areas where its fishermen operate, he said, "this could de facto expand to include the entirety of the SCS covered within the 10-dash line claim," referring to the new map recently issued by Beijing to further expand its claim.

"In a geopolitical perspec-

tive, the offshore archipelago of China is aligned with their recent publication of the new version of their 10-dash-line map," he added. "China's strategy of calibrating... intimidation and coercion shows a definitive aggression of China's claim of a historic right over the South China Sea."

**Limited options**

Still, it is important to acknowledge that the Philippines has very limited options in resisting China's actions without provoking a shooting war, Amador said.

"Documenting China's aggressive behavior and filing diplomatic protests are critical parts of the country's tool kit in responding to aggressive behavior," he said,

adding that Manila needs to verbalize its displeasure with the same intensity as it had protested incidents of harassment and the swarming of maritime militia.

The PCG will not be able to do all the work, he said, thus "it is time to test the Philippine Navy's conviction in preventing the delivery of building materials [to] China's artificial islands."

Interdiction operations will have to be done—but within the limits and bounds of international law, he said. Playing by the rules while showing Philippine resolve sends a strong signal to China. **INQ**

(Editor's Note: A longer version of this report appears on Inquirer.net.)





STRATEGIC  
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# BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business



OPINION

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## Antarctica's shrinking sea ice hits a record low, alarming scientists

By DANIELLE BOCHOVE

**A**T its largest expanse this year, sea ice covered less than 17 million square kilometers (6.6 million square miles) of the Antarctic—an area that is 1 million square kilometers (almost 400,000 square miles) smaller than the previous record low set in 1986, according to preliminary figures released Monday by the National Snow and Ice Data Center at the University of Colorado Boulder. The number represents the smallest peak extent in almost 45 years of satellite records.

Peak Antarctic ice coverage during the region's winter—which is the northern hemisphere's summer—likely occurred on Sept. 10. On that date sea ice stretched over 16.96 million square kilometers, after which it began to shrink, the NSIDC said. This took place almost two weeks earlier than the median date of September 23 between 1981 and 2010.

"There is some concern that this may be the beginning of a long-term trend of decline for Antarctic sea ice, since oceans are warming globally, and warm water mixing in the Southern Ocean polar layer could continue," the NSIDC said in a news release.

While the drivers of the loss are complicated, and not fully understood, scientists believe climate change plays a role, and continuing

shrinking of the ice could exacerbate warming's effects, as less ice means less sunlight is reflected back into space. Scientists who study Antarctica observed months ago that the ice was struggling to grow back from its February nadir, in a stark deviation from usual patterns.

"The last three or four months now is nothing like we've seen before, or would have expected, ever," said Cecilia Bitz, a climate scientist specializing in sea ice at the University of Washington. "This tells me that the climate change we're seeing is outside our range of experience and can't be explained by natural variability."

If sea-ice coverage that is dramatically lower than usual continues, more of the coastline will be exposed to ocean waves, the effects of which are not yet clear, the NSIDC noted.

Scientists have all sorts of ideas about how sea ice and oceans interact in the Antarctic but most are theoretical and more study is needed, Bitz said.

### Arctic summer

IN the Arctic, sea ice typically covers the largest expanse of ocean at some point in September. After that, it begins a slow melt over the southern hemisphere's summer, with the most open water typically seen in early March. The process is the same in the Arctic, though the winter-summer months are reversed.

The research center also released the latest summer sea-ice coverage estimates for the opposite side of the planet. They showed that sea ice covered just 4.23 million square kilometers of the Arctic Ocean at its lowest point this summer. That's the sixth lowest figure recorded, and the 17 lowest were all posted in the last 17 years.

Scientists are interested in understanding why a given year may have more or less sea ice, even though the multi-decade trend is clearly down, said Flavio Lehner, an assistant professor of Earth and atmospheric science at Cornell University who is also chief climate scientist for Polar Bears International.

"Was it because the air temperature was warmer, because certain weather patterns brought more warm air?" he asked. "Was it the ocean transporting more warm waters into the Arctic? Was it a big storm that broke up the sea ice and made it easier to be flushed out of the Arctic and melted? There's different stories to every individual sea-ice minimum year that help us better understand the vulnerability of the ice."

Those variations can have a significant impact on those living in the region, from Indigenous communities to land and marine animals to the smallest flora and fauna. In the case of polar bears, for example, an earlier freeze in one area might mean an earlier hunting season, while a longer ice season might encourage the migration of bears from other areas. Understanding the variations, and the way animals are responding, is key to successful conservation, Lehner said.

"If we designate something, a national park or a marine sanctuary, but climate change makes that not habitable anymore for a species that we are trying to protect, then that's a problem," he said. "It's a lot about teasing as much out of the data as we can to be prepared." *Bloomberg*





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## From print to film, this is how I continue my reportage on Kaliwa Dam and the environment

BY MADELAINE B. MIRAFLORE

**"LUNOD"** — a short documentary I filmed to explore the connection between the sacred Tinipak River and Rock Formation in Rizal province and the local community living in the area — will have its international premiere today, September 27, at London's Discover Film Awards.

But before I provide more details, let me share how I got into documentary filmmaking.

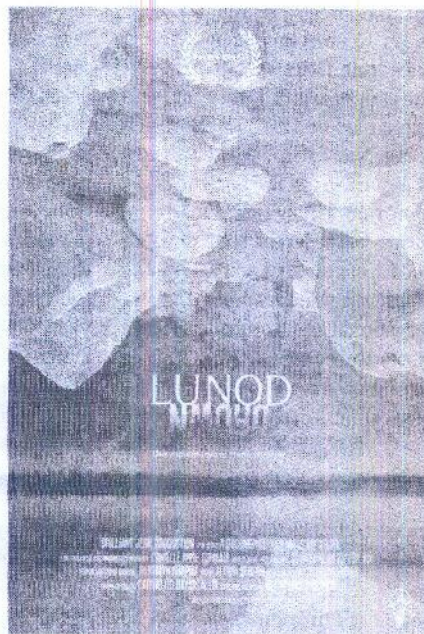
Sometime in 2021, I learned about an opening in one of the country's premier government organizations. This wasn't merely an ordinary job opening; it entailed the establishment of an entire division tasked with implementing the recently enacted **Philippine Innovation Act**. Seeking a fresh direction in my life and craving a new challenge, I did the boldest thing and applied. I was already surprised to qualify for the exam, but even more surprising was that I did not only pass but also ranked first. I underwent panel and final interviews and was ultimately selected for the position.

This is how I left journalism — a profession that gave me a sense of fulfillment for almost a decade. But did I really want to leave? Well, I just knew that my time was already up somehow. I have already experienced a lot as a journalist and even explored different storytelling techniques, ranging from the traditional inverted pyramid style to a more immersive, contextual journalism that somehow borders on non-fiction. As a journalist, I have already covered many things, including corporate, capital markets, energy, utilities, environment and agriculture. And for some reason, I began to feel that perhaps it was time to pass the torch to the younger generation, to make space for fresh voices and perspectives in the field.

Fast-forward to the present, I no longer work in government. I decided to dedicate myself full-time to our independent production company, Brilliant Jerk Production. This is while I continue to take up my MA in Creative Writing at the University of the Philippines Diliman.

As I exhausted my available creative writing courses, I found myself with a single elective left to complete my coursework. At this juncture, I opted to enroll in a documentary filmmaking class at the UP Film Institute. It was in this class that I produced my short documentary "Lunod," which centered around Nanay Nelly, a 63-year-old member of the Dumagat tribe, who shared her account of the river's significance, ranging from tragic tales of drowning incidents to her theories behind these occurrences. Nanay Nelly is now one of the oldest members of the Dumagat tribe, the original inhabitants of the forest in Rizal province.

Through Nanay Nelly's storytelling, the



documentary delved into her cherished memories, both positive and negative, associated with the river. The narrative took an unexpected turn as Nanay Nelly confronted a pressing concern — the imminent construction of the Kaliwa Dam. This mega dam, proposed by the Philippine government as a solution to water scarcity in Metro Manila, threatens to transform the Tinipak River and Rock Formation into a mere expanse of water.

Looking back, as a journalist, I did spend a lot of time pursuing stories surrounding the Kaliwa Dam and the ongoing water crisis in Metro Manila. Therefore, when the opportunity arose for us to propose ideas for our inaugural documentary project, it was almost instinctive for me to suggest exploring this pressing issue. This led me to the realization that perhaps, even though I no longer belong to any media organization, I can still pursue journalism through documentary filmmaking — this being "the creative treatment of actuality" (John Grierson).

"Lunod" is among the 45 films selected from over 3,000 entries worldwide to screen at the Discover Film Awards. Of these 45 films, "Lunod" stood as one of the four films nominated for the prestigious Craghoppers' Documentary Prize.

The documentary will be screened at the Charlotte Street Hotel in London as part of the Discover Film Awards. Additionally, on October 1, an exclusive red carpet awards ceremony will take place at Proud Embankment, by invitation only, where all of this year's winners, including those of the Craghoppers' Prizes, will be announced.

*The author is an alumna of The Manila Times College.*





# Scientists uncover new pangolin species

**BANGKOK:** The small, scaly and highly endangered pangolin has been keeping a secret: it comprises not eight species but nine, with a new one discovered through analysis of confiscated scales.

Scientists previously believed there were four Asian and four African varieties of the shy, nocturnal creature, which is often described as the world's most trafficked mammal.

However, even as the species was discovered, there are signs it may be disappearing, according to research published Tuesday in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Pangolin scales are coveted for use in traditional medicine, despite being made of keratin, just like fingernails, and the diminutive creature is also hunted for its meat.

More than a million are believed to have been poached from the wild in the decade to 2014, according to conservationists, and all international trade has been banned since 2016.

Despite its elusive nature,

there have been suggestions before that the pangolin family might be bigger than believed.

Analysis of 27 scales confiscated in Hong Kong in 2012 and 2013 suggested a lineage unrelated to the eight known species.

But only limited gene fragments were available, and no definitive conclusion could be reached.

Picking up that trail, researchers analyzed scales from two confiscations in China's Yunnan province in 2015 and 2019 and compared them against whole genome data from all previously known species.

They found a lineage "distinct from all eight currently known pangolin species," with signs it belonged to the Asian or "Manis" branch of the pangolin family.

They assigned the new species the tentative name "Manis mysteria" in a nod to its enigmatic nature and found it likely diverged from the Philippine and Malayan pangolin species about 5 million years ago.

The newly described animal's existence only came to light through samples seized from traffickers, and the research suggests the new species is already under pressure.

Analysis "showed genomic signatures of a declining population, including the relatively low genetic diversity when compared to other pangolins ... (and) high levels of inbreeding and genetic load." Just where *Manis mysteria* roams remains ... something of a mystery.

Asian pangolins arriving in

Hong Kong and Yunnan are believed to mostly originate in Southeast Asia.

But because the new species does not look very different from its Asian cousins, it may well have been overlooked in the wild.

It could also have escaped notice because it lives in an understudied region, or simply because pangolins tend to be hard to find.

Regardless, the findings suggest the "urgent need" for more research, as well as "effective strategies for this mysterious species," the study said.

AFP