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DENR

IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



Cimatu: Cut down on plastics that clog oceans

By RHODINA VILLANUEVA

Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Roy Cimatu has called upon Filipinos to cut down on the use of plastics that often end up in oceans and threaten marine life.

Cimatu, who made the appeal during the department's celebration of World Wildlife Day (WWD) 2019, noted that plastic pollution is one of the greatest threats to ocean health worldwide, with an estimated

eight million tons of plastic waste finding its way into oceans every year.

"The task of reversing this issue is as big and wide as the ocean, but small actions can make a huge difference," he said as he urged people to become "stewards of marine life" by reducing the use of plastics.

According to Ocean Conservancy, at least eight million tons of plastic enter the ocean each year on top of the 150 million tons of plastic that already

circulate in it. This contributes to the loss of species and contamination of the food chain.

In the 2017 International Coastal Cleanup report, the top polluting items found in the oceans were cigarette butts, plastic bottles and caps, straws and stirrers and plastic bags. It also indicated that such waste could harm one million seabirds, 100,000 sea mammals as well as marine turtles and countless fish annually. The harm brought to these crea-

tures is either due to ingestion or entanglement.

Citing a United Nations report, Cimatu said the Philippines is one of Top 5 contributors of plastic waste in the world's oceans, accounting for about half of the total plastic leakage.

"We produce 2.7 metric tons of plastic waste every year," Cimatu said. "Following this trajectory of plastic production and mismanagement, UN reports predict that by 2050,

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there would be more plastic in the oceans than there are fish."

Meanwhile, the DENR, through its Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB), gave out 44 medals during the 6th Wildlife Law Enforcement Awards to the men and women who defended the "voiceless wildlife species" against illegal collectors and traders.

The awardees consist of 21 officers from the National Bureau of Investigation; 14 from the Bureau of Customs; six from the Philippine National Police; two from the city government of Cebu; and one from the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Animal Industry.

BMB director Crisanta Marlene Rodriguez said that annually, the DENR "bestows official recognition to partners who have valuable contributions in the enforcement of wildlife laws, rules and regulations."

"For the past five years, the DENR has conferred the Wildlife Law Enforcement Awards on at least 365 men and women," she said.

WWD 2019 carries the theme "Life below water: for people and planet," featuring a formal awarding ceremony for the recipients of grants from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for graduate students pursuing further studies aligned with the project's research priorities in conserving biodiversity in the Philippines.



IN BRIEF

Cut down on use of plastics—DENR

ENVIRONMENT Secretary Roy Cimatu on Monday told Filipinos to be stewards of marine life and cut down the use of plastics that end up in the ocean and pose threat to marine life.

He said plastic pollution is one of the greatest threats to ocean health worldwide with estimated eight million tons of plastic waste finding their way into the oceans.

“The task of reversing this issue is as big and wide as the ocean, but small actions can make a huge difference,” he said.

The environment chief appealed to the public to join the rest of the world in celebrating the World Wildlife Day 2019 with the theme “Life below water: for people and planet.”

According to Ocean Conservancy, eight million tons of plastic enter the ocean each year on top of the 150 million tons of plastic that already circulate in the ocean, contributing to loss of species and contamination of food chain. **Rio N. Araja**



Bay rehab reveals Duterte's soft side



Manny B. Villar

THE ENTREPRENEUR

MANY Filipinos are now beginning to appreciate the soft side of President Rodrigo Duterte despite his tough stance on his war on drugs. Mr. Duterte, not to the surprise of many, also cares about the environment and its benefits to the population, tourism and the economy in general. His initial success in cleaning up Boracay Island gained the support of the Filipino people and was lauded here and abroad. It started the momentum to rehabilitate other tourist attractions in the Philippines.

President Duterte now faces the most daunting task of all: the very ambitious and long-delayed cleanup of Manila Bay. No past presidents of the republic have succeeded in restoring Manila Bay to its original state, where one can swim in its clean waters and enjoy its spectacular sunset without the sight of filth and floating garbage.

Manila Bay will not be rehabilitated in three years, or until the expiration of President Duterte's term in 2022. The more relevant question, for me, however, is what can be done in three years? I believe the government can accomplish many things in cleaning up Manila Bay, and Pasig River for that matter, in three years

and that those deeds will speed up the momentum and lead to an irreversible trend to finish the job, whoever succeeds President Duterte.

The Manila Bay rehabilitation will not be a success, of course, without the support of his Cabinet members and the international community, which has long urged the Philippines to do the job soon. The cleanup is also a perfect complement to President Duterte's tough stand against drugs, graft and corruption, the New People's Army and terrorism. For me, the rehabilitation of Manila Bay represents the soft side of the President.

But his soft side should not be mistaken for a weakness in his

character. President Duterte was firm in his directive in early January to rehabilitate Manila Bay and warned establishments along the bay that he would not hesitate to order their closure if they challenge his call. "Whether they like it or not, all of them, including the hotels, must put water treatment for their waste discharge or else I will shut them down," said the President.

Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Roy Cimatu, meanwhile, is lucky to be given the opportunity by the President to rehabilitate Boracay Island and Manila Bay. Mr. Cimatu may be remembered in time as the best environment secretary of the Philippines after receiving the full support of President Duterte in implementing these rehabilitation projects.

Mr. Cimatu so far is implementing President Duterte's directive to the letter. He has urged 178 mayors of the cities and municipalities surrounding Manila Bay to do their share in the bay's rehabilitation by cleaning up their rivers and esteros.

"We have to clean all 47 esteros and all the rivers that contribute to the pollution of Manila Bay. Nobody should be left alone, we will one by one ask them [to help]," he said.

He reminded local officials to implement environmental laws and clear the waterways of squatters, and

asked them to identify the sources of water pollution in their areas and do something about it.

"Once we clean the esteros and rivers, garbage will not go out to Manila Bay. We'll make it a point that the water that reaches Manila Bay is clean," he said. "Even if it takes us one, two or three years to clean these rivers, we have to do it."

The absence of wastewater-treatment facilities along the tributaries and waterways of Metro Manila and nearby municipalities is largely contributing to the high coliform content of the waters of Manila Bay.

Mr. Cimatu has the full support of President Duterte, who minced no words in his early warnings against hotels and other commercial establishments contributing to the pollution of Manila Bay.

"Do not challenge me. If we do not have tourists, so be it. We are not going to die without them. You do something about your waste there, or we will have you closed down. That's for sure," said the President.

I am confident President Duterte's directive to clean up Manila Bay will be a success and set the tone for other similar projects. A strong political will and his high popularity ratings are backing him up.

For comments, e-mail mbv.secretariat@gmail.com or visit www.mannyvillar.com.ph.



Less catch in Manila Bay dredging, say fisherfolk

A group of militant fisherfolk on Wednesday expressed concern over the potential economic and environmental impact of the dredging activities on Manila Bay to the livelihood of small fishermen in surrounding areas.

"Dredging-related stressors such as movement of solid particles, the discharge of toxic contaminants, and noise pollution can effectively disrupt the movement of fish species and various marine life in Manila Bay," said Fernando Hicap, national chair of Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalalakaya).

On Tuesday, the Department of Public Works and Highways began massive dredging activities in a 1.5-kilometer stretch of Manila Bay to remove more than 225,000 cubic meters of silt and garbage from the bay.

Respect rights

"While we support a genuine rehabilitation of Manila Bay to restore its ecosystem, the government must assure us that

the dredging part will not result in reclamation and that the rights of the small fisherfolk would be respected," added Hicap, a former Anakpawis party-list representative, addressing the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Hicap said he feared that long-term dredging would affect the income of small fisherfolk whose catch had been dwindling in recent years because of environmental degradation.

Fisherfolk used to catch from 10 to 15 kilos a day. That has now fallen to 2 to 5 kilos, he added.

Pamalalakaya said the government must provide more livelihood and economic assistance to the fisherfolk who would be affected by the dredging.

43 pending projects

The group also urged the DENR to prevent "a full-scale sellout of Manila Bay" to private developers, as it noted that there are over 43 pending reclamation projects covering more than 30,000 hectares of Manila Bay.

Included in the project are 4,900 hectares en-

compassing portions of Cavite province, according to Pamalakaya.

In Bacoor, Cavite, the local government has partnered with Frabelle Fishing Corp. and Aboitiz for a 944-hectare reclamation project.

Another joint project between the provincial government and controversial businessman Wilfredo Keng covers more than 2,200 hectares.

The reclamation projects could affect 26,000 coastal families from Bacoor, Noveleta, Kawit, Rosario and Cavite City through displacement and forcible ejection, Pamalakaya warned.

Malacañang earlier said that the reclamation projects would generate income for the government and bring in more jobs for Filipino workers.

Although Interior Secretary Eduardo Año has said that all reclamation projects would be reviewed, he also clarified that while his department could recommend whether or not the project should push through, Malacañang would have the last say.



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Garbage removal underway; ending pollution will take time

THE Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) have started deploying amphibious excavators along the 1.5-kilometer shoreline along Roxas Blvd. between the Manila Yacht Club and the United States Embassy.

At least 20 trucks will be used to transport the trash that the excavators are expected to raise from the waters close to the shore. There have been occasional cleanup drives conducted by civic groups that collected trash on the shores of the bay. This time, with the excavators, the DPWH and the DENR intend to reach farther out into the bay and remove the garbage dumped over so many decades..

The silt and garbage raised from the waters of the bay will go through a waste segregation machine and the trash will be taken to a Navotas landfill while the mire and soil will be dumped in Bicutan, Taguig City. This dredging operation may take three months. The goal is to remove all the garbage that now covers the sand at the bottom of the bay.

It must be stressed, however, that this excavation operation is only part of the rehabilitation plan for Manila Bay. The bigger part will be the elimination of the pollution that now flows into it with the waste water coming from the thousands of homes and establishments in Metro Manila. Because of all these untreated wastes, the fecal coliform bacterial level in many parts of the bay is said to have reached 350 MPN (Most Probable Number) per 100 milliliters, when the acceptable level is only 100 MPN.

At the start of the cleanup, the Manila Zoo, along with several hotels and restaurants, were closed down for directly dumping their wastewater into sewers flowing into the bay. Metro Manila's two water concessionaires, which have been collecting funds from households to set up wastewater treatment plants, expect close to 100 percent coverage of their areas by about 2037.

And this is only Metro Manila with its Pasig River collecting waste water from heavily populated towns along the way as well as from Laguna de Bay with its own set of towns and five river systems that flow into it from Southern Luzon – the Boso-boso river in Rizal, the Zapote river in Cavite, the San Cristobal river in Laguna, the San Juan river in Batangas, and the Iyam-Dumacaa river in Quezon. The DENR said hundreds of hog farms have long been disposing of their animal wastes into these rivers.

There are other river systems carrying their own pollution directly into Manila Bay from Bataan in the west, Pampanga and Bulacan in the north, and Cavite in the south.

All this pollution has made Manila Bay what it is today, a body of water unsafe for swimming or any other form of "contact recreation."

The excavators deployed by the DPWH and DENR will remove the more visible garbage that now covers the sand along Roxas Boulevard. The real pollution is less visible – the bacteria thriving in the wastewater from Metro Manila and Laguna de Bay, that can cause disease upon contact.

We must not expect any quick solution to this long-neglected problem of Manila Bay. We can only be thankful that finally, the government is acting on it.



Department of Environment and Natural Resources
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION INITIATIVES SERVICE

THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
SINCE 1900

MANILA BULLETIN

THE NATION'S LEADING NEWSPAPER

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EDITORIAL

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EDITORIAL

Tatangalin na ang mga basura; ngunit matatagalan bago maihinto ang polusyon

SINIMULAN na ng Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) at ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ang pagtatalaga ng mga amphibious excavators sa 1.5 kilometrong baybayin sa kahabaan ng Roxas Blvd. sa pagitan ng Manila Yacht Club at ng Embahada ng Amerika.

Hindi bababa sa 20 truck ang gagamitin upang ikarga ang mga basura na inaasahang mahuhukay ng mga excavators mula sa tubig na malapit sa baybayin. Nagkakaroon ng mga panaka-nakang paglilinis sa baybayin ang iba't ibang grupo na nakakalikom ng mga basura sa baybayin ng look. Sa pagkakataong ito, gamit ang mga excavators, pakay ng DPWH at DENR na mas malayo ang maabot nito sa look at matanggal ang mga basurang natambak na doon sa maraming nagdaang dekada.

Mapupunta ang mga banlik at basura na maiaagat mula sa tubig ng Manila bay sa waste segregation machines at saka dadalhin sa Navotas landfill habang ang mga burak at lupa ay itatambak sa Bicutan, Taguig City. Maaaring abutin ng tatlong buwan ang paghuhukay na ito. Ang hangad ay ang matanggal ang lahat ng basura na ngayon ay tumatabon sa buhangin sa ilalim ng look.

Gayunman, kailangang bigyang-diin na ang paghuhukay na ito ay bahagi lamang ng planong rehabilitasyon para sa Manila bay. Ang mas malaking bahagi nito ay ang pagtanggap sa polusyon na ngayon ay dumadaloy dito sa mga maruruming tubig na nagmumula sa libu-libong kabahayan at establisyamento sa Metro Manila. Dahil sa lahat ng duming ito, sinasabing umabot na sa 350 MPN (Most Probable Number) per 100 milliliters, ang fecal coliform bacterial level sa maraming bahagi ng look, gayong nasa 100 MPN lamang ang katanggap-tanggap.

Sa simula ng paglilinis, ipinag-utos ang pagsasara ng Manila Zoo, kasama ng ilang hotel at kainan na direktang nagtatapon ng kanilang dumi sa mga alkantarilya na dumadaloy patungong look. Ang dalawang water concessionaries ng Metro Manila na matagal nang nangongolekta ng pondo mula sa mga kabahayan upang magtayo ng wastewater treatment plant, ay umaasang masakop ang halos 100 porsiyento ng kanilang mga sakop na lugar bago ang 2037.

Ito ay sa Metro Manila pa lamang kasama ng Ilog Pasig na tumatanggap sa mga dumi na nagmumula sa siksikang bayan, gayundin sa Laguna de Bay kasama ng mga bayang nasa paligid nito at ang limang ilog na dumadaloy dito mula sa Katimugan ng Luzon – ang ilog ng Boso-boso sa Rizal, ang ilog ng Zapote sa Cavite, ilog San Cristobal sa Laguna, ilog ng San Juan sa Batangas at ang ilog ng Iyam-Dumacaa sa Quezon. Ayon sa DENR daan-daang babuyan ang nagtatapon ng kanilang mga dumi ng hayop sa mga ilog na ito.

May iba pang mga ilog na direktang nagdadala ng kanilang sariling polusyon sa Manila Bay mula sa Bataan sa kanluran, Pampanga at Bulacan sa hilaga, at Cavite sa timog.

Lahat ng polusyong ito ang nagluklok sa Manila bay sa kasalukuyang kalagayan nito, isang bahagi ng tubig na hindi ligtas na languyan o ng anumang uri ng "contact recreation."

Tatangalin ng mga excavators na ilalagay ng DPWH at DENR ang mga nakikitang basura na nagtataklob sa buhangin sa kahabaan ng Roxas Blvd. Ngunit hindi gaanong nakikita ang tunay na polusyon – ang mga bacteria na dumarami mula sa maduming tubig ng Metro Manila at Laguna de Bay, na maaaring magdulot ng sakit.

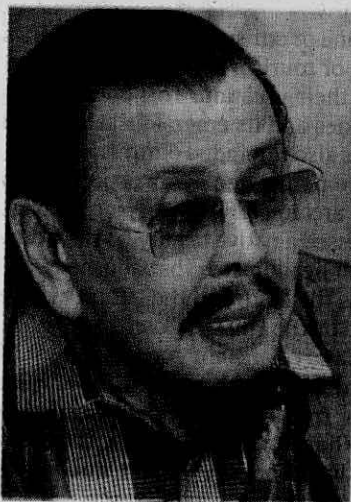
Hindi tayo dapat umasa ng mabilis na solusyon sa matagal nang napabayaang problema ng Manila Bay. Tanging magagawa natin ay magpasalamat na sa wakas ay tinutugunan na ito ng pamahalaan.



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DATE

'DEMOLITION JOB'



Manila Mayor Joseph Estrada
—MARIANNE BERMUDEZ

ERAP HITS FOILED TRY TO DUMP WASTE

By Aie Balagtas See
@ABSeeINQ

As far as Manila Mayor Joseph Estrada is concerned, the foiled attempt to dump a truckload of suspected human waste into one of the city's drainage canals was meant to make him look bad.

"It's a demolition job," Estrada said on Monday during a press conference at city hall.

He was referring to Friday's incident in which a surveillance camera caught two men alighting from a truck and dumping its contents into a drainage system in front of Century Hotel.

A hotel security guard, however, accosted the two men who fled in their truck.

The incident happened in the middle of the national government's widespread program to rehabilitate Manila Bay with the help of local officials.

Estrada, who is running for reelection against his former vice mayor, Isko Moreno, and predecessor Alfredo Lim, felt that the incident was politically motivated.

"Who would the people blame? Me, right? The public will say there is no government here in Manila," he said.

He added that the incident was an insult to the city government and residents.

Manila's police chief, however, did not agree with Estrada.

No evidence

"We are facts-based," said Chief Supt. Vicente Danao, Manila Police District (MPD) director. "We don't have any information on [his theory] yet."

According to the MPD, it has has yet to identify the truck driver and his helper, and what exactly they dumped into the canal.

A check of the surveillance camera's footage showed only five of the six alphanumeric characters on the truck's license plate. INQ



₱100k reward vs nagtapon ng dumi ng tao

Nag-alok ng P100,000 pabuya si Manila Mayor Joseph Estrada sa sinumang makapagbibigay ng impormasyon para maaresto ang driver at may-ari ng truck na ginamit sa pagtatapon ng dumi ng tao sa isang kanal sa Malate, noong nakaraang buwan.

Ayon kay Estrada, sa kanya mismo manggagaling ang naturang reward at handa siyang doblehin pa ito kung kakailanganin.

Batay sa ulat, Pebrero 4 nang magtapon ng dumi ng tao ang truck sa isang kanal sa Pablo Ocampo Street sa Malate.

Nakuhanan ng CCTV camera ang pagparada ng truck sa lugar at pagtatapon nito ng dumi ng tao sa kanal, na dumadaloy sa Manila Bay, kaya malinaw na paglabag ito sa Clean Water Act.

Ang truck na ginamit ay may plakang TNV-48, ngunit hindi nakuha ang dulong numero nito, dahil yupi umano ang dulong bahagi ng plaka.

Hinala naman ni Estrada, posibleng ilang kalaban niya sa pulitika ang nasa

likod ng insidente, upang sirain ang kanyang kandidatura.

"Siyempre, sasabihin ang dumi ng Maynila, wala akong ginagawa. Pinupulitika 'yang isyu na 'yan. May hinala na ako kung sino ang nasa likod niyan para sirain ako," ani Estrada.

"Sa akin manggagaling ang reward, ipanguingutang ko 'yan basta masuntok ko lang. At kapag nasentensiyahan do doblehin ko, gagawin kong P200,000," anang alkalde.

Samantala, sa panig naman ni Manila Police District (MPD) Director Chief Supt. Vicente Danao, sinabi niyang mas makabubuti na sumuko na lang ang driver ng truck dahil mayroon nang iimbestigahan trucking company ang pulisya na ang negosyo ay may kaugnayan sa pagsipsip ng poso negro.

"Kapag hindi sila sumuko, pahihirapan namin ang negosyo nila," babala ni Danao.

Mary Ann Santiago



TITLE:

EXCUSE me po!

Bumaligtad ang sikmura ng mga taga-Malate, Manila, partikular sa kanal ng Ocampo Street, nang may isang truck na nagtapon ng dumi ng tao sa kanila noong nakaraang Lunes.

Eh mabuti kung parang utot lang ang amoy niyan na sa ilang segundo lang ay tinatangay na ng hangin.

Solid waste o material na basura ang dumi ng tao na hangga't hindi natutunaw o mailagay sa tamang lalagyan ay mananatili ang amoy sa lugar na pinagtapunan nito.

Nakunan ng CCTV ang trak ngunit hindi gaanong nakilala ito dahil nilagyan ito ng decoy para magmukhang isang delivery trak ito.

Pinahahanap na ng pamahalaan ni Mayor ang trak at kompanya na may-ari nito para mapanagot sa batas.

SA BENGUET DIN

Hindi lang sa Maynila nagaganap ang pagtatapon ng dumi ng tao sa kanal, mga Bro.

Pagkatapos na pagkatapos lang ng Kapaskuhan sa La Trinidad, Benguet nitong nakaraang taon, isang trak ng dumi ng tao ang itinapon sa isang kanal.

Anak ng tokwa, may umaagos na tubig sa kanal at dinala ang dumi ng tao sa mga pinagkukunan ng inumin at panluto ng mga tao.

Umagos din ang maraming tubig sa mga taniman.

Perwisyo talaga ang naganap.

DELIKADO SA MAYNILA

Delikado rin ang pagtatapon ng ebak sa Maynila.

Ipagpalagay nating may dumi ng tao na galing sa maysakit na nahalo rito.

O galing sa mga ospital o puneraryang ang trak.

Maimadyin ba ninyo, mga Bro, kung ano ang dulot nitong perwisyo sa kalusugan ng mga mamamayan?

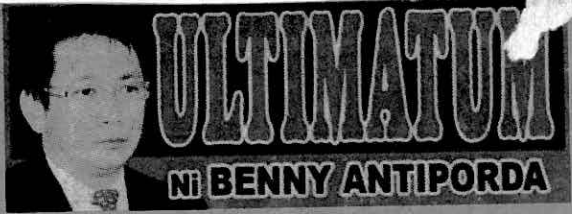
ANG LINYA NG TUBIG

May mga linya ng tubig na matatagpuan sa mga kanal.

Maaaring tumawid ang mga ito sa kanal o isinama sa kanal.

Paano kung may bitak ang mga ito at pumasok sa mga tubo ang mga dumi ng tao?

Sakit ang aabutin ng



MAGBABASURA NG DUMI HABULIN

sinomang makainom ng tubig na may dumi ng tao.

Baka may mamatay pa dahil sa labis na pagsusuka, diarrhea at pagkakaroon ng sakit mula sa may sakit.

'Yun ngang maamoy mo ang isang diaper na tangay-tangay ng aso, eh, magkakasakit ka sa hindi paghinga, eh 'di lalong magkakasakit ka kapag nainom mo ang may ebak na drinking water?

Ang pitong putakte talaga.

AKSYON NG BAYAN

Ang isang magandang nangyari sa Malate, Maynila, naging aktibo ang mga mamamayan.

Makaraang hindi pangkaraniwan ang galaw ng tsuper at pahinante ng trak, tumawag agad ang mga nakakita ng barangay tanod para tingnan ang ginagawa ng mga ito.

Nang makahalata ang mga nagtatapon ng dumi, agad silang umalis at nainwan nila ang umaamoy nang kanal.

Napigilan ang lubos na pagtatapon ng basura sa lugar.

At ngayon naman, puspusang hinahanap ng pamahalaan ni Mayor Erap ang nagtapon ng dumi upang magawan ng ligal na aksyon.

Kaisa ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources ang pamahalaang Estrada laban sa hindi tamang pagtatapon ng basura.

DALAWANG BATAS

Maaaring dalawang batas ang pagmulan ng mga kaso sa nagtapon ng dumi ng tao.

Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 at Philippine Clean Water Act of 2004.

Sa ilalim ng batas sa solid management, ang ginawa ng tarantado sa Malate ay maaaring maparusahan ng P200,000 multa at makulong ng hanggang tatlong taon.

Mas mabigat ang parusa sa ilalim ng Philippine Clean Water Act dahil, depende sa katatagan ng imbestigasyon, maaaring maparusahan ang mga basurero ng P500,000-P3 milyon kada araw na

multa at hanggang 10 taong pagkabilanggo.

Ganyan kabigat ang parusa sa mga nagtatapon ng basura sa kung saan-saan.

Lalo na kung toxic ang mga basura at talaga namang nakalalason sa tao, sa tubig, sa hangin, halamanan at iba pa hanggang sa maaaring magkasakit at mamatay ang mga tao, hayup at halaman.

HABANG BINABASA

Marami ang hindi nakaalam ng responsibilidad sa hindi tamang pagtatapon ng basura.

Sa mga barangay, nakikita ang mga karatula kung paano tratuhin ang mga nagtatapon ng basura kahit saan at nakabatay ang mga ito sa mga barangay ordinance o municipal o city ordinance.

Multa at community service ang nakikita ng mga tao na parusa.

Kung may kulong man, ilang araw lang.

Pero panahon na talaga na makialam ang mga tao at alamin ang mga seryosong pagtatapon ng mga basura na delikado at toxic.

Mabibigat ang mga parusa, sa totoo lang, gaya ng nabanggit natin sa itaas.

Maganda kung kahit sa barangay level ay magbigay sina kapitan at mga kagawad ng mga seminar laban sa bawal na pagtatapon ng basura.

Bukod kasi sa mga ordinansang pambarangay, dapat na ikonekta ang mga ito sa mga pambansang batas at makatutulong ang mga municipal environment officer dito.

Hindi tatanggi aing municipal o city environment officer na magbigay-kaalaman at linaw sa mga pambansang batas ukol sa mga basura sa hangin, tubig at solid waste.

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Anomang reaksiyon o reklamo ay maaaring iparating sa 0922840-3333 o i-email sa bantiporda@yahoo.com



PH now the second largest habitat of whale sharks – DENR

By **ALI G. MACABALANG**

KORANADAL CITY – Fourteen (14) whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*) spotted surface feeding in Sarangani Bay last March 9 has placed the Philippines in the map as the second largest habitat of whale sharks.

This is the second time that whale sharks were spotted in Sarangani Bay since 2014 where two whale sharks were spotted.

“The recent documentation of whale sharks in Sarangani Bay made the Philippines as the second largest known population of whale sharks in the world, according to the Wildbook for Whale Sharks, a global online library providing visual database of whale shark encounters around the world,” the DENR-12 said in a statement.

The DENR-12, through its GenSan-based Task Force Butanding, forwarded corresponding data to the Large Marine Vertebrates (LAMAWE) Research Institute for individual tagging of the 14 whale sharks.

It said the new discoveries were tagged as P1597, P1598, P1599, P1601, P1603, P1604, P1606, P1607, P1608, P1609, P1614, P1615, P1616, and P1605 in its continuous monitoring. The two whale sharks earlier found were tagged as P640 and P641, the DENR added.

Australia, which the LAMAWE named earlier as the second largest habitat of whale sharks, has been overtaken by the Philippines with the March 9 discovery. Mexico waters remain the world's top whale sharks habitat, the DENR statement said.

“The Philippines’ (rise) to the **►4**

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number two spot highlights (its) global significance...for the endangered species and emphasizes the country as a conservation leader for the species in South East Asia,” it added.

DENR-12 Regional Executive Director Nilo Tamera commended members of the Task Force Butanding Gensan for their latest feat. The task force is a composite team responsible for the protection and conservation of whale sharks.

“We should intensify our information

drive to the community on the presence of whale sharks in the area and the prohibited acts as stipulated in Republic Act 9147 or the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act and other related laws,” Tamera was quoted telling task force members.

Sarangani Gov. Steve Chiongbian-Solon ordered the Environmental Conservation and Protection Center (ECPC) to lead the research team together with DENR and local government units to gather relevant

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data that would help in the conservation and protection of whale sharks.

Dr. Roy Operario Mejorada of the ECPC said his team's daily monitoring of whale shark sightings and documenting their behaviors have drawn support from various quarters.

General Santos City Councilor Shandee Llido, Protected Area Superintendent Joy Ologuin and Dr. Rosalinda Cortez of the DENR-Sarangani office are reported to be working on another ordinance declaring General Santos City waters a critical habitat of the whale sharks.



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'BUTANDING' SIGHTING

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WHALE SHARKS RETURN TO SARANGANI BAY; EXECS URGE STUDY TO PROTECT 'GENTLE GIANTS'

GENERAL SANTOS CITY—At least 14 whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*), or “butanding,” have been seen feeding in Sarangani Bay since last month, prompting local and environment officials to appeal to coastal communities to protect these sea creatures.

Nilo Tamoria, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) regional director in Soccsksargen (South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani and General Santos) said some of the butanding

were recently seen feeding in the waters off Barangay Silway during the monitoring that started in late February.

Protection

The Task Force Butanding-GenSan said this made the Philippines the second country, after Mexico, with the most number of whale sharks, quoting a report from Wildbook for Whale Sharks, a global online library that provides a visual database of whale sharks en-

counters around the world.

“[We need to ensure] that these whale sharks should be protected while they are still in our area ... There is a possibility that they will be harmed if we will not act soon,” Tamoria said in a statement.

He said the task force, composed of different government agencies, had tagged the whale sharks seen feeding on surface waters.

Sarangani Gov. Steve Solon instructed the province’s Envi-

ronmental Conservation and Protection Center (ECPC) to conduct research to boost efforts to conserve and protect the butanding, also called “gentle giants” as they pose little threat to humans.

Butanding sighting had been recorded in Sarangani as early as 2006.

Food supply

In 2014, the DENR documented two whale sharks off the waters of this city, the agency said.

According to the task force,

the highly migratory whale sharks could have been drawn to Sarangani Bay due to the abundance of sardine, locally known as “lupuy.”

Roy Mejorada, ECPC chief, said the team had been conducting daily monitoring also to document the behavior of butanding.

“We want to understand why they are here so we can contribute to the scientific information on their biology,” he said.

Mejorada said data that the team would gather would also

help local governments draft ordinances for the protection of whale sharks in the 211,913-hectare Sarangani Bay.

The Philippines, which has a whale shark population of at least 1,600, dislodged Australia as the country with the second largest known population of whale sharks in the world, according to a report this month of the Large Marine Vertebrates Research Institute. —REPORTS

FROM BONG S. SARMIENTO AND EDWIN FERNANDEZ INQ



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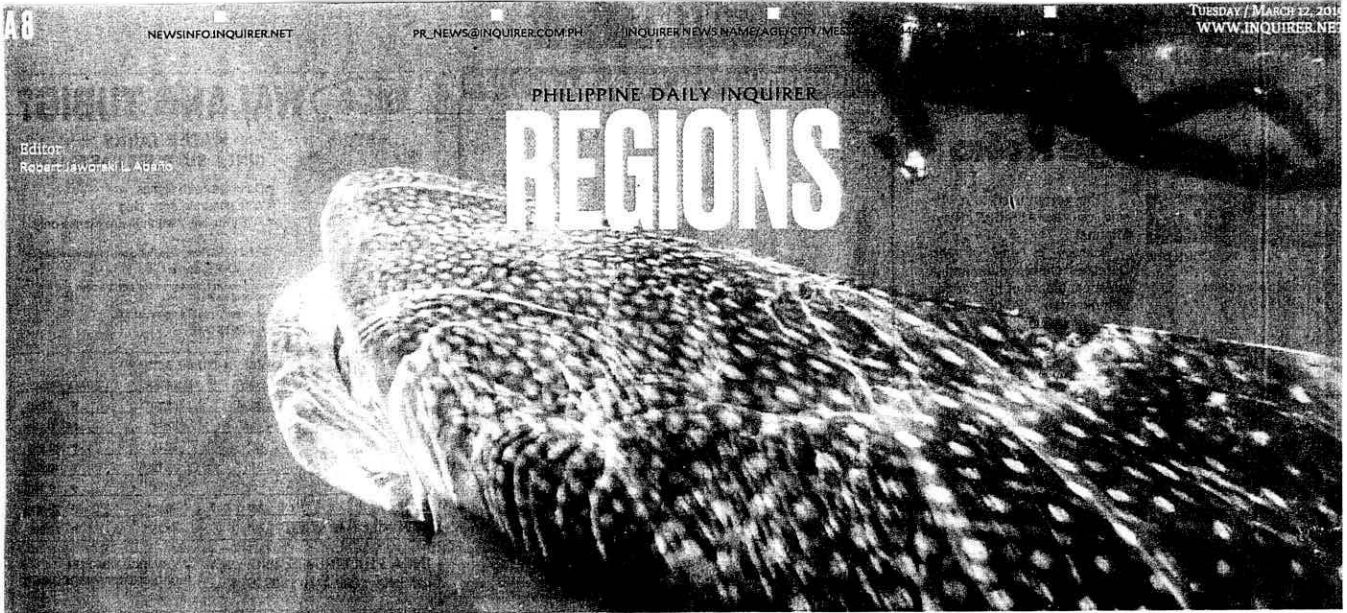
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FEEDING TIME The abundance of food, particularly sardine, or "lupuy," has drawn whale sharks to Sarangani Bay in Mindanao, according to a government task force. —PHOTO COURTESY OF DENR SARANGAN



Whale sharks in Sarangani Bay up to 14

KORONADAL CITY—A total of 14 whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*) were discovered and documented in Sarangani Bay on Saturday.

The Task Force Butanding Gensan disclosed that the recent documentation of whale sharks in Sarangani Bay made the Philippines as the second largest known population of whale sharks in the world, according to the Wildbook for Whale Sharks, a global online library that provides a visual database of whale shark encounters around the world.

These whale sharks or “butanding” were spotted surface feeding in the waters adjacent to Silway, General Santos City which were officially tagged as P1597, P1598, P1599, P1601, P1603, P1604, P1606, P1607, P1608, P1609, P1614, P1615, P1616 and one in Kiamba, Sarangani (P1605).

This is an addition to two whale sharks P-640 and P-641 that were documented in General Santos City by the Department of Environment of Environment and Natural Resources in Region XII and the City ENRO in the year 2014 making up a total number of 16 whale sharks documented in Sarangani Bay.

The documentation was forwarded to Large Marine Vertebrates Research Institute for individual identification.

In a recent article from the LAMAVE Research Institute, Australia was once recognized as the second largest known population on the database, while Mexico remains the number one global hotspot.



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14 more whale sharks spotted off Sarangani Bay

By ALI MACABALANG

KORANADAL CITY – Fourteen more whale sharks (*Rhincodon typus*) have been found in Sarangani Bay, making the Philippines the second largest habitat of the endangered marines species, locally called “butanding”.

The whales were discovered last March 9 in the waters off Silway near General Santos City, that brought to 16 the total number of whale sharks spotted in Sarangani Bay since 2014, according to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

“The recent documentation of whale sharks in Sarangani Bay made the Philippines as the second

largest known population of whale sharks in the world, according to the Wildbook for Whale Sharks, a global online library providing visual database of whale shark encounters around the world,” the DENR-12 statement said.

The DENR-12, through its GenSan-based Task Force Butanding, forwarded corresponding data to the Large Marine Vertebrates (LAMAWE) Research Institute for individual tagging of the 14 whale sharks.

Australia, which the LAMAWE named earlier as the second largest habitat of whale sharks, has been overtaken by the Philippines with the March 9 discovery. Mexico waters remain as the world’s top whale sharks habitat, the DENR statement said.

“The Philippines’ (rise) to the number two spot highlights (its) global significance...for the endan-

gered species and emphasizes the country as a conservation leader for the species in South East Asia,” it added.

The butanding has been spotted in Donsol, Sorsogon; Oslob, Cebu; Pintuyan, Southern Leyte; and Honda Bay in Palawan.

DENR-12 Regional Executive Director Nilo Tamoria commended members of the Task Force Butanding Gensan for their latest feat. The task force is a composite team responsible for the protection and conservation of whale sharks.

“We should intensify our information drive to the community on the presence of whale sharks in the area and the prohibited acts as stipulated in Republic Act 9147 or the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act and other related laws,” Tamoria was quoted as telling the

task force members.

Sarangani Gov. Steve Chiongbian-Solon ordered the Environmental Conservation and Protection Center (ECPC) to lead the research team together with DENR and local government units to gather relevant data that would help in the conservation and protection of whale sharks.

Dr. Roy Operario Mejorada of the ECPC said his team’s daily monitoring of whale shark sightings and documenting their behaviors have drawn supports from various quarters.

General Santos City Councilor Shandee Llido, Protected Area Superintendent Joy Ologuin and Dr. Rosalinda Cortez of the DENR-Sarangani office were reported working on another ordinance declaring the General Santos City waters as a critical habitat of the whale sharks.



DENR halts 'tourism highway' project in Aurora due to environmental threat

By **ARIEL AVENDANO**

BALER, Aurora – The provincial office of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) here disclosed yesterday that a Notice of Violation (NoV) has been issued against the firm which is undertaking the first phase of the "tourism highway" construction in Dipaculao town for failure to present Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) while conducting earth moving and cutting of trees in the project site.

Alfredo Collado, DENR chief for Aurora, said that the construction company was ordered to refrain from

any earth moving and cutting of trees in the three-kilometer by-pass road section which shall traverse the forest zone in Barangay Dinadiawan, pending the submission of an ECC which the regional office of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) in Region 3 has yet to provide.

In imposing the first NoV dated December 11, 2018, Collado said that then DPWH Region 3 director Antonio Molano, who is now DPWH undersecretary, had already been advised by the community office of the DENR in Northern Aurora district to submit an ECC on the affected "tourism highway" project as early as February 26, 2018 as

stipulated on another written communication dated October 23, 2018 but no compliance has been made.

In another letter dated December 12, 2018, barely a day after the issuance of NoV against the construction firm, Merliza Torre, newly designated district DENR chief for Northern Aurora, again reminded newly designated Region 3 DPWH director Roseller Tolentino about the same requirement for the project.

A two-page Administrative Order number 2018-16 signed by DENR Roy Cimatu, reiterating the "Guidelines on the issuance of permits on affected DPWH projects," was also attached to the letter to Tolentino.



Mount Apo's Sta. Cruz trail to be closed April 1

By **ANTONIO L. COLINA IV**

DAVAO CITY — The Municipality of Sta. Cruz will implement a temporary closure of its trail to the summit of Mt. Apo, the country's highest peak, starting April 1, due to the El Niño, Sta. Cruz Tourism officer Julius Paner said.

Paner said that there will be no definite date yet for the lifting of the closure order as the local government would have to depend on the advisory of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) on the drought, which is expected to hit several provinces in Mindanao.

The local government wants to immediately implement the closure to prevent another forest fire on Mt. Apo and protect the climbers from the impact of El Niño, he said.

"We also have to look after the welfare of the climbers. We want to avoid cases of heat stroke," he said, adding that climbers may not get water from the streams due to the drought.

Paner said the Sta. Cruz will still allow the remaining climbers who have already made their bookings to scale Mt. Apo until March 31, 2019.

In a March 8 Facebook post of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-SOCCSKSARGEN, all the region's Mt. Apo trails in Kidapawan,

Magpet, and Makilala have already been closed for trekking, climbing, camping, and tree planting activities starting March 7 to prevent possible cases of forest fires.

Mt. Apo Natural Park-Protected Area Management Board (MANP-PAMB) passed a resolution on March 31, 2016, closing all six trails in Kidapawan, Makilala, and Magpet in North Cotabato, Digos, Sta. Cruz, and Bansalan in Davao del Sur, after it suffered from a massive fire that started from its peak and later spread to other parts of the mountain, razing even some century-old trees.

The "indefinite closure" of the Mt. Apo was lifted on April 12, 2017.

Paner said the Mt. Apo trail in Sta. Cruz would be opened for two days on April 13 and 14 for the Mt. Apo Sky and Vertical Race that is expected to attract around 100 racers from different parts of the world, including American and European racers.

Racers will scale the peak of Mt. Apo from beach line of Sta. Cruz, he said.

He said the Mt. Apo Boulder Face Challenge, an annual activity held during summer, has been suspended this year.

"We're all set for the Sky Race. We are in the stage of coordination with all the stakeholders," he said, adding the race helped boost the tourism industry of Sta. Cruz by attracting visitors from different countries to experience the Mt. Apo.



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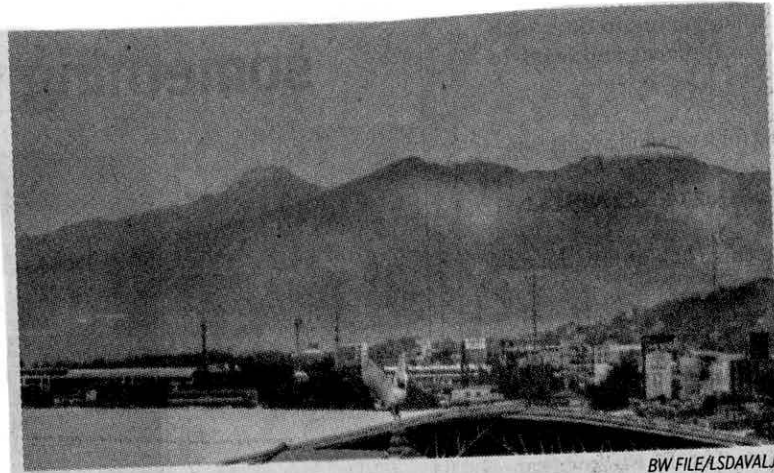
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BW FILE/LSDAVALJR

SOCCKSARGEN: KIDAPAWAN CITY, COTABATO

Mt. Apo Cotabato trails temporarily closed to prevent forest fires amid El Niño
THE THREE trails in Cotabato going up to Mt. Apo have been temporarily closed to avoid forest fires amid the ongoing dry spell brought about by El Niño. The closure, which takes effect immediately, was approved by the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) in a meeting last March 8. The three trails have entry points from the towns of Makilala and Magpet, and Kidapawan City. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources Region 12 (DENR-12), in a statement, said all "trekking, climbing, camping and tree planting activities" will not be allowed until weather bureau PAGASA "lifts its advisory on El Niño in Western Mindanao." Based on PAGASA's El Niño Climate Outlook for Mindanao Advisory No. 4, the dry spell will likely "continue until April- May-June 2019 season, and various climate models prediction still suggest the likely persistence of dry condition, dry spell and drought over most areas in Mindanao in March- April-May 2019, as Philippine climate move towards the dry season." Mt. Apo Natural Park, the country's highest peak, suffered forest fires in March 2016 and recently this month in some areas of Matalam, Cotabato.



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Alarm raised as forest fires hit Benguet towns

'Kaingin' blamed for blaze that razed 15 hectares of woodland in Itogon and Tuba

BAGUIO CITY—More than 15 hectares of forest in two adjacent towns in Benguet province were destroyed by fire that raged for nearly 10 hours on Sunday until Monday.

The blaze that started around 5:45 p.m. at Sitio Bisil in Barangay Gumatdang in Itogon town burned at least 5 ha and was placed under control at 4 a.m. on Monday, according to the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) in Itogon.

It recorded three forest fires in January and February, including the one that razed some 60 ha and killed five foresters of Philex Mining Corp. in February.

In nearby Tuba town, fire also razed some 10 ha of forest at Sitio Pitlawan in Barangay Poblacion on Sunday, according to the Tuba fire station.

The fire was reported at 5:45 p.m. and was put out around 11:40 p.m.

No rainfall

Tuba fire officials blamed the fire on "kainginero" (slash-and-burn farmers).

The BFP in Cordillera has raised the alarm over the series



MOUNTAIN INFERNO Firefighters took 10 hours, from Sunday to Monday, to control the fire that hit a section of a forest at Barangay Gumatdang in Itogon, Benguet. —LEVY MANGILI/CONTRIBUTOR

of forest fires since January.

In Mountain Province, 20 forest fires were recorded in the past two months, including the one that struck the watershed of Mt. Amo that serves Tadian and Bauko towns. An elderly farmer was killed in the blaze.

Supt. Allan Emballar, Mountain Province fire marshal, said the lack of rainfall since December had also made the forests "very susceptible to fire."

In Kalinga, grasslands were being burned for graze land that had affected adjacent

lands or forests, according to Chief Insp. Rogelio Nisos, the province's fire marshal.

He said fire authorities were even scolded by residents for putting out grass fires.

Apayao spared

Kalinga recorded at least five forest fires. "The figures are alarming," Senior Supt. Maria Sofia Mendoza, BFP regional director, told a recent press briefing here.

Of the six provinces in Cordillera, only Apayao has

been spared by forest fires.

According to BFP data, there were over 90 forest and grass fires recorded in the region in January and February, compared to the 87 from January to March last year.

Mendoza asked farmers to refrain from burning dry grass in their farms and from practicing "kaingin." She said uncontrolled kaingin was the main reason for forest fires in the region.

"Prevention is better than cure," Mendoza said. —KIMBERLIE QUITASOL INQ



Two forest fires hit Benguet

By Aldwin Quitasol

BENGUET — Two forest fires struck damage to the greens of Benguet Province in close proximity early Sunday night.

Members of the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) responded to the forest

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fires in municipalities of Benguet in a less than two-hour gap.

The first fire was reported at around 5:45 p.m.

A duty personnel of the municipal police station of Itogon

noticed smoke emanating from the mountain part of Sitio Bisil, Gumatdang in Itogon and alerted the BFP for immediate response.

Volunteers, residents, barangay officials, BFP personnel and Itogon police are still in the area trying to contain the fire as of this writing.

An investigation is in progress to assess the damage.

Then, at around 7 p.m., the BFP Tuba and Tuba police rushed to the scene of another forest fire at Sitio Pitlawan, Poblacion in Tuba, Benguet.

The firemen and police were aided by barangay officials and

residents to help contain the conflagration.

Initial investigation showed that the forest fire started in the middle of the forest. The burned portion was estimated at about a hectare.

Benguet Fire Marshall Roberto

Aragon said 77 fire incidents have been recorded in the province from January to 5 March, 54 of these were forest and grass fires with more than 375 hectares razed. They have not apprehended a single suspect who may have caused the fire.



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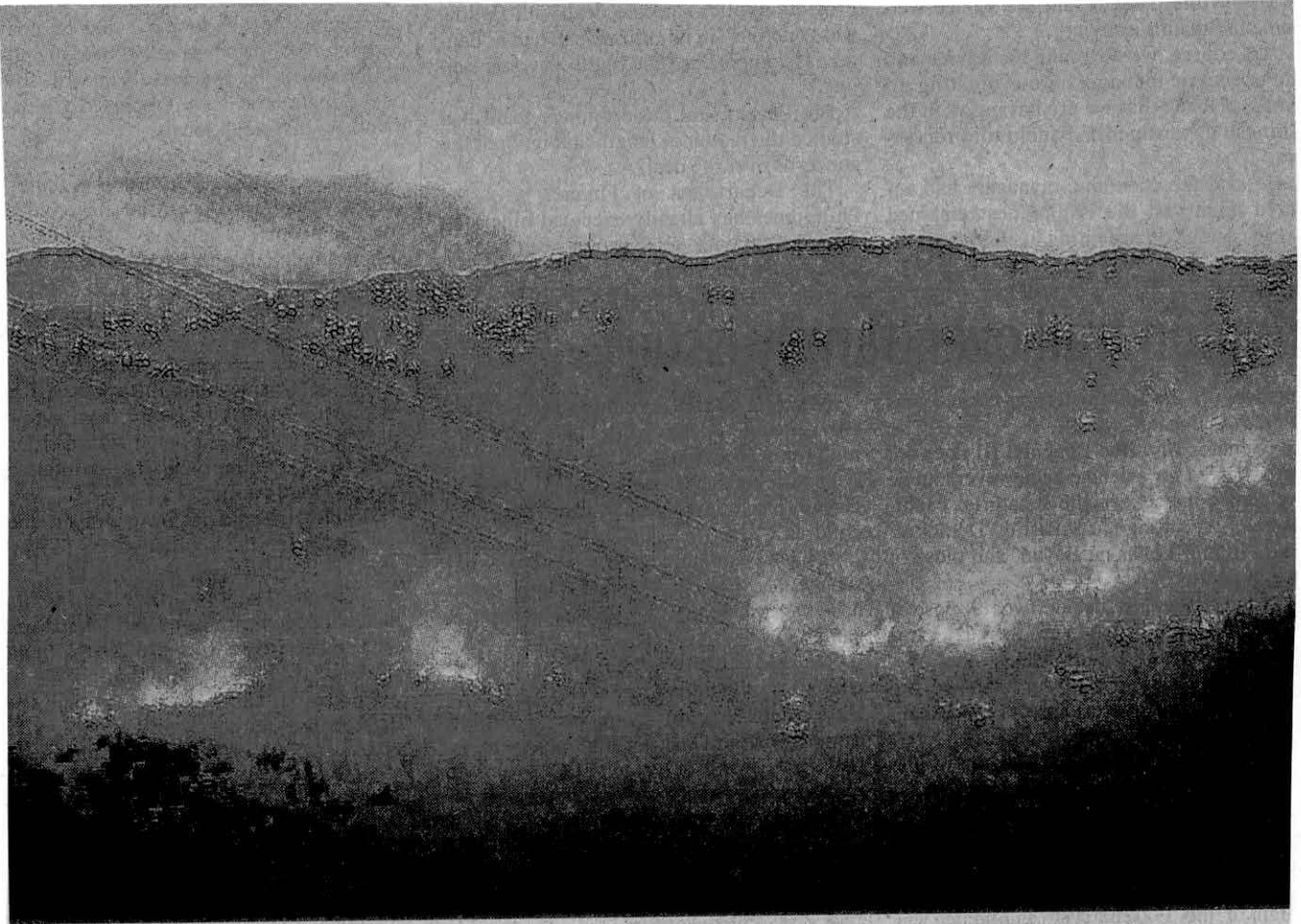
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FOREST FLAMES. Fires are raging this week in Gumatdang, Itogon, Benguet as well as Dontogan, Tuba, Benguet, and what makes the scenes more frightful are the areas' inaccessibility due to the mountainous terrain which cannot be easily reached by firefighters. It is not yet clear how many areas have been gutted down, but firefighters and police are monitoring the inferno, which coincided with the celebration of Fire Prevention Month. **PNP Itogon/Cesar Cheong**



NWRB ready to commit more water to La Mesa

BY ANGELA LOPEZ DE LEON

NATIONAL Water Resources Board (NWRB) Executive Director Sevilla David Jr. yesterday said the agency is willing to increase the flow of water from the Angat Dam in Bulacan to prop up the water level of La Mesa Dam in Quezon City.

In a television interview, David said La Mesa Dam currently has a 48 cubic meter per second allocation of water from Angat.

Water reserve at the La Mesa Dam remained at a critical level yesterday, according to the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

As of 6 a.m. yesterday, PAGASA hydrologist Edgar Dela Cruz said water elevation at the dam stood at 68.93 meters, still below the 69-meter critical low level. The La Mesa Dam began to breach its critical level of 69 meters on Sunday afternoon.

Water from Angat passes through

the Ipo Dam in Bulacan then flows into the La Mesa Dam. The Angat-Ipo-La Mesa water system supplies most of Metro Manila's water.

As long as the water reserve of Angat "remains at a normal level," David said the NWRB will not reduce the water allocation for La Mesa.

According to Dela Cruz, Angat's water level at 6 a.m. yesterday was at 200.59 meters, "still sufficient for the dam's purposes."

"Right now, Angat has enough reserve to cover increased water supply for Metro Manila on top of its normal allocation for irrigation and power production," he said.

Dela Cruz said that even without rain, Angat can still supply water to the La Mesa Dam until early June, when the wet or rainy season is expected to start.

Dela Cruz also appealed to the public to be responsible and wise in utilizing water and "as much as

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See NWRB ► Page B3

NWRB

possible to conserve water."

Apart from the extreme heat and lack of rain, Dela Cruz attributed the significant drop in La Mesa's water level to the high domestic water demand.

Due to the dwindling water level in La Mesa, residents of Metro Manila and parts of Rizal have been affected by water interruptions since last Thursday.

In its Twitter account, the Maynilad Water Services Inc. said the firm will have enough water supply to sustain the needs of its customers throughout the summer months as long as the NWRB does not reduce the allocation of raw water from the Angat.

"Nevertheless, if the mild El Nino brings down the water level at Angat and the NWRB is forced to reduce allocation, Maynilad has prepared for this eventuality," it added.

Manila Water has also apologized to its customers for the unexpected water service interruptions.

The firm said it has started to augment the supply in reservoirs so it could bring back water service to the affected areas.

Malacañang said there is a need to improve the information drive about the water interruption and rationing schedules while government intensifies its efforts to cushion the impact of the water crisis on the public.

Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo, concurrent presidential spokesman, said, "We will respond to that (crisis). But the problem is the water would come from the heavens. There is no rain, if there is no rain, how do we do it. We might have to wait," he said.

He said one measure that government might pursue is cloud seeding in areas most affected by the water crisis. — *With Jocelyn Montemayor*



WATER RATIONING COVERS 273 VILLAGES IN METRO MANILA, RIZAL AS SUPPLY DROPS

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**By Ronnel W. Domingo,
Jaymee T. Gamil
and Maricar Cinco**
@Team_Inquirer

Water rationing in the service area of Manila Water Co. now affects 273 barangays in 18 towns and cities in Metro Manila and Rizal province as the water level in La Mesa Dam continues to recede.

Manila Water said rationing in the east zone was needed so that available supply would last over the next two or three months.

Customers would get water but at reduced volumes until the rainy season, it said.

Manila Water gets most of its supply from La Mesa Dam in Novaliches, Quezon City.

As of 6 a.m. on Monday, water in the dam dipped to 68.93 meters, falling below the "critical" level of 69 meters and approaching the last record low of 68.75 meters in 1998.

Angat Dam water

Maynilad Water Services Inc. said its supply was not affected by the dry spell just yet as it was getting water directly from Angat Dam in Bulacan province.

Maynilad supplies water to the west zone, which covers mostly Manila, parts of Quezon City and Makati City, and Caloocan, Pasay, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, Valenzuela, Navotas and Malabon cities, and certain areas in Cavite province.

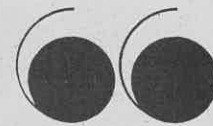
Water level in Angat Dam was 200.59 meters on Monday morning, still more than 20 meters above the critical level.

"Unless the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) reduces allocation for MWSS (Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System), Maynilad should have enough supply to sustain the needs of its customers throughout the summer months," said Jennifer Rufo, head of corporate communications at Maynilad.

"But assuming that water level in the Angat Dam goes down and the NWRB is forced to reduce allocation, Maynilad has mitigating measures in place," Rufo said.

More reservoirs

Since El Niño of 2010—one of the worst on record—Maynilad had been working to improve its water storage capaci-



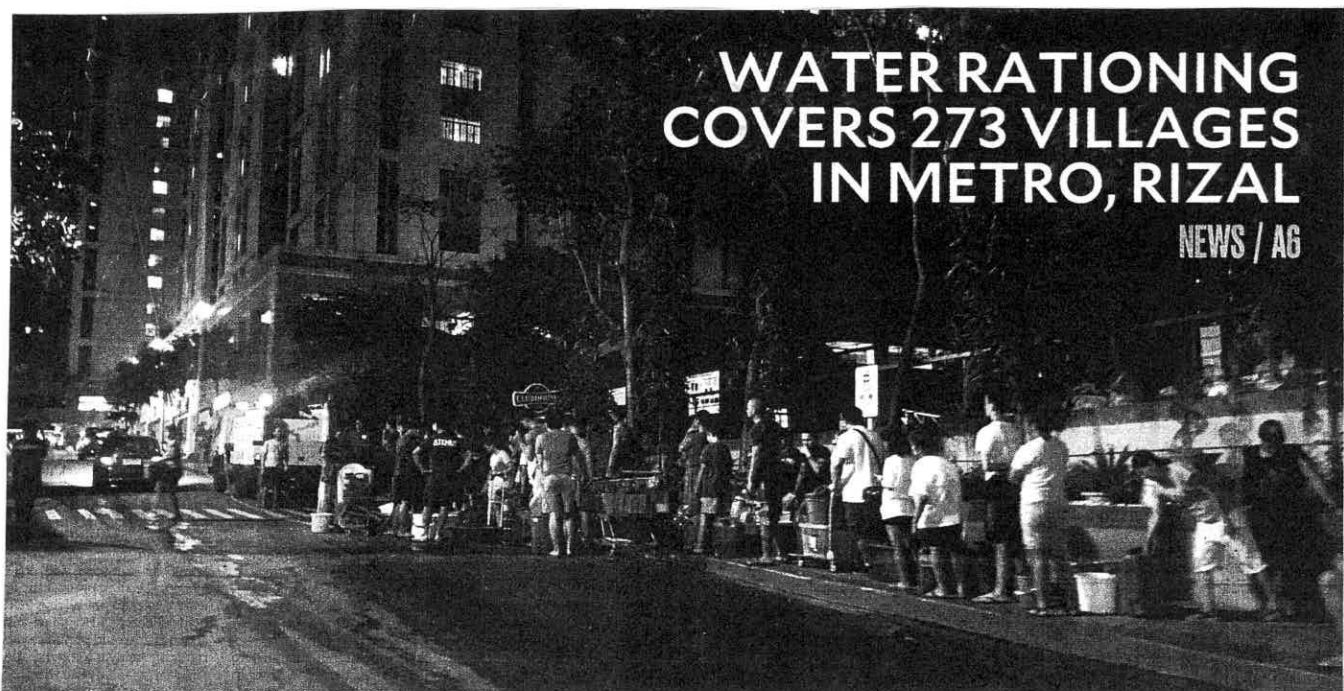
If we don't regulate [the current water supply], if we're not frugal, we can expect an even worse water shortage

Elmer Caringal
Pagasa hydrologist

ty, she said.

"From only 12 reservoirs in 2010, we now have 32," Rufo said. "This essentially gives us more reserve water, assuming there is supply shortage from the source."

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) expects the water level in La Mesa to reach the record low levels in 1998, especially



WATER RATIONING COVERS 273 VILLAGES IN METRO, RIZAL

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WATERLESS IN THE CITY As the lack of water becomes acute in certain Metro Manila areas due to El Niño, apartment owners queue to fill pails, jugs, containers and even plastic storage boxes with water from a delivery truck inside a 25-building condominium complex in Mandaluyong City on Sunday night. —ROBERT JAWORSKI L. ABAÑO


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since the dry season has yet to officially begin.

Pagasa hydrologist Elmer Caringal said the rainy season that would boost the water supply at La Mesa was expected to be delayed until August.

"If we don't regulate [the current water supply], if we're not frugal, we can expect an even worse water shortage" than the interruptions being implemented by the water concessionaires, Caringal said.

Infusions from Angat

Decreasing supply levels in dams are normal during the dry season, with abnormally low water level in La Mesa usually addressed by infusions from Ipo Dam, which in turn, gets an inflow from Angat Dam.

But Caringal said infusions from Angat Dam were not enough now, because demand was increasing.

While increasing the limit may seem an obvious option, the hydrologist said doing so may also risk Angat Dam's water level.

Caringal deferred to the NWRB, the agency in charge of water resources in the coun-

try, to assess the best course of action.

NWRB officials on Monday afternoon were meeting with executives of MWSS, the government agency that regulates private water concessionaires Manila Water and Maynilad.

Ipo Dam's water levels remained healthy at 101.02 meters as of Monday.

Laguna Lake

Water level in Laguna Lake is likely to hit its critical low level in two months' time, the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) said.

The 90,000-hectare lake is a major source of water for households. Manila Water and Maynilad draw a combined average of 450 million liters daily from the lake.

As of Monday, the LLDA's water level monitoring showed the water elevation at 11.1 meters, or just 0.6 meter above the critical level. The critical low level is 10.5 meters.

"Right now we're still okay. But should there be no rains [in the coming weeks], the water still may go down," said LLDA hydrologist Emil Hernandez.

He said the water was receding at a rate of 0.3 meter a month.

MWSS Administrator Reynaldo Velasco asked consumers to use water wisely.

"Since we primarily source our water from Angat-Ipo-La Mesa water system, we have to do our share to help lessen the effect of El Niño not only on our need for water in our households and industries but also on agriculture," Velasco said in a statement.

Cloud seeding set

Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol said he had directed the Department of Agriculture's regional offices to implement cloud seeding operations.

Piñol said the department would coordinate with the Philippine Air Force for cloud seeding over Bulacan, Pampanga and Rizal provinces in order "to fill up La Mesa Dam."

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo called on water service providers to improve information dissemination on the schedule of water interruptions in parts of Metro Manila. —WITH A REPORT FROM JULIEM. AURELIO INQ



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PROVINCES START TO REEL FROM EL NIÑO

STORY BY THE INQUIRER STAFF

By the end of March, 22 provinces are likely to experience dry conditions, 41 would have a dry spell and nine would suffer from drought, according to the weather bureau.

By the Inquirer Staff
@Team_Inquirer

Things will get worse before they get better, as the dry spell is expected to deepen across the country.

This early, the dry spell stemming from El Niño is already destroying crops, reducing water supplies and endangering the health of millions of Filipinos, according to officials.

Abnormally low rainfall in most parts of the country is expected this month, and dry spells and drought are due in the coming months until August, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa).

By the end of March, 22 provinces are likely to experience dry conditions, 41 likely to experience a dry spell, and nine to experience drought, Pagasa said.

In Zamboanga City, a state of calamity has been declared amid the drastically reduced water levels in rivers and the Pasonanca watershed.

"The city agriculture [office] also reported damage to crops, as well as ill effects on health of the city's constituents," Vice Mayor Cesar Iturralde said on Monday.

Early harvest

At Laoag City in Ilocos Norte province, farmers have started harvesting crops such as corn earlier than scheduled before these are laid to waste due to rising temperatures.

Some fishpond operators have also been harvesting tilapia to avoid fishkill.

Farmers have resorted to pumping water from the ground through shallow tube wells but acknowledge that the volume is not enough.

El Niño conditions are expected to last until May, according to Pagasa. The phenomenon is characterized by unusually warm sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific.

Pagasa has said weak El Niño conditions are prevailing over the country since February, warning the public of warmer-than-average surface temperatures and a prolonged dry season in the months to come.

Climate outlook

In the March to August climate outlook presented on Feb. 20, Pagasa climate monitoring and prediction section chief Ana Liza Solis said that this month, only southern Mindanao and Surigao del Sur were likely to experience "near normal" rainfall, with the rest of the country to experience below normal rainfall.

Solis said that this month, 22 provinces were likely to receive

way below normal rainfall, 50 below normal, only eight near normal, and three above normal.

"Way below normal" means a reduction of more than 60 percent from average rainfall, while "below normal" means a 21- to 60-percent reduction.

Drought is declared after three consecutive months of way below normal rainfall conditions or five consecutive months of below normal rainfall.

Cotabato crop damage

Solis identified the possible areas to be hit by drought this month as the provinces of Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Occidental Mindoro, Palawan, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, Maguindanao and Sulu.



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Crops in hundreds of hectares of land in at least 10 villages in the town of Kabacan, Cotabato, are suffering from the effects of high temperatures, according to its mayor, Herlo Guzman.

Guzman placed the initial damage to rice and corn at P32.5 million in the villages of Aringay, Pisan, Bangilan, Dagupan, Magatos, Kayaga, Cuyapon, Bannawag, Nangaan and Katidtuan.

More than 500 hectares in these areas had become parched due to lack of rainfall since December last year, he said.

In Kidapawan City, Mayor Joseph A. Evangelista has ordered the City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office to intensify information and education campaign on grass fire.

Vast grasslands in the city have become dry due to intense temperatures, which also lowered the water level of Nuangan River.

Drop in crop harvest

In eastern Pangasinan, rice farmers expect a drop of up to 50 percent in their harvest due to lack of irrigation water and rainfall.

"The palay (unmilled rice) grains did not fully develop because of lack of water. Half of the grains we harvested are 'ipa' (empty)," Ponciano Onia said.

Despite rising temperatures, water in San Roque Dam in San Manuel town, Pangasinan, is sufficient for irrigation if El Niño hits the province, said Tom Valdez, vice president for corporate social responsibility of

San Roque Power Corp.

Despite the assurance from San Roque Dam officials, the provincial government continued to install tube wells.

The Ilocos Norte government will hold a water summit on March 15 to discuss mitigating measures during El Niño and mobilize immediate assistance for affected towns.

Magat Dam water

In Isabela, water in Magat Dam was still 10 meters above the 160-meter critical level in its catch basin on Sunday.

The dam supplies water to 85,000 ha of rice farms in Isabela, Quirino, Cagayan and Ifugao provinces, and provides water for power generation to the hydroelectric power plant.

On Sibuyan island, Romblon, the Cantingas River, which powers the island's hydroelectric plant, has receded from its normal level of 2.4 meters to 1.70 meters, over the last two weeks of February.

In Bulacan province, the water level in Angat Dam remained high as of Monday at 200.55 meters. Its low critical level is 170 meters.

Angat Dam is a major source of potable water for Metro Manila.

In Albay, the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office is conducting an inventory of areas vulnerable to El Niño.

Che Rebeta, Albay provincial agriculture office chief, said a team of farm technicians was still validating report that the dry spell was starting to affect the towns of Oas and Polangui.

"Unlike Catanduanes and Masbate, the province [of Albay] would only experience moderate dry spell in the months of March and April and drought by May to June," Rebeta said.

—REPORTS FROM JAYMEE T. GAMIL, JULIE ALIPALA, WILLAMOR MAGBANUA, YOLANDA SOTELO, GABRIEL CARDINOZA, LEILANIE ADRIANO, VILLAMOR VISAYA JR., CARMELA REYES-ESTROPE AND MAR S. ARGUELLES INQ



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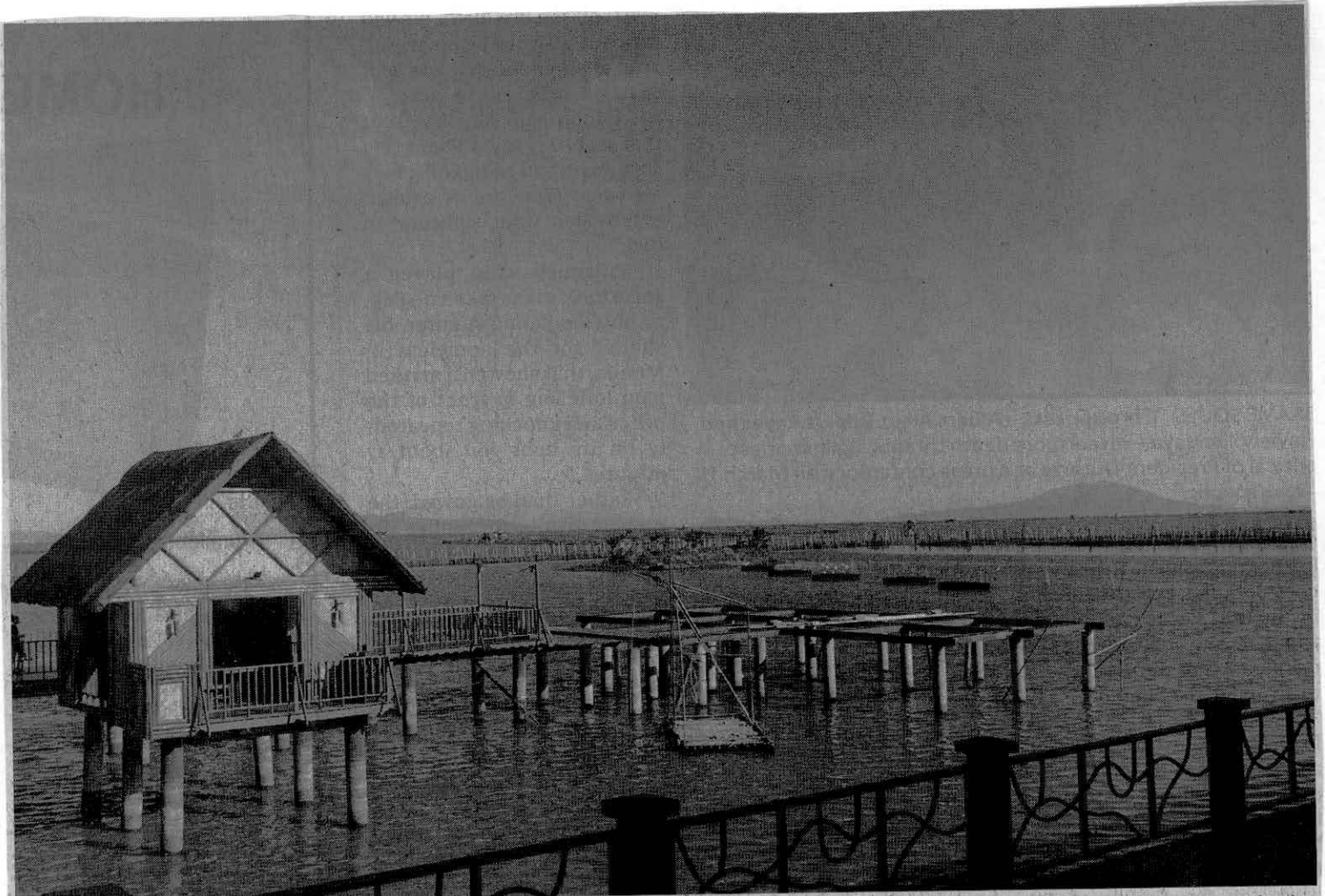
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DRYING UP Water in Laguna Lake has dropped to slightly half a meter above the critical level, the Laguna Lake Development Authority reported on Monday. But the agency said it was continuing to drop in the absence of significant rainfall. —JOEL MATARO/CONTRIBUTOR



THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
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Department of Environment and Natural Resources
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Water shortage may last till June

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La Mesa Dam breaches critical level; Manila Water to implement service interruptions

By ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ and MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR

La Mesa Dam in Quezon City breached its 69-meter critical low water level on Monday after registering 68.93 meters, just 0.18 meters short of its record-low 68.75 meters recorded in 1998.

Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) hydrologist Ailene

Abelardo said that at around 6 a.m. Monday, La Mesa Dam reached 68.93 meters, down from last Sunday's 69.02 meters. Its normal high water level is 80.15 meters.

With the depleted water supply due to El Niño, customers of Manila Water Company, Inc. will continue to experience low pressure to no **▶4**



CREEPING DANGER - This aerial photo shows the La Mesa Dam, Monday, with its water level at 68.93 meters, below the critical level of 69 meters. The normal level of the dam is 80 meters and the alarming state of the water supply in Metro Manila has this boy (inset photo) drawing water from a well at the Baseco compound in Tondo, Manila for his family's needs. (Mark Balmores/Czar Dancel)





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Water shortage may...

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water service interruptions throughout the summer months.

"We will implement [scheduled water service interruptions] until summer months. That will be up to June or when the rainy season begins," Dittie Galang, Manila Water head of planning and tactical development corporate communications, said.

Galang said her company would be implementing "operational adjustments" in the way it will release its water supply to its customers.

Manila Water sources its water from Angat-Ipo-La Mesa water system. To be specific, water from Angat passes through Ipo Dam, from where it is released to La Mesa Dam.

Unlike Manila Water, Maynilad Water Services, Inc. doesn't get water from La Mesa Dam, which is why the company has not yet to issue scheduled supply interruptions, said Madeleine R. Zaide, media relations manager at Maynilad.

Manila Water, which currently has 6 million customers, provides water to 23 cities and municipalities in Metro Manila and Rizal. These include Mandaluyong, Makati, Pasig, Pateros, San Juan, Taguig, Marikina, and parts of Quezon City and Manila. The towns of Angono, Baras, Binangonan, Cainta, Cardona, Jalajala, Morong, Pililia, Rodriguez, Tanay, Taytay, Teresa, San Mateo and Antipolo in the province of Rizal are also part of the East Zone.

Maynilad, on the other hand, has 9 million customers from Manila (all but portions of San Andres and Sta. Ana), Quezon City (west of San Juan River, West Avenue, EDSA, Congressional, Mindanao Avenue, the northern part starting from the Districts of Holy Spirit and Batasan Hills), Makati (west of South Super Highway), Caloocan, Pasay, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, Valenzuela, Navotas and Malabon, all in Metro Manila; the cities of Cavite, Bacoor and Imus, and the towns of Kawit, Noveleta and Rosario, all in the Province of Cavite.

PAGASA said reduced rainfall is one

of the most common impacts of an El Niño, and the country is currently affected by a weak El Niño event. The 1997-1998 El Niño occurrence was also among the strongest events in history.

Abelardo pointed out that PAGASA has observed a significant reduction in rainfall over the catchment area of La Mesa Dam since September, 2018. "So in January this year, La Mesa Dam's water level was at 74 to 75 meters, which is significantly lower than the previous years," she said.

With the dam's critical level, "there will be a limited" water source for a portion of Metro Manila's water consumers.

While La Mesa Dam is now in critical level, Angat Dam – which supplies 97 percent of Metro Manila's domestic water needs and irrigation for 27,000 hectares of farmlands in Bulacan and Pampanga – is "still high," Abelardo said.

As of Monday, Angat Dam's water level was 200.59 meters, or higher than its low water level of 180 meters.

PAGASA weather specialist Lanie Bitagun said there is a low chance of rainfall in Metro Manila, and most parts of Luzon and Visayas this Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo said the government is concerned about the situation, assuring that the government will do something to address the issue.

"We're always concerned with respect to any problem affecting the welfare of people," he said Monday.

"Yes, we will respond to that. Pero ang problema ata yung tubig manggagaling sa langit. Walang ulan. Pag walang ulan, paano? Baka mag-aantay tayo (But I think the problem is there is no rain. We would have to wait if that's the case)," he added.

Although he has not talked about the situation yet with the President, Panelo said one thing that can be done is cloud-seeding or the spreading of chemicals into the clouds to promote rainfall. (With a report from Argyll B. Geducos)



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La Mesa Dam water crisis will worsen

If you are a Manila Water Co. Inc. customer who lives in the farthest and highest area of its distribution network, brace yourself for a very serious water shortage in the coming days.

Last weekend, the water level at Manila Water's major reservoir, La Mesa Dam, dipped below critical level (69 meters). It was at 68.90 m on Monday morning. I was floored by drone videos from the Quezon City government that showed a drying water reservoir even before the start of summer.

The scenario of a dried-up La Mesa Dam is forcing Manila Water to deal with a water crisis for its consumers in Mandaluyong, Pasig, San Juan, Marikina, Quezon City, Makati, Taguig and Pateros as well as parts of Rizal province.

Maynilad Water Services Inc., on the other hand, is not yet in crisis mode since it gets its supply directly from Angat Dam where the water level is at 200 m, still far from the critical level of 180 m.

Maynilad also has 40 different reservoirs and 30 pumping stations all over its west zone franchise area.

When the water at Angat Dam breached critical level in 2010, resulting in a drought, Maynilad suffered the most. It was forced to resort to water rationing.

At that time, Manila Water's La Mesa Dam reservoir saved the day for its east zone customers.

The situation has been reversed now. When I interviewed her on my radio program, Dittie Galang of Manila Water said that we should pray for an early rainy season.



SHARP EDGES

JAKE J. MADERAZO



Maynilad ready for dry spell amid mild El Niño

By Victor V. Saulon *Sub-Editor*

MAYNILAD Water Services, Inc. has downplayed the impact of El Niño on the water it supplies to Metro Manila's west zone, saying the previous dry spell early in this decade left the company prepared for a similar incident.

"Since 2010 — the big El Niño, remember — we built a couple of reservoirs all across our network to prevent any service-affecting interruption to our customers in the event of a strong El Niño," said Maynilad President and Chief Executive Officer Ramoncito S. Fernandez in a chance interview.

Aside from the reservoirs, the company has also invested in technology to monitor the water situation in its service area.

"We've invested in a central control room. You can see the entire network remotely in our head office and also in Arroceros (in Manila). Those are the major investments — automation, additional reservoirs," he said.

Maynilad, the country's largest water concessionaire in terms of customers, is an agent and contractor of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS).

Asked whether the supply in the additional reservoirs could last until June, when the weather bureau expects the "weak" El Niño to persist, Mr. Fernandez said: "I believe, as long as MWSS gets the 46 cmps (cubic-meter-per-second) from Angat it looks like we won't be too worried."

"There are still things to worry about but I don't think it will be worse than 2010. That's what we're seeing," he said.

MWSS Administrator Reynaldo V. Velasco earlier called on consumers to save water and help cushion a water shortage as the weather phenomenon could result in the delayed onset of the rainy season.

The agency had said that as a rule, discharge for potable water supply becomes the priority during droughts, reducing water releases for irrigation and power generation.

Water for Metro Manila is primarily sourced from the Angat-Ipo-La Mesa water system. Water from Angat passes through Ipo Dam where it is then released to La Mesa Dam.

According to Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), La Mesa Dam has a 47-cubic-meter-per-second allocation of water from Angat Dam, higher than the 44 cms the government sets aside for La Mesa Dam during the dry season.

Maynilad serves certain portions of Manila, Quezon City and Makati. It also covers Caloocan, Pasay, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, Valenzuela, Navotas and Malabon in Metro Manila.

Outside the Philippine capital, it serves the cities of Cavite, Bacoor and Imus, and the towns of Kawit, Noveleta and Rosario, all in Cavite province.

Metro Pacific Investments Corp., which has majority stake in Maynilad, is one of three Philippine units of Hong Kong-based First Pacific Co. Ltd., the others being Philex Mining Corp. and PLDT Inc. Hastings Holdings, Inc., a unit of PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund subsidiary MediaQuest Holdings, Inc., has interest in *BusinessWorld* through the Philippine Star Group, which it controls.



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Observe proper use of water – Tolentino

PDP-Laban senatorial bet Atty. Francis Tolentino has called on the public to observe proper use and management of water as the El Niño dry spell hits different parts of the country.

The call was made amid the continuous drop in the water supply in Metro Manila, causing several water interruptions in many areas.

“Ramdam na ramdam na sa kalunsuran ang epekto ng El Niño. Ang mabilis na pagbaba ng lebel ng tubig sa mga dam na nagsu-suplay ng tubig sa Kamaynilaan ay ma-

ngangahulugan na mas kailangang kontrolin ang distribusyon ng tubig upang balanseng masuplayan ang mga kabayanan, tanggapan at industirya sa lungsod (The effect of El Niño is already being felt. The fast lowering of water levels in the dams supplying water to Manila means that there is a need to control the distribution of water to balance the water supply for the houses, offices and the industries),” the former Metropolitan Manila Development Authority chairman said.

“Sa mga darating na buwan ng bakasyon sa eskwela, inaasahang mas tataas pa ang demand para sa tubig sa mga kabahayan. Isyu ngayon kung paa-no makatutugon sa mataas na demand ang mababa ng suplay ng tubig (In the coming months of the summer vacation, it is anticipated that the demand for water will go up. The issue now is how to address the increased demand and the low supply of water),” he said.

Tolentino added that the public should save water when the water supply is available in their neighborhood.



Palace advice on water crisis: 'Wait for rain'

MALACANANG said Monday that relief from the Metro Manila water crisis may have to wait for the onset of the rains, though cloud-seeding was also an option, with the Department of Agriculture saying it ordered seeding in areas of Central Luzon that could help fill the capital's reservoirs.

"Ang problema yata eh ang tubig eh manggagaling sa langit; walang ulan, 'pag walang ulan papa'no, baka mag-aantay tayo," (The problem is that the water has to come from the sky, and if there is no rain we may have no choice but to wait) the President's spokesman Salvador S. Panelo said in a briefing.

Separately, Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel F. Piñol said on Monday that he instructed the department's regional offices to conduct cloud seeding in Bulacan, Pampanga and Rizal in response to El Niño.

"Operations Undersecretary Ariel Cayanan of the Department of Agriculture (DA) [has been instructed] to order the DA Regional Offices to implement cloud seeding operations," Mr. Piñol said in a social media post while visiting Isabela and Nueva Vizcaya.

"Usec. Cayanan was also directed to coordinate with the Philippine Air Force for the cloud-seeding operations over Bulacan, Pampanga, and Rizal (to increase the sources of water for) La Mesa Dam," Mr. Piñol said.

"As early as last year, funds were transferred to the Regional Offices and the Philippine Air Force for cloud-seeding operations in preparation for El Niño," Mr. Piñol added.

The DA estimates crop damage from El Niño at P464.27 million, affecting 13,679 hectares.



"We are always concerned with respect to any problem affecting the welfare of the people," Mr. Panelo said in the briefing on Monday when asked to comment on the water crisis in Metro Manila.

He said cloud seeding is a "possibility, but added he is not aware if the President has officially ordered it.

"Kung meron man, hindi ko alam. But, I am sure meron nang ginawa (If any instructions were issued, I am not aware of them. But I am sure something has been done)" he said. "I have to ask the President exactly what were the instructions."

In a social media post on March 8, the Manila Water Company Inc. said: "We sincerely apologize for the inconvenience brought by unexpected water service interruption experienced by our customers across the East Zone."

The company said it is implementing operational adjustments that may result in low pressure to no water in certain areas "to address the continued decline in the water level at La Mesa Dam due to minimal inflows."

"We urge our customers to use water more responsibly and wisely in light of

the weak El Niño we are currently experiencing and the rapid decline of water levels at La Mesa Dam while Manila Water continues to employ augmentation plans to mitigate the impact of these realities," it said further.

According to the Manila Water Service Update on Monday, March 11, at least 13 barangays in Mandaluyong City were affected ("no water") from 11:00 a.m., with this status expected to last until 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday.

Affected barangays in Mandaluyong City were Addition Hills, Barangka Drive, Barangka Ibaba, Barangka Ilaya, Barangka Itaas, Buayang Bato, Highway Hills, Hulo, Malamig, Maunway, Plainview, Pleasant Hills, and Wack-Wack.

In Marikina City, barangays experienced "low pressure to no water" service interruptions on Monday were Concepcion Dos, Concepcion Uno, Fortune, Industrial Valley, Jesus dela Peña, Mandalay, Marikina Heights, Nangka, Parang, San Roque, Santa Elena, Santo Niño, Tañong, and Tumana.

In Quezon City, at least 83 barangays experienced "low pressure to no water" service interruptions on Monday.

Several barangays in Antipolo, Rizal, according to Manila Water, were also affected, such as Mayamot, Cupang, Dalig, San Isidro, San Jose, San Luis, San Roque, and parts of Sta. Cruz, among others.

Other affected areas were Pasig, Taguig, the Rizal towns of Angono, Taytay and Binangonan, as well as Makati, Parañaque, and Pateros. — **Arjay L. Balinbin, Reicelene Joy N. Ignacio**



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Fight for water (3)

Michael A. Bengwayan, currently a fellow of Echoing Green Foundation in New York, recently wrote about an ongoing tribal war in Mountain Province north of the Philippines over water.

It is not an isolated story, he says, with the Philippine National Police reporting of incidences of shooting and killing in 34 areas in four regions last year over water rights, boundaries, use, and sharing.

To date, we may think of these as isolated cases as, far too few to affect a nation that is populated by over 100

BIZLINKS



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million inhabitants and growing faster than many other countries in the world.

On the other hand, we could reflect on this "skirmishes" as warning signs that a crisis over water is imminent, perhaps not as alarming as the droughts being experienced in many parts of the world that have severely affected food production and drinking water supply.

DW.com's Jon Sheldon says,

"Drought is turning many areas of the globe into arid wastelands. Excessive heat has cost lives, ruined crops and created water shortages. The effects are being felt from South America to the Arctic Circle."

Among the affected areas he reported are New South Wales in Australia, Ethiopia, South Africa's Cape Town, Greece, Sweden, the UK, Bangalore in India, and Kansas in the US.

In Europe, Sheldon writes, "Europe's sweltering heat has been compounded by a lack of rain. Not only have citizens been suffering the health consequences, which affect health care systems and labor productivity, crops have also been hit hard."

He adds that the EU Joint Research Center has warned of "an increase in drought frequency and intensity in the future."

Conflicting water laws

We could say that the Philippines, in particular, is still blessed with abundant water supply. But this may not be the case soon, especially in high economic growth areas like Metro Manila and other key cities in the country where water demand will draw on water sources from nearby regions.

While the lack of water may not be a fight-to-the-death scenario as with our indigenous brothers from up north, it could spell life and death for people who will experience the lack of clean water for drinking and sanitation.

Sadly, this would happen not because there is a severe drought, but because water governance is lacking.

The Philippines is governed by the 1976 Water Code, which defines the ownership, appropriation, utilization, development, and protection of Philippine water resources.

While its underlying principles define that all waters belong to the state, there are at least seven other laws that also deal with governance of water resources in the Philippines, and which can sometimes be in conflict with others.

The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), for example, protects the rights alone of indigenous peoples to water resources that are in their ancestral domain. This is in conflict with the National Integrated Protected Area System, which provides watershed protection so that water supply can be shared with others.

IPRA also conflicts with local governments' mandates to develop water supplies for their constituents' needs. A good example of this is the New Centennial Water Project that Metro Manila needs, but is being challenged by the Dumagats and Remontados.

The same is true for the Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act, which has jurisdiction of all watersheds as well as major aquifers that can be tapped for existing and future farmlands.

Then there is the territorial conflict between the national government policies and local governments. A watershed, for example, may be staked by both the national government through the Protected Area Management Board and by the local government through its Watershed Management Board.

Other conflicts on water use are manifested in the priority allocation of this resource. The Water Code follows the "first in time, first in right" doctrine, but local communities – especially those that reside right at the fount of water supply – have been known to be hostile to either or both national and local governments' unilateral decisions to tap into the source for other communities' needs.

Strong water resource overseer needed

Clearly, there is a need to resolve these conflicting interpretations and overlapping jurisdictions of multiple laws through a strong central body that will have the appropriate mandate.

The National Water Resources Board currently is the main state body that supposedly has the chief responsibility to implement the Water Code. However, its functions through the decades have been devolved to other government agencies.

The NWRB is just a shadow today of its predecessor, the National Water Resources Council, which was created by a Presidential Decree in 1974 before the Water Code of the Philippines was passed into law.

Since then, the NWRB has been stripped of most of its vital roles. Its technical functions were transferred to the Department of Public Works and Highways in 1987 through an Executive Order (EO).

In 2002, the NWRB was subsumed to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and although it initially gained the regulatory functions of the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA), these were transferred back to LWUA in 2010.

As a central agency, the NWRB operates on a lean human resource lineup and budget, thus severely affecting its capability. With some 30 other government agencies at the national and local levels mandated to manage the country's water resources, it's not surprising how messed up water governance in the country has evolved.

The responsibilities of those managing water are far-reaching. A stronger and more powerful water resource overseer that will be able to implement a well-defined delineation of roles and responsibilities among conflicting agencies is definitely needed.

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Should you wish to share any insights, write me at Link Edge, 25th Floor, 139 Corporate Center, Valero Street, Salcedo Village, 1227 Makati City. Or e-mail me at reydgamboa@yahoo.com. For a compilation of previous articles, visit www.BizlinksPhilippines.net.



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Interrupted

DESPITE the growing reach of social media, people can feel distant and removed from many issues dominating the headlines these days.

For example, while many issues—Chinese incursion into the West Philippine Sea, or the political bickering among the senatorial candidates, their champions and their supporters, deplorable traffic or public transportation, or even the on-again, off-again attacks by the President on members of the Catholic clergy—are deemed important, they stand at various points along the urgency continuum. Solutions to these problems could take months or even years, requiring careful planning, constant dialogue, or even implementation.

Meanwhile, there are some issues that are both important and urgent. One day longer is one too much. They have the potential

to anger or inflame the people they affect—sentiments that can translate into strong opinion in the poll surveys, or in the polls.

One such issue is the water shortage now being experienced in Metro Manila.

That there could be a shortage is not far-fetched. After all, summer has crept in, and we are told the El Niño phenomenon promises considerable damage not only to lifestyles but livelihoods.

What most Metro Manilans were surprised about, however, was the sudden—unannounced—drop in the water level at the La Mesa Dam. As of Monday morning, that level has dropped to 68.93 meters Monday morning, lower than the 69.02 meters the previous day, and the lowest it has gone in 12 years. Normal water level is 79.30 to 79.60 meters.

This led to unannounced water service interruptions across the metro, leaving residents desperate—and angry.

Presidential Spokesman Salvador Panelo says the government will swiftly act to address the problem, possibly through cloud seeding over the affected areas, and marvels at how nobody but him seems to have thought of this.

But more than the inducing rain, the government must take charge of the situation by providing information to residents on projected water levels, service interruption schedules, and regularly fielding water trucks to help restore a semblance of normalcy and predictability to affected communities.

It should hold the water service providers accountable for their failure to act in a timely manner to help residents deal with the shortage.

Water is not just any product or commodity. It is as intimately linked with daily life, perhaps more than any other utility. If water stops flowing from people's taps, it won't be long before patience drains, as well.



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MGB mulls revisions of Mining Act's IRR

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR**

The Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) is now taking a look at possible revisions that could be applied to the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of the Philippine Mining Act of 1995, the main legislation that governs all mining and extractive operations in the country.

To be specific, MGB Director Wilfredo G. Moncano recently ordered the review of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR) Administrative Order (DAO) No. 2010-21, which was issued in 2010 to also implement a revised IRR for Philippine Mining Act.

A statement from MGB showed that Moncano's directive is just the agency's response to the mandate given under the Republic Act No. 11032 or "an act promoting ease of doing business and efficient delivery of government services, amending for the purpose of Republic Act No. 9485, otherwise known as the anti-red tape act of 2007, and for other purposes."

The agency, tasked to regulate the mining sector, also wants to come up with a streamlined regulatory framework and requirements for the securing of mining rights, as well as a more simplified procedures for the mining applicants, contractors, permittee, or permit holders.

The said review and possible revision of DAO No. 2010-21 was agreed upon to discuss in the upcoming workshop of MGB to be conducted tentatively next month.

The meeting will be attended by the personnel of MGB's Mining Tenements Division and the Legal Service Division as well as their counterparts in the Regional Offices (ROs).

The MGB is currently soliciting issues, comments, and suggestions from the ROs for the said workshop mechanics and outlines.

Right now, the Philippines ranks in the bottom seven out of 91 jurisdictions in terms of mining policies and last in terms of investment attractiveness in the Australia or Oceania region, the Fraser Institute 2017 survey

showed.

Also, the Philippines is losing billions of dollars in potential mining investments because of the policy stalemate plaguing the industry.

Dindo Manhit, President of Stratbase ADR Institute, said while countries such as Australia and Indonesia managed to develop their mineral endowments as a strategic pillar of their economies, the Philippine mining industry has become stagnant, following the issuance of Executive Order No. 79 and DENR's DAO No. 2017-10, which both effectively banned open pit mining.

"Our ability to efficiently and sustainably harvest the country's mineral wealth potential, estimated to be worth more than a trillion dollars, just sitting underground and basically untapped, has been mired in prolonged legal and regulatory challenges," Manhit said.

"To put in perspective just how much opportunity we are losing, a 2016 list of just 11 pending projects was estimated to total over US\$23 billion in capital investments. Compare this to the official figures of the BSP on our total foreign direct investment from January to November last year which totaled only US\$9.06 billion," he added.

For his part, Chamber of Mines of the Philippines (COMP) Chairman Gerard Brimo said EO 79 which imposed a ban on new mining applications and DAO 2017-10 made mining in the Philippines unattractive to investors.

Brimo identified three open pit projects that are now on hold due to the ban. These include the Tampakan Copper Project, King-king Copper Gold Project, and Silangan Copper and Gold Project which are all located in Mindanao.

He then pointed out that these pending projects could bring the National Government yearly revenues totaling P12 billion and a total of P1.5 billion for local government. Concurrently, the projects will boost industry contribution to exports to 9 percent and total contribution to GDP to 1.5 percent.



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Billions lost from mining ban

EXPERTS said the Philippines is losing billions of dollars in potential mining investments because of the policy stalemate plaguing the industry.

At a roundtable discussion on the open pit mining ban, Chamber of Mines of the Philippines chairman Gerard Brimo said three open pit projects that are now on hold could bring the national government yearly revenues totaling P12 billion and another P1.5 billion for local governments hosting.

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Waiting game. The Tampakan copper project is one of three open pit projects put on hold.



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BILLIONS

projects that are now on hold due to the ban as the Tampakan copper project, King-king copper and gold project and Silangan copper and gold project which are all located in Mindanao.

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the Philippine mining industry has become stagnant, following the issuance of EO 70 and DAO No. 2017-10 issued on April 27, 2017 effectively banned open pit mining.

Manhit said while countries such as Australia and Indonesia managed to develop their mineral endowments as a strategic pillar of their economies, the Philippines' ability to efficiently and sustainably harvest its mineral wealth potential, estimated to be worth more than a trillion dollars, just sitting underground and basically untapped, has been mired in prolonged legal and regulatory challenges."

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"Passing a new mining revenue law now pending in the Senate will resolve the impasse caused by EO 79 and will result in substantial revenue gains," Manhit said.

Carmelo Bayarcal, convenor of the Philippine Business for Environmental Stewardship (PBEST) supported Manhit, saying that "aligning policies to responsibly develop the country's resource potential while strictly enforcing existing environmental regulations to harness our mineral resources should be a priority of the government."

"A hybrid and more balanced approach that imposes strict evaluation on the capacity and competence on mining companies to rehabilitate disturbed areas instead of an outright ban will minimize the inherent environmental impact of mining and maximize the long term benefits to the host communities," Bayarcal said.



12 MAR 2019

DATE

Conglomerate to build road from recycled plastics

BY MYLA IGLESIAS

SAN MIGUEL Corp. (SMC) yesterday said it will build the country's first recycled plastic road as part of initiatives to address solid waste pollution.

SMC will be working with leading materials science company Dow Chemical for the project that will use hard-to-recycle plastics as an alternative raw material input to asphalt for road building.

"This initiative is part of our push towards greater sustainability. Two years ago, we

announced our major water sustainability project: to cut SMC water use by 50 percent by 2025. Recently, we reported that we beat our 2020 intermediate deadline of 20 percent reduction, by two years. Last year, we announced another initiative, and that is to address solid waste pollution. This project is part of that goal," said Ramon Ang, SMC president and chief operating officer.

"Developing roads using plastics that would have otherwise ended up in landfills or our bodies of

water is an environment-friendly method of disposing of scrap plastics," Ang said.

"We can help our environment and at the same time improve the quality of our infrastructure projects. We are eager to begin this initiative," he added.

Among the benefits of using recycled plastics for road surfacing are: improved stability and durability of roads; increased skid resistance, which improves road safety; longer lifespan of roads; lower asphalt costs, and less waste destined

for landfills.

Dow has worked on projects that use plastics for modifying the properties of bitumen, used in the making of asphalt, which has been tested in India, Indonesia and Thailand.

Initially, SMC will test out the technology in small municipal roads, as well as sidewalks and parking lots.

If the technology proves effective and meets all safety and quality requirements, the company may roll it out for larger infrastructure projects, Ang said.

"While we are proud to be the first-mover in this area, we are very hopeful that we won't be the last or the only ones. The research is there and available to everyone, and we'll be glad to share our own processes and experience. At the end of the day, this kind of innovation will benefit the same environment we all share," Ang added.

SMC operates major expressway projects in the country which include South Luzon Expressway, Skyway Stage 1, STAR Tollways from Sto. Tomas to Lipa City Ba-

tangas, NAIA Expressway, Tarlac-La Union-Pangasinan Expressway and Boracay Airport.

Currently, the company is constructing major expressway projects, including Skyway Stage 3, an expressway linking the NLEX and SLEX project which is expected to be completed this year; Skyway Stage 4 from South of Metro Manila Skyway to Batasan Complex, Quezon City which will be completed by 2022 and; the Tarlac-Pangasinan-La Union Expressway.



San Miguel starts building roads made of recycled plastics

By Darwin G. Amojelar

SAN Miguel Corp. said Monday it is building roads out of recycled plastics to help reduce the impact of plastic waste on the environment.

"This initiative is part of our push towards greater sustainability. Two years ago, we announced our major water sustainability project: to cut SMC water use by 50 percent by 2025," SMC president and chief operating officer Ramon Ang said.

"Recently, we reported that we beat our 2020 intermediate deadline of 20 percent reduction, by two years. Last year, we announced another initiative, and that is to address solid waste pollution. This project is part of that goal," he said.

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