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DAY : Sunday

DENR

IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



DENR exec sees improved metro water service soon

By **ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ**

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) foresees an improvement in the situation in the coming weeks as far as the water service interruptions in Metro Manila is concerned.

The additional water supply from the National Water Resource Board (NWRB), Maynilad Water, including the water treatment plant of Manila Water in Cardona, Rizal could help assuage the current situation in Metro Manila, DENR Undersecretary Benny Antiporda said.

DENR has already coordinated with the three water agencies to help parts of the metropolis experiencing water shortage - specifically the areas being serviced by Manila Water - with a total additional water supply of 180 million liter a day (MLD) that will be obtained by April.

"Within [a] week or two, the water service will be back to normal," Antiporda said.

He said that Manila Water's

Cardona water treatment facility is expected to yield 22 MLD by the end of March before reaching a capacity yield of 50 MLD by April.

The official bared that the three agencies met at the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) office in Quezon City last Thursday where Maynilad committed to allocate some 20 MLD to Manila Water by the end of March, and to increase it to 50 MLD by April.

From the NWRB side, Antiporda said the agency projects an additional allocation of 30 MLD by April with the reactivation of deep wells.

The MWSS will be responsible for operating the deep wells, Antiporda added.

He said the NWRB likewise expects another 50 MLD to be sourced from the deep wells after April, for a total of 80 MLD.

"We expect a big improvement in the situation, not go worse," Antiporda said.

As of Saturday, the La Mesa Dam's water level is still under critical level at 68.70 meters. It went further down from the 68.72-meter elevation last Friday.



DENR: Metro water situation to improve

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) sees an improving situation in the coming weeks in light of the water service interruptions experienced in some parts of Metro Manila.

The additional water supply from the National Water Resource Board, Maynilad Water, including the water treatment plant of Manila Water in Cardona, Rizal, could help improve the current situation in Metro Manila, DENR Undersecretary Benny Antiporda said.

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As of yesterday, the La Mesa Dam's water level is still under critical level at 68.70 meters. It is further down from the 68.72-meter elevation last Friday.

The Department of Health yes-

terday advised the public to make sure that their drinking water is safe, especially to those who are affected by the water shortage.

The DoH said that drinking water from "unsafe sources" can be made safe by boiling the water for two minutes to eliminate disease-causing organisms.

Another way is by using chlorine tablets, the DoH said. "Chlorinating water for drinking is an alternative way to make it safe but it may not be effective against some disease-causing organisms, such as those that cause watery diarrhea," the DoH said.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said that it is important

to ensure the quality of the drinking water to avoid falling ill.

Duque also added that the public should maintain their personal hygiene, as some may be tempted to forego habits such as taking a bath and hand washing.

"In the midst of the water shortage crisis, continue observing personal hygiene to avoid common diseases such as scabies, diarrhea, and other food and waterborne diseases," said Duque. "Let us conserve water, adapt to the limited water supply, and make sure to prioritize cleanliness and personal health at all times," he added. **(El-lalyn V. Ruiz and Analou de Vera)**



Manila Bay rehab on right track -- Cimatu

By Cory Martinez

ENVIRONMENT and Natural Resources Secretary Roy Cimatu has declared that they are on the right track more than a month since the launching of the Manila Bay Rehabilitation last January 27.

Cimatu made the statement during the first meeting of the DENR-led inter-agency Task Force Manila Bay which he presided over.

Last month, President Rodrigo Duterte issued Administrative Order No. 16 creating the task force and expediting the rehabilitation and restoration of Manila Bay's coastal and marine ecosystems.

"I can proudly say, we

are heading in the right direction," Cimatu said.

Cimatu explained that the signing of the administrative order "signifies the full trust and confidence of our President that the rehabilitation of Manila Bay is a doable and achievable mission."

Prior to the administrative order, the DENR launched on January 27 the three-phase rehabilitation project dubbed "Battle for Manila Bay" where over 10,000 people joined a massive cleanup activity in various parts of the Manila Bay region.

Cimatu said the unprecedented cleanup activity was made possible by the overwhelming support from local government units, private sector, aca-

deme and non-government organizations.

"We were more than 10,000 at that time, all with hearts and minds set to rehabilitate and restore Manila Bay to its former glory," he said.

Barely six weeks since the launch, Cimatu reported that the DENR and its attached agency, the Laguna Lake Development Authority, have already issued a total of 263 Notices of Violation and 119 Cease and Desist Orders to establishments in Metro Manila, Central Luzon and the Calabarzon that have violated the Philippine Clean Water Act of 2004 and other environmental laws.

Cimatu also disclosed that the rehabilitation ef-

forts got a major boost after San Miguel Corp., through its president Ramon Ang, signed a memorandum of agreement with the DENR for the massive cleanup of the Tullahan-Tinajeros River System, which is among the dirtiest river systems in Metro Manila, that empties to the bay.

"Mr. Ang generously pledged P1 billion for this project which will positively impact the rehabilitation of Manila Bay," Cimatu said.

Cimatu added that other companies have also expressed their willingness to join the efforts to rehabilitate Manila Bay and its tributaries, among them the SM Group for the Parañaque River and

Megaworld Corp. for Marikina River.

Addressing the heads and representatives of various agencies involved in the rehabilitation, Cimatu said: "Let us put our minds together, roll up our sleeves, and more importantly, commit ourselves for the rehabilitation of Manila Bay for the present and the future generations."

He added: "My fellow workers in government, Administrative Order No. 16 has laid down our tasks. We have all been hand-picked to do this job. Let us be brave and courageous enough to accept this colossal challenge of rehabilitating Manila Bay."

Cimatu further stressed that the Manila Bay rehabilitation was not just an



CIMATU

environmental issue, but also social and economic issue "as we remove and move people, and weed out industries and structures that violate the law and hinder our work for Manila Bay."

The rehabilitation will be done in three phases, namely: cleanup and improvement of water quality; rehabilitation; and protection and sustainment.



Department of Environment and Natural Resources
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION INITIATIVES SERVICE

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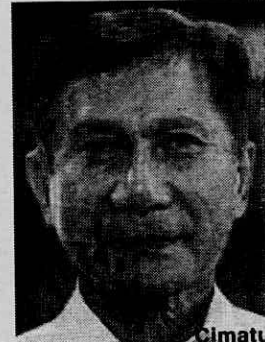
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DPWH eyes bigger machines for Manila Bay cleanup

The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) is planning to bring in larger machines to help remove deep-seated sediment from Manila Bay, an official said yesterday.

"We are now encountering difficulty. The sediments in the outer sea area are more compact, maybe because there

are already several layers of sediment that have solidified over the years. So now we are assembling a larger amphibious excavator to loosen the sediment in the Manila Bay," said Noel Ilaog, DPWH Bureau of Equipment director.

The new amphibious excavator would have a shorter arm

than the three existing machinery but it would have a bigger bucket capacity, he said.

"Having a shorter arm would also be useful because it would have more force or strength in digging out the sediments," Ilaog added.

The DPWH has been using 28 pieces of equipment,

including three new amphibious excavators, two dumping scows and a debris segregator for the Manila Bay cleanup.

Ilaog said while the DPWH personnel currently work only for one shift, the agency will form a second shift of personnel who would work from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m.

He explained that even if the DPWH has 11 trucks at its disposal, workers can only haul three truckloads of garbage to a facility in Taguig City because of traffic gridlocks. By setting up another shift, the DPWH can use the lighter flow of traffic at night to transport the collected garbage, Ilaog said.

For this year, the desilting would cover 1.5 kilometers, from the United States embassy to the Manila Yacht Club breakwater; 50 meters from the coastline and .80 to one meter deep. The 2019 target is to remove 225,000 cubic meters of silt.

- Evelyn Macairan



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The Manila Times

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IN FULL SWING Personnel of the Department of Public Works and Highways continue dredging operations in Manila Bay as the rehabilitation program enters its second month. The government hopes that the massive cleanup that would cost P47 billion would lead to the reduction of the coliform level to make the bay fit for swimming and fishing.

PHOTO BY DJ DIOSINA



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Pulso ng Masa

I-relocate ang squatters para mawala ang basura sa Manila Bay

PATULOY ang paglilinis sa Manila Bay. Ginugwardiyahan pa ang bahaging nililinis para walang makalusong na mga tao at makapagligo. Tone-tonelada ng burak at basura ang nakuha sa ilalim ng dagat at hanggang ngayon patuloy pa ang paghahalukay o dredging. Anim na linggo umanong huhukayin

ang Manila Bay gamit ang mga makabagong makinarya.

Nabasa ko na seryoso ang Department of Environment ang Natural Resources (DENR) sa paglilinis ng Manila Bay gaya rin ng ginawang paglilinis sa Boracay. Sa kasalukuyan, malinis na malinis ang Boracay at marami na namang turistang dumadagsa roon. Nagalit si President Duterte sa karumihan ng Boracay na tinawag niyang "cesspool" o poso negro kaya iniutos na isara sa loob ng 6 na buwan para linisin. Nagtagumpay ang DENR sa Boracay at nadisiplina ang mga may-ari ng resort at restaurant.

Nagalit din si Duterte nang makita ang karumihan ng Manila Bay kaya ipinag-utos sa DENR na linisin ito. Ito ang dahilan kaya nagkukumahog si DENR Sec. Roy Cimatu sa paglilinis ng makasaysayang Manila Bay. Ininspeksiyon ni Cimatu ang mga estero na nakakonekta sa Manila Bay ay natuklasan na maraming establisimento ang nagtatapon ng dumi sa mga estero at mula rito, tumatapon sa Manila Bay. Walang waste water treatment facilities ang mga establisimento at mga restaurant kaya ang dumi ay sinusuka sa Manila Bay. Unang pinasara ang Manila Zoo na napatunayang ang mga dumi at basura ay deretsong tumatapon sa estero at iniluluwa sa Manila Bay.

Nakikita kong seryoso si Secretary Cimatu sa paglilinis ng Manila Bay. Tama lang na ipasara
(Sundan sa page 4)

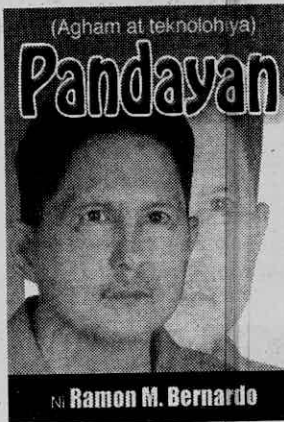
PULSO NG MASA... Mula page 3

ang mga establisimento na nagsusuka ng kanilang dumi. Pero para sa akin, mas maganda kung isabay na ang pag-relocate sa mga squatters na nasa baybayin ng Manila Bay. Ang mga squatters sa palagay ko ang numero unong nagpatapon lang sila nang tapon ng kanilang basura na karamihan

ay mga plastic na supot, sache ng shampoo, coffee, sauce, ketsup at iba pa. Ilipat ang squatters para mawala ang basura sa Manila Bay.

Sayang lang ang paglilinis sa Manila Bay kung nariyan ang squatters.

--- **RODITO JAMLO,**
Vicente Cruz St.,
Sampaloc, Manila



(Agham at teknolohiya)

Pandayan

NI Ramon M. Bernardo

Pollution na likha ng sachet

WALA namang binabanggit na partikular na klase ng mga produkto ang Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives nang ipalabas nito kamakailan ang resulta ng isa nitong pag-aaral hinggil sa problema ng plastic pollution sa bansa. Ayon sa pag-aaral nito, halos 164 milyong piraso ng plastic sachet ang itinatapon ng mga Pilipino araw-araw. Ito iyong mga sachet na gamit na at siyempre, basyo na lang o wala nang laman. Taon-taon, 59.8 bilyong piraso ng plastic sachet ang ginagamit sa Pilipinas.

Nilinaw naman sa pag-aaral na hindi naman ang pangagasiwa at pagtatapon sa mga basurang nalikha ng mga plastic o lalagyan kaya panawagan sana nila sa mga manufacturer na bawasan sana ang paggawa ng mga ganitong plastic packaging na natatapon lang pagkagamit.

"Hindi naman isang problema sa basura ang plastik," sabi pa sa pahayag ng naturang organisasyon. "Isa itong problema sa polusyon. Nagsimula ito nang gawin ang plastik. Dahil walang ibang mapamimilian ang mga tao kundi ang plastic packaging, napipilitan silang maging katuwang sa krisis sa plastic pollution." Ipinahiwatig na dapat magkaroon ng alternatibo rito. Hindi nga lang malaman kung anong puwedeng alternatibo rito.

Isa pa naman ang sachet sa bunga ng makabago nating panahon na nagpapaluwag sa araw-araw na buhay ng maraming Pilipino lalo na ng mga mahihirap. Kahit ano pa man ang laman niyan- sabon, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, pulbos, mga pampakintab sa buhok at sapa-

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tos, hair dye, kape, gatas, tsokolate, asukal, palaman sa tinapay, at iba pa- naging magaan sila sa bulsa, matipid at nabibili kahit sa sari-sari store lang o convenience store o sa mga bangketa.

Kaso nga, gawa sa plastik ang halos karamihan ng mga sachet na ito. Bukod diyan, binabanggit din na problema sa naturang pag-aaral ang hinggil sa mga plastik na shopping bag at diaper. 57 milyong shopping bag ang nagagamit sa Pilipinas araw-araw (20.6 bilyon taun-taon) at 45.2 milyon kada araw naman ang sa plastic labo bag (iyong maliliit, manipis at transparent na plastik na supot). Ayon pa sa ulat, tatlong milyong diaper araw-araw o 1.1 bilyong

diaper bawat taon ang itinatapon ng mga Filipino. Siyempre, gawa sa plastik ang karamihan ng mga diaper. At plastik ang isa rin sa mga dahilan ng pag-iinit ng klima ng mundo o global warming.

At, dahil hindi madaling matunaw ang mga plastik, bigla kong naalala iyong mga ulat hinggil sa mga plastik na nakukuha sa tiyan ng ilan sa klase ng mga nahuhuling isda sa mga karagatan sa mundo. Ganito katindi ang problema sa plastic pollution. Hindi natin namamalayang nakakain natin ang plastik na napapasama sa sistema ng mga isda.

164 milyong plastic sachet araw-araw ang natatapon? Napakarami nga lalo na kung

iisipin ang bilang nito nang buwanan at taunan. Itinatapon na lang pagkaubos ng laman. Ibig sabihin, hindi na magagamit. Maganda sana kung puwede silang i-recycle. Pero hindi naman lahat ng tao ay nagagawa o magagawang maging mapanlikha at makapag-recycle ng mga plastic na bagay. Baka nga

kailangan ng tulong ng lahat, hindi lang ng mga consumer at ng pamahalaan kundi maging ng mga tagagawa rin ng mga produktong gumagamit ng plastic sachet.

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(Anumang reaksyon sa kolum na ito ay e-mail sa rbernardo2001@hotmail.com)



MWSS to comply with Rody order

150 days to solve water crisis

By CATHERINE TALAVERA

The head of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) is reading between the lines of President Duterte's order to release 150 days worth of water from Angat Dam, noting that the President may have been misinformed on the water crisis.

In a radio interview yesterday, MWSS administrator Reynaldo Velasco said while the President may have been ill-advised on the issue, he understands the message being conveyed.

"What is important is to solve the problem," Velasco said in English and Filipino.

Velasco said he has informed Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea about the misinfor-

mation sent to the President.

"I will comply with the wish of the President not based on the terms that he used, but I can see what he wants. He doesn't want people to line up in the streets waiting for water," Velasco said.

Velasco added that he hoped to come up with an action plan by tomorrow.

"We will comply with the marching orders of (President

Duterte) to solve the water shortage in 150 days and the MWSS together with its concessionaires – Manila Water, Maynilad and Bulacan Bulk Water – will do its best to meet his expectations," the MWSS said in a statement.

In line with the President's order, the MWSS said it has added two centimeters (cm) to

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the 46 cm released daily from the Angat-Ipo-La Mesa water systems, which can only accommodate 4,000 million liters daily (MLD), with the approval of the Natural Water Resources Board (NWRB).

"The present problem could have been averted had Manila Water's 100 MLD Cardona Treatment Plant been operational since October," the MWSS said.

In the previous months, Manila Water had been sourcing its deficit water from La Mesa Dam but due to the lack of rains caused by El Niño, La Mesa was depleted.

The MWSS board of trustees said it held a special meeting last Thursday, where short-term and long-term measures to solve the water shortage in the East Zone were discussed.

Among the possible solutions discussed were the activation of 101 deep wells, which can supply 101 MLD to consumers, and the sharing of Maynilad of 50 MLD through cross-border sharing, including

the deployment of water trucks to affected areas that will service or benefit 50,000 households in Quezon City, Parañaque and Taguig.

The MWSS said the NWRB has approved the request to reactivate the deep wells and Manila Water has started energizing and activating the said wells.

East Zone concessionaire Manila Water noted that its 20-hour water interruptions would not last throughout the summer as it is starting to see the effects of the rotational water supply scheme it implemented since Thursday.

"Levels of various reservoirs have started to increase and water supply, though still at low pressure in some areas, is slowly being distributed to severely affected barangays," the company said in a statement Friday.

Manila Water said pressure is expected to improve in the coming days as the reservoirs are refilled to enable water to reach highly elevated areas.

"These operational adjustments are a temporary measure that Manila Water is undertaking to balance water supply distribution in its concession area," the company said.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) expressed optimism that the situation in Metro Manila will improve in the coming weeks.

DENR Undersecretary Benny Antiporda said the DENR has coordinated with the NWRB, Maynilad and Manila Water with regard to its water treatment plant in Cardona, Rizal to help areas in Metro Manila experiencing water shortage.

Antiporda said Manila Water will provide a total additional water supply of 180 MLD by April.

"Within next week or two, service will improve,"

Antiporda said in English and Filipino, noting that (Manila Water's) Cardona water treatment facility is expected to yield 22 MLD by the end of March before reaching a capacity yield of 50 MLD by April.

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met at the MWSS office in Quezon City Thursday, where Maynilad committed to allocate 20 MLD to Manila Water by the end of March and increasing it to 50 MLD by April.

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The MWSS will be responsible for operating the deep wells, Antiporda added.

He said the NWRB also expects another 50 MLD to be sourced from the deep wells after April, generating a total of 80 MLD.

Critical level

Meanwhile, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) yesterday said the water level in La Mesa remained critical.

As of 6 a.m. yesterday, the water level in the dam was at 68.70 meters, below the critical level of 69 meters.

PAGASA noted that there was a reduction of 0.02 meters from the 68.72 meters recorded Friday morning.


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The Dam Water Level Update of PAGASA also showed that the current level is 11.45 meters below the normal level of 80.15 meters.

Hospitals with standby wells can draw their water needs from the water facilities, the National Disaster Risk and Reduction Management (NDRRMC) said.

"In case there is a need to augment the water supply, hospitals with standby deep wells will be the priority," said NDRRMC executive officer and Office of Civil Defense administrator Ricardo Jalad.

Jalad cited last Wednesday's report from the Department of Health (DOH) that at least five government hospitals in Metro Manila have been affected by the water crisis.

The five hospitals include Rizal Medical Center in Pasig City, National Center for Mental Health in Mandaluyong City, National Kidney Institute and Transplant Institute, Philippine Children's Medical Center and the Quirino Memorial Medical Center, all in Quezon City.

The prevailing El Niño spell has affected 23 areas in Region

4-B as well as Regions 9 and 10 with damages to agriculture including high-value crops.

As this developed, the DOH has assured the public that the water being rationed to its hospitals are tested.

According to Health Secretary Francisco Duque III, all affected DOH hospitals are under instruction to test their water supply coming from several sources to prevent outbreaks of diseases like diarrhea and gastroenteritis.

"Our hospitals have capabilities to test water so they are doing it now. Even if the water is coming from a corporation, which is supposed to treat and test them... handling may cause contamination," Duque told reporters.

Duque also urged persons who are affected by the water shortage to make sure that their drinking water is safe.

"It is important to ensure the quality of your drinking water through simple, inexpensive steps... to treat and safely store water in your homes to avoid falling ill," he said. - **With Rhodina Villanueva, Jaime Laude, Sheila Crisostomo**



MWSS to solve Manila's water woes in 150 days

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR**

Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) has vowed to solve the water supply issues hounding Metro Manila through a list of short-term and medium-term solutions to be carried out in the span of 150 days.

The government water regulator was responding to the marching orders of President Duterte, who had earlier directed the MWSS to order private concessionaires Manila Water and Maynilad to release water supply from Angat good for 150 days.

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MWSS to solve Manila's... ◀1

"We wish to assure the President that MWSS is doing its best to solve the water shortage problem and we are putting to task Manila Water to give us a definitive timeline of solving their distribution and operations systems to bring back to normal level the water supply to ease the suffering of the consuming public," MWSS Administrator Reynaldo Velasco said.

He also reiterated that short and long-term solutions for Metro Manila's water supply demand are now in place to provide enough and sufficient water to supply the future needs of the 20 million residents in metropolis and nearby provinces serviced by its concessionaires in the next 10 to 15 years.

"Admittedly, we are on a catch up mode as far as water supply source is concerned since our main source which is the Angat Dam that supplies 96 percent of water to Metro Manila and the provinces of Bulacan, Cavite and Rizal was built in 1967 and no major water source has been built since then except for some water supply projects from Laguna Lake by both Maynilad and Manila Water," Velasco said.

He said that it's only over the last two years under the Duterte administration that serious efforts have been put in place to push for major water flagship projects such as: the 600 MLD Kaliwa Dam, the 500 MLD from Wawa Dam, the 800 MLD to be sourced from unutilized water from Angat-Norzagay, the 350 MLD from Bayabas Dam as well as 500 MLD from Laguna Lake.

In a special board meeting, the MWSS Board of Trustees chaired by Franklin J. Demonteverde adapted the short-term and long-term measures presented by Velasco to address the water shortage in the East Zone.

These measures include MWSS requesting the National Water Resources Board (NWRB), through its Executive Director Virgilio David, to allow Manila Water to activate 101 deep wells which can supply 101 million liters daily (MLD) to its consumers.

The NWRB has already approved this request and Manila Water has started energizing and activating these deep wells.

MWSS also asked Maynilad to allocate 50 mld and share water through cross border flow with Manila Water. The cross border will initially provide additional 20 MLD to Manila Water's supply this March and full 50 MLD by April.

Maynilad was also asked to share its water tanks to Manila Water.

MWSS has also directed Manila Water to activate and operationalize its Cardona, Rizal, treatment plant which was supposed to be operational in October, 2018.

Right now, the Cardona Treatment Plant is now energized with initial 24 MLD and will be fully operational with 50 MLD by end of this month.

Right now, Angat Dam supplies Metro Manila 4,000 MLD.

The concession agreements particularly give Manila Water an alloca-

tion of 1,600 MLD and Maynilad 2,400 MLD. That is a total of 4,000 MLD, divided into 40 percent and 60 percent, which is based on the actual amount that Angat can give with the existing infrastructure.

Manila Water is getting its allocation of 1,600 MLD but its requirement is already at 1,750 MLD.

This pushed the company to source its deficit water from La Mesa Dam but due to the lack of rains, the dam was eventually depleted.

As a result, Manila Water had to implement low to no-water supply interruption within its concession, subjecting itself to an intense public scrutiny.

This prompted Duterte to order the release of water from Angat Dam good for 150 days.

Meanwhile, Velasco clarified that the so-called "bypass" has been open all these times following a viral post in social media involving MWSS Chief Regulator Patrick Ty and a netizen.

Last year, Manila Water and Maynilad had issues regarding the bypass that prompted the MWSS to mediate between the two concessionaires. Maynilad had complained that it was getting less than 60 percent of its allocation, causing its Bagbag Reservoir's level to fall, affecting its service area.

Contrary to perception, the 60:40 split is not maintained throughout the day. Maynilad produces more at night because it has the Bagbag reservoir to fill up and use during the day, while Manila Water produces more during daytime. It is the Common Purpose Facilities (CPF) that controls the bypass that regulates this sharing.



MWSS: WATER WOES SOLVED IN 150 DAYS

By Maricel V. Cruz

THE Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System said Saturday it would solve the water shortage in some parts of Metro Manila and Rizal in 150 days or around five months in compliance with President Rodrigo Duterte's "marching order."

"We will comply with the marching orders of President Rodrigo Duterte to solve the water shortage in 150 days and the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System together with its concessionaires—Manila Water, Maynilad and Bulacan Bulk Water will do [their] best to meet [the President's] expectations," MWSS Administrator Reynaldo Velasco said in a statement.

Velasco's statement followed his earlier clarification that "there's no such thing as 150 days" worth of water from Angat Dam.

Duterte earlier ordered 150 days' worth of water to be released to supply water to those affected by the water shortage.

"We perfectly understand the presidential order to immediately resolve the problem to ease the burden of the consuming public," Velasco said.

Turn to A2

MWSS:...

From A1

"In line with his order, the MWSS, through the approval of the Natural Water Resources Board [NWRB], has actually added 2 cm to the 46 cm released daily from [the] Angat-Ipo-La Mesa water systems, which can only accommodate 4,000 million liters daily," he noted.

Angat Dam supplies Metro Manila with 4,000 million liters of water per day.

The concession agreements gave Manila Water an allocation of 1,600 MLD for its 6 million consumers, and Maynilad with 2,400 MLD for its 9 million consumers.

That is a total 4,000 MLD, divided into 40 percent and 60 percent, respectively, which is based on the actual volume that Angat can give with the existing infrastructure involving aqueducts and pipeline systems.

Velasco said Manila Water was getting its allocation of 1,600 MLD but its requirement was now pegged at 1,750 MLD due to the increase in demand, consumption and population growth.

"The present problem could have been averted had Manila Water's 100 MLD Cardona Treatment Plant had been operational since December 2018," he said.

In the previous months, Velasco said, Manila Water has been sourcing its deficit water from La Mesa Dam but due to the lack of rains caused by the El Niño or dry spell,

1/2



La Mesa Dam was depleted.

The MWSS has directed Manila Water to activate and operationalize its Cardona, Rizal treatment plant, enough to provide an additional 100 MLD to its consumers.

Manila Water president Ferdinand dela Cruz on Saturday announced that the Cardona Treatment Plant was now energized with an initial 24 MLD and would be fully-operational with 50 MLD by the end of this month.

"We wish to assure the President that MWSS is doing its best to solve the water shortage problem and we are putting to task Manila Water to give us a definitive timeline of solving their distribution and operations systems to bring back to normal level the water supply to ease the suffering of the consuming public," Velasco said.

He also reiterated that short- and long-term solutions for Metro Manila's water supply demand were now in place and on pace, under the Duterte administration to provide sufficient water to supply the future needs of the 20 million residents in the metropolis and nearby provinces serviced by its three concessionaires in the next 10 to 15 years.

"Admittedly, we are on a catch-up mode as far as water supply source is concerned since our main source, which is the Angat Dam that supplies 96 percent of water to Metro Manila and the provinces of Bulacan, Cavite and Rizal, was built in 1967 and no major water source has been built since then, except for some water supply projects from Laguna Lake by both Maynilad and

Manila Water," Velasco said.

He said it was only over the past two years under the Duterte administration that serious efforts have been put in place to push for major water flagship projects, such as the 600-MLD Kaliwa Dam, 500 MLD from Wawa Dam, 800 MLD to be sourced from unutilized water from Angat-Norzagaray, 350 MLD from Bayabas Dam, as well as 500 MLD from Laguna Lake.

Meanwhile, Velasco clarified that the so-called "bypass" had been open all along, following a viral post on social media involving MWSS chief regulator Patrick Ty and a netizen.

According to MWSS, the bypass was opened regularly, particularly because the La Mesa Dam level was low.

Most, if not all, of Manila Water's 1600 MLD now probably was going through the bypass.

Last year, Manila Water and Maynilad had issues regarding the bypass that resulted in MWSS mediating between the two concessionaires after Maynilad complained that it was getting less than 60 percent, causing its Bagbag Reservoir's level to fall, and affecting its service area.

Contrary to perceptions, Velasco said, the 60-40 split was not maintained throughout the day.

"Maynilad produces more at night because it has the Bagbag reservoir to fill up and use during the day. While Manila Water produces more during the daytime. It is the Common Purpose Facilities that controls

the bypass that regulates this sharing," he noted.

Meanwhile, a party-list lawmaker called on the Department of Agriculture to provide emergency aid to farmers heavily hit by drought.

Party-list Rep. Ariel Casilao of Anakpawis said that so far, the government had estimated the damage wrought by the drought at P1.2 billion worth of crops in nine provinces in the Visayas and Mindanao major islands.

The Agriculture department earlier announced that about 22 provinces were expected to be affected by drought, including Palawan, Ilocos Sur and La Union.

"While the government is receiving reports of areas where farmers are grossly decapitated on saving their crops, the urgent concern at present is for them to be assisted, alleviated with government aid. Otherwise, they will certainly fall into unrecoverable bankruptcy and consequently, our local food supply and sufficiency will decline," Casilao said.

He said regional chapters of Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas reported that farmers in the provinces were in dire need of food and cash assistance and irrigation services to salvage crops which are not totally destroyed.

Government agencies and local governments reported damages in Cotabato at P362 million on rice, P269 million on corn crops; Kidapawan at P53 million; Maguindanao at P47 million on rice, P54 million

on corn; Zamboanga provinces at P79 million; Davao del Sur at P55 million; Misamis Oriental at P7 million; Pagadian City at P102 million and P23 million on high-value crops and seaweeds; in Negros Oriental at P6.1 million; and Region IV-B Mimaropa on 3,000 hectares of cropland.

"We believe the damage could not be this worse, if the Free Irrigation Services Act were fully implemented, we intend to know if these lands should have been saved by free irrigation," Casilao said.

Republic Act 10969 or the Free Irrigation Services Act was enacted on Feb. 2 last year but is yet to be implemented as its implementing rules and regulations is yet to be finalized, after more than a year, he lamented.

"The Rice Liberalization Act has overran the Free Irrigation Act, and now the farmers are hammered by the drought, that neoliberals will use to their argument that local agriculture is a lost cause and the government's token measures and downplaying of damages are reeking of its adoption of liberalization or non-intervention dogma," he said.

The lawmaker said that the value of damaged crops is of serious level as it represented the lost potential incomes of farmers and wealth that could have circulated to the local economy.

"The government is mandated to reparate the affected sectors, otherwise, all sectors in the country will be, from enduring low supply of food to high levels of prices," he said. **With PNA**

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MWSS-RO calls for creation of Department of Water

By **MADELAINE B. MIRAFLOR**

As the East Zone concession of Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) faces water supply shortage, the MWSS-Regulatory Office (MWSS-RO) thinks the government must work toward the establishment of Department of Water, which will regulate the overall distribution of water throughout the country.

MWSS Chief Regulator Patrick Ty said there is now a need to revisit the plan for the country to establish a Department of Water, which will help the government hold concessionaires more accountable for their shortcomings.

MWSS's East Zone concessionaire Manila Water is currently reeling from low to no-water supply interruption, subjecting itself to intense public scrutiny.

It all started when water got depleted at La Mesa Dam, where the company sources its supply deficit.

Right now, Metro Manila gets 96 percent of its water supply from Angat Dam. Manila Water is allocated 1,600 million liters per day (MLD), but its requirement already grew to 1,750 MLD.

When asked if Manila Water could be held accountable for failing to have a clear projection of the demand within its concession, Ty said it should be, but this could only be reckoned with in the fifth

rate rebasing period.

Done every five years, rate rebasing is a review of the water utilities' past performance and projection of their future cash flows. Its purpose is to set the water rates at a level that would allow both Maynilad and Manila Water to recover their expenditures and earn a rate of return.

"We can't hold anyone accountable when something like this happened because MWSS is not authorized to issue fines and penalties. That's an unfortunate situation for us," Ty said.

"We should have a Department of Water. Right now, there are lots of government agencies that are related to water," he added.

As it is, the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) is the government agency that is responsible for all the water resources in the Philippines. It coordinates and regulates all water-related activities in the country that has impact on the physical environment and the economy.

MWSS, on the other hand, is tasked to monitor the concession agreements as well as review and monitor water supply and sewerage rates. It is also tasked to maintain the country's waterworks system to ensure an uninterrupted and adequate supply and distribution of potable water for domestic and other purposes.

As of now, the NWRB, as well as the

MWSS, are both under the National Water Regulatory Commission (NWRRC).

Aside from NWRB and MWSS, other agencies under the NWRRC are the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA), Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA), Coordinating Council for Private Sector Participation (CCPSP), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), and Department of Justice (DOJ).

The plan to establish Department of Water is now being discussed at the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) as one of the legislative agenda this administration would be pushing for.

"It's going to be a legislative process. We are hoping that it will happen (within this administration) because President Rodrigo Duterte earlier had a pronouncement saying that within his administration, he will centralize the management of water," National Water Regulatory Board (NWRB) Executive Director Seville David Jr. said in an earlier report.

According to him, NWRB is now coordinating with some members of the House of Representative in the drafting of the bill that will lead to the creation of the Department of Water.



Public urged to conserve water

I am calling not just the residents of La Union but also other Filipinos to conserve water during summer

By Raymart T. Lolo

La Union Bishop Daniel Presto of the Diocese of San Fernando on Saturday has called on the public to conserve water in the wake of simultaneous water interruption be in many parts of Metro Manila.

Bishop Presto pointed out the importance of conserving water especially now that summer is fast approaching.

"I am calling not just the residents of La Union but also other Filipinos to conserve water during summer," Bishop Presto said.

The bishop appealed to the people to likewise plant trees as a means of preserving the environment and cushioning the impact of the El Niño phenomenon..

According to Bishop Presto, planting trees helps water conservation especially in parts of the watershed.

Meanwhile, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) sees an improvement in the water situation in Metro Manila in the coming weeks with the additional water supply from the National Water Resource Board, the Maynilad Water Services Inc., including the water treatment plant of Manila Water Co. Inc. (MWCI) in Cardona, Rizal province.

DENR Undersecretary Benny Antiporda said the DENR has already coordinated with the three water agencies serviced by MWCI with a total additional water supply of 180 million liter a day that will be obtained by April.



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National Water Resources Board kinalampag sa krisis sa tubig

Kinalampag kahapon ni dating senador Juan Ponce Enrile ang National Water Resources Board na paigtingin ang paghahanap ng karagdang suplay ng tubig para sa dumaraming mga Pilipinong nakatira sa Metro Manila at kalapit na mga lugar.

Sinuportahan din ni Enrile ang gagawing magkahiwalay na imbestigasyon ng Senado at House of Representatives tungkol sa krisis sa tubig.

Ayon kay Enrile, dapat imbestigahan kung

bakit sa concession area lamang ng Manila Water nagkakaroon ng krisis.

Idinagdag ni Enrile na ramdam na ngayon ang El Niño at dapat hindi na umaasa sa iisang suplay ng tubig.

"Ngayon na ramdam na ramdam na natin ang El Niño at dapat naghahanda na rin tayo sa mga posibleng epekto ng climate change, hindi na dapat tayo umaasa sa iisang suplay ng tubig lamang," ani Enrile. *(Malou Escudero)*



Department of Environment and Natural Resources
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION INITIATIVES SERVICE



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Ang aming pananaw...



KAMAY NA BAKAL VS KRISIS SA TUBIG

INIUTOS na ni Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte sa Manila Water at Maynilad na magpalabas ng tubig mula sa Angat Dam simula nitong Biyernes upang maresolba ang matinding kakapusan sa tubig sa Metro Manila na sinasabing artipisyal para mapabilis ang Wawa Dam project na gagawin ng mga Chinese contractor sa lalawigan ng Rizal.

Sa isang pahayag, sinabi ni Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo na 'aware and concerned' ang Pangulo sa hirap na dinaranas ngayon ng maraming taga-Metro Manila dahil sa kakapusan sa tubig kaya inatasan na ang Manila Water Company, Inc., Maynilad Water Services, Inc., at iba pang kinauukulang ahensiya ng pamahalaan na ipagamit ang tubig sa Angat Dam sa loob ng 150 araw.

"Failure to act or comply with this directive, the President will personally go to them and make the responsible officers account for such failure," sabi ni Panelo.

Kailangan pa ang kamay na bakal ng Pangulo para malutas ang problema sa tubig ng Metro Manila na hindi dapat naganap kung hindi sobra-sobra ang arawang kinukuha ng Manila Water sa La Mesa Dam na hindi nito maipaliwanag kung saan ginamit.

Dapat papanagutin ang Manila Water sa kanilang kapabayaang para magkaroon ng artipisyal na kakapusan sa tubig na napakahalaga sa buhay ng mga taga-Metro Manila.



Report violations of Boracay establishments — DOT

By **TARA YAP**

ILOILO CITY — The Department of Tourism (DOT) is urging everyone to report establishments that violate regulations at the world-famous Boracay Island almost five months after it reopened to tourists.

DOT Undersecretary Art P. Boncato Jr. said it was critical that the business sector and the local government of Malay town, Aklan province must report violations or immediate action.

Lawyer Helen Catalbas, DOT's regional director for Western Visayas, reiterated the need to continue to cooperate.

"Our purpose is to sustain a better and cleaner Boracay Island," noted Catalbas.

DOT has accredited 320 hotels and resorts. These establishments with a total of 11,062 rooms have complied with environmental and local government laws to operate.

Unlike in the past, Boracay-bound tourists are now required to have bookings with DOT-accredited hotels and resorts. Otherwise, they are not allowed to enter the island if they do not have proof of a hotel or resort booking. There has been strict checking at mainland Malay town before tourists are allowed to go ride the boat going to Boracay.



Pasaway sa Boracay, isumbong n'yo – DoT

ILOILO CITY - Nanawagan ang Department of Tourism (DoT) sa publiko na isumbong sa kanila ang mga pasaway na establisimyentong lumalabag sa batas sa isla ng Boracay.

Ayon kay DoT Undersecretary Art Boncato, Jr., dapat na isulong ng local government ng Malay, Aklan sa kagawaran ang mga establisimyentong lumalabag sa mga alintuntunin sa isla.

Tiniyak niya na agaran ang gagawing aksyon ng DoT sa mga reklamong matatanggap nito.

Paliwanag naman ni DoT-

Western Visayas director Atty. Helen Catalbas, kailangan nila ang pakikipagtulungan kaugnay ng naturang usapin.

"Our purpose is to sustain a better and cleaner Boracay Island," aniya.

Sa record ng DoT, aabot sa 320 hotel at resort ang nabigyan na nila ng accreditation matapos na makumpleto ang lahat ng kinakailangan upang makapag-operate ng negosyo.

"Unlike in the past, Boracay-bound tourists are now required to have bookings with DoT-accredited hotels and resorts.

Otherwise, they are not allowed to enter the island if they do not have proof of a hotel or resort booking. There has been strict checking at mainland Malay town before tourists are allowed to go ride the boat going to Boracay," ayon pa sa DoT.

Tara Yap



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El Nido Resorts's five 'must-try at least once in a lifetime' activities

HEALTHY coral reefs serve as home to a fascinating diversity of marine life. Having been declared a protected area since the '80s, Northern Palawan's Bacuit Bay and its reefs teeming with coral, other marine habitats and over 800 fish species in addition to sea turtles and dugong offer among the most absorbing water experiences.

Bacuit Bay is also home to three of the four island-paradise destinations that carry the El Nido Resorts (ENR) brand and where snorkeling is a must-do, even for beginners. These are Miniloc, Pangulasian and Lagen. The fourth island resort, Apulit, is in the neighboring municipality of Taytay where marine life also abounds.

Located short boat rides away from the Palawan mainland and the intense activity of its municipalities, the island resorts maintain for its guests house reefs that serve as serene windows to the underwater world. Fully aware that some of its guests may be new to snorkeling, the most convenient way to witness marine life, the resorts provide guests the required gear and highly supportive guides.

Here are five things El Nido Resorts' guest are encouraged to try:

1. Encounter Miniloc's fish 'university'

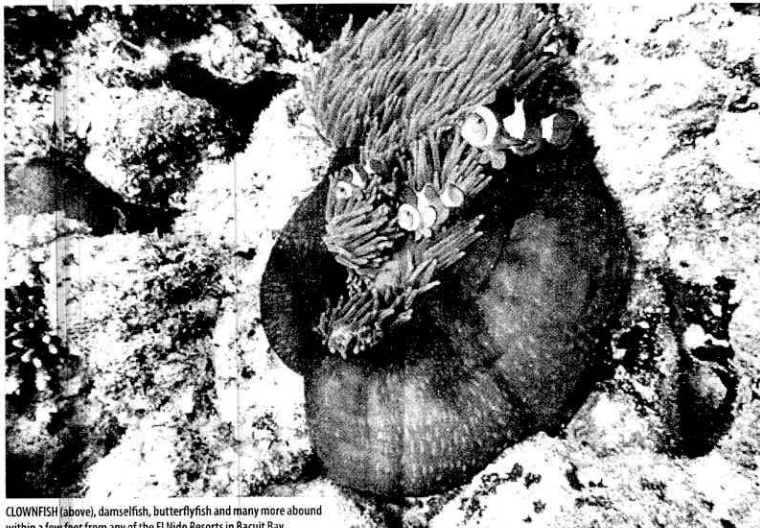
YOU'LL see not just a school of fish—but a "university" composed of hundreds to even thousands of bigeye scad. As marine expert Lee

Goldman writes: "The well-synchronized movement of schooling fish as they swim and react in near perfect unison is something to behold...there is no pre-swim game plan. Yet the fish rarely act confused."

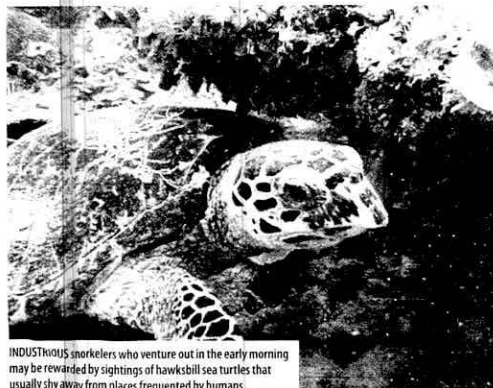
The fish have been genetically programmed to move in schools and mask their individuality to prevent predators from isolating individuals and attacking them. They also school to feed. By attacking in unison, they overwhelm other fish, protecting precious resources like algae patches. Not even the most heroic of fish, after all, will resist an attacking mob.

2. Swimming with the jacks

GIANT trevally, a.k.a jacks or *talakitok*, that grow up to 1.5 meters feed on scad. Thus, these reef predators also regularly visit Miniloc to dine on its large scad population. Miniloc's jacks are mostly breeders, explains Mariglo Laririt, ENR environmental director. They have apparently recognized this island's reef as a safe haven for them and their young.



CLOWNFISH (above), damselfish, butterflyfish and many more abound within a few feet from any of the El Nido Resorts in Bacuit Bay.



INDUSTRIOUS snorkelers who venture out in the early morning may be rewarded by sightings of hawksbill sea turtles that usually shy away from places frequented by humans.

3. Witness a turtle release

SEA turtle hatchings are celebrated in all El Nido Resorts. When ENR environmental officers and staff chance upon the golf ball-sized eggs of these sea creatures in Bacuit Bay's many beaches, they carefully gather them and rebury them in a spot in any of the island resorts where they can be watched over and shielded from monitor lizards, birds and illegal poachers.

When the eggs begin to hatch, guests from the ENR Bacuit Bay island resorts are invited to witness the fragile hatchlings make their way from the beach to the sea, usually at dusk. Very few of the nest population (one out of every 100 eggs laid) survive into adulthood. Thus, guests send them off with high hopes, cheers and prayers. The

females that will survive will reach sexual maturity in 15-20 years and will travel hundreds of kilometers to go back to the beach where they were hatched. This augurs well for the island-paradise destinations of El Nido Resorts, where there will always be room for them.

4. Get up close and personal with a shark

BLACK-TIP reef sharks and blue-spotted ribbontail rays are among Pangulasian's most important visitors. Because the premier island resort's house reef is part of a channel leading to the open sea, these incredibly graceful creatures have become regular habitues, along with blackspotted pufferfish and angel fish.

5. Try snorkeling, even if you don't swim

WITH more than 800 fish species, Bacuit Bay is a highly prized snorkeling paradise. Unlike other destinations within the Coral Triangle, the region, including the Philippines with the highest levels of marine biodiversity, Bacuit offers a variety of fish habitats within a confined space. No need to travel for hours to go from one habitat to another.

Clownfish, damselfish, wrasses, butterflyfish and much, much more abound within a few feet from any of the El Nido Resorts. Better yet, the guides of Miniloc, Pangulasian, Lagen and Apulit are trained to teach even newbies how to don a scuba mask and to breathe in a relaxed manner with a snorkel. Non-swimmers are handed floaters that are steered through the waters by the guides themselves.

Moreover, the guides' passion for the richness of their surroundings easily rubs off on their guests who go home convinced they have indeed been to a very special place.

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Students spark global climate uproar

Borders, languages and religions do not separate us

WASHINGTON — Students across a warming globe pleaded for their lives, future and planet Friday, demanding tough action on climate change.

From the South Pacific to the edge of the Arctic Circle, angry students in more than 100 countries walked out of classes to protest what they see as the failures by their governments.

Well more than 150,000 students and adults who were mobilized by word of mouth and social media protested in Europe, according to police estimates. But the initial turnout in the United States did not look quite as high.

"Borders, languages and religions do not separate us," eight-year-old Havana Chapman-Edwards, who calls herself the tiny diplomat, told hundreds of protesters at the US Capitol. "Today we are telling the truth and we do not take no for an answer."

Thousands of New York City students protested at locations including Columbus Circle, City Hall, the American Museum of Natural History and a football field at the Bronx High School of Science. Police said 16 protesters were arrested on disorderly conduct charges for blocking traffic at the museum.

The coordinated "school strikes" were inspired by 16-year-old Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, who began holding solitary demonstrations outside the Swedish parliament last year.

Since then, the weekly protests have snowballed from a handful of cities to hundreds, fueled by dramatic headlines about the impact of climate change during the students' lifetime. Unless emissions of heat-trapping gases start dropping dramatically, scientists estimate that the protesters will be in their 40s and 50s, maybe even 30s, when the world will reach dangerous levels of warming that international agreements are trying to prevent.

Thunberg, who has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, said at a rally in Stockholm that the world faces an "existential crisis, the biggest crisis humanity ever has faced and still it has been ignored for decades."

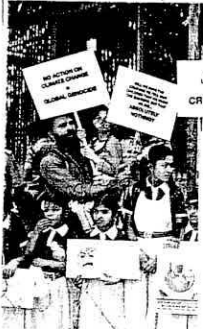
The coordinated "school strikes" were inspired by a 16-year-old Swedish activist, who began holding solitary demonstrations outside the Swedish parliament last year.

Alexandria Villasenor, a 13-year-old co-coordinator of the New York City protest that culminated in a die-in at the steps of the American Museum of Natural History, said while she was pleased with the number of demonstrators, a big turnout isn't the point.

"It won't be successful until the world leaders take some action," Villasenor said.

Young voice with a big heart
Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old from Sweden who started a global movement of schoolchildren striking to demand climate change action, has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

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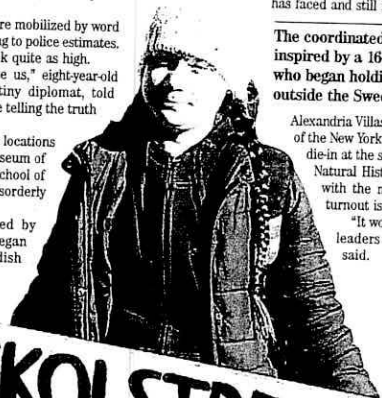
HYDERABAD, India.



MADRID, Spain.



PARIS, France.



ROME, Italy.



LONDON, United Kingdom.



LISBON, Portugal.



DUBLIN, Ireland.



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WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE GLOBAL SCHOOL STRIKE FOR CLIMATE

LAST March 15, students from around the world participated in a global school strike demanding bold action on climate change. According to estimates by 350.org, more than 1 million students from over 2000 locations in 125 countries participated in the strike. In the Philippines, hundreds of students and supporters gathered in at least 9 locations to show solidarity with the global strike.

The students who participated in the strike are on firm scientific ground. Climate change poses a threat to their future. In fact, it already poses a threat to their present. Sharp reductions in carbon emissions are needed to ensure a livable future.

One of the main inspirations for the movement, 16-year-old Swedish student Greta Thunberg, was recently nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Last year, Thunberg protested alone in front of the Swedish parliament. This week she was joined by more than a million students.

"The students who are striking in cities, towns and villages around the world are uniting behind the science," she writes in *The Guardian*. "We are only asking that our leaders do the same."

One of the Filipino students who participated in the global strike was Krishna Ariola. She joined Youth for Climate Hope in a silent protest at the Fountain of Justice in Bacolod City to call for climate action. "Climate change used to be just a lesson in science class, today we are experiencing its effects firsthand," she said. "But we can't be paralyzed by fear. That's why we choose to act."

Meanwhile, about 150 students from Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center in Bukidnon held a 12-kilometer march on mountain terrain to join the global call. High school student Vanessa Flores, who joined the march, talked about the impact of climate change on her community. "It's not easy to live with an unpredictable climate that affects our crop yield," she said. "It affects the food security of our family."

Last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a special report summarizing the extent of the climate crisis and laid down various pathways to prevent catastrophe.

According to the report, which was based on hundreds of independent and reputable scientific studies, climate change will reach catastrophic levels if everything goes on as they are. "Business as usual," as this path is often described.

Using a mountain of evidence, the report shows that if we fail to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius and instead allow it to reach 2 degrees, the world will be a much more dangerous place for future generations. The report shows that the difference between a warming of 1.5 degrees and 2 degrees is literally a matter of life and death for millions of people. (The current level of warming is around 1 degree Celsius.)

How do we limit warming to 1.5 degrees? According to the report, the world's carbon emissions must be reduced to almost half by 2030, and to net zero by 2050. With 11 years to go before 2030, we are nowhere near this target. This explains the urgency in the students' calls.

Kyle Anne Villariza, a student from Miag-ao, Iloilo, helped organize an event in solidarity with the global movement out of this sense of urgency. "I am joining the climate strike because I believe that the call for climate action has long been overdue," she says. "This is to show that I will stand together with the youth of tomorrow."

Many top climate scientists have expressed support for the students participating in the worldwide climate strike.

In an open letter published in *Scientific American*, climate scientists Peter Kalmus, Kate Marvel, Michael Mann, Katharine Hayhoe, and Kim Cobb declared their support. They write, "Our scientific understanding of the currently observed and projected future climate impacts clearly calls for the transformation of our energy systems and our society at all scales and across all sectors in order to rapidly decarbonize our economy."

"Ignoring the problem will not make it go away," the scientists write. "Students' demand for bold, urgent action are fully supported by the best available science. They need our support, but more than that, they need all of us to act. Their future depends on it; and so does ours."

With the climate strike movement going global, world leaders are already feeling the heat.

"My generation has failed to respond properly to the dramatic challenge of climate change," writes UN secretary general Antonio Guterres in response to the school strikes. "This is deeply felt by young people. No wonder they are angry."

The students are striking because they have learned one of the most valuable lesson of all —if we want to live safely, we must act in accordance with the science. It's time for the rest of us to act on it.



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World's youth demand action on climate change

By AFP bureaux

MONTREAL -- Hundreds of thousands of young people skipped school across the globe on Friday to march through the streets for an international day of student protests aimed at pushing world leaders into action on climate change.

Classrooms in capitals from Bangkok to Berlin and Lagos to London emptied as organizers of the student strike called demonstrations in more than 100 countries.

Students flooded into the streets across Europe, North and South America, and Asia carrying placards reading: "There is no planet B", "You're destroying our future" and "If you don't act like adults, we will."

Despite three decades of warnings, carbon dioxide emissions hit record levels in 2017 and again last year.

Loading the atmosphere with greenhouse gases at current rates will eventually lead to an uninhabitable planet, scientists say.

In Stockholm, Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg — who inspired the protests — warned that time was running out.

"We are living through an existential crisis that has been ignored for decades and if we do not act now it may be too late," the 16-year-old, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee, told Swedish public television station SVT.

Across the world, their placards formed a mosaic:

"Like the ocean, we will rise" (Sydney)

"Our future in your hands" (Berlin)

"System Change not Climate Change" (Vienna)

"Don't be a Trump" (Hong Kong)

"The Titanic would have NO problem in 2019" (Elmshorn, Germany)

And everywhere, "There is no planet B."

Montreal drew among the largest crowds, estimated by organizers at nearly 150,000.

In the United States, protests were more low-key, with events held in New York, Washington, Chicago, Portland, Oregon, and St. Paul, Minnesota, where one sign read: "So bad even introverts are here!"

Further south in Latin America, placards with messages such as "climate change is not 'fake news'" were seen in Buenos Aires, Argentina — while young people also took to the streets in the Chilean capital Santiago and Colombia's Medellin.

In Delhi, one of the world's most polluted cities, 200 students took part in a colorful protest, waving ribbons, juggling and performing stunts with hoops.

"We have to make a choice whether we want to sit and be indifferent or do something for our planet," said 16-year-old student Srijani Datta.

In Sydney, 18-year-old Charles Rickwood warned

that Australia's Great Barrier Reef could be destroyed.

"If current trends in the environment continue, we'll see the one, two degrees increase in our ocean then it will simply become unsustainable and we could lose the entire Great Barrier Reef," he told AFP.

SKIPPING EXAMS

European students were also out en masse. Several thousand youngsters thronged the streets of central London in a raucous demonstration with banners and placards.

Packing into Parliament Square, they cheered and chanted "Change... now!" before marching past Downing Street and massing outside Buckingham Palace.

"They're not going to stop me trying to save the planet," said 15-year-old Joe Crabtree from southwest London, who had missed two exams to join the rally.

More than one million marched overall, according to estimates by organizing groups such as the Youth For Climate movement and AFP reporters.

The Friday for Future movement said more than 300,000 young people demonstrated in Germany alone.

As youngsters hit the streets, nations meeting at the UN environment assembly in Kenya announced they had agreed to "significantly reduce" single-use plastics over the next decade.

But experts said the pledge — which only referred to man-made global warming and made no mention of the fossil fuels driving it — fell far short of the steps needed to tackle Earth's burgeoning pollution crisis.

'ADULTS SHOULD LEARN A LESSON'

The global action drew a mixed reaction from politicians.

Germany's Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said the demonstrators should be in class while Australia's Education Minister Dan Tehan said striking was "not something that we should encourage."

But New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern hailed the action, saying: "We hear you and we're getting on with setting a path for carbon neutrality."