

07 June 2023 Wednesday



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SM celebrates World Environment Day with DENR, private firms

SM celebrated World Environment Day together with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) with a pledge of support and a meeting on 'Blazing New Trails and Building a Shared Future with DENR's Strategic Partners'.

Led by DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Loyzaga, the private sector underscored the

importance of working together towards a sustainable future, and highlighted their initiatives towards safeguarding the country's environment and natural resources.

SM Prime Holdings, led by its sustainability champion Mr. Hans Sy, has long put in place initiatives to ensure the company's operations are sustainable and environmentally friendly.

SM Supermalls Senior Vice President for Operations Bien Mateo said, "As we celebrate World Environment Day, on behalf of the SM family, you have our commitment that we will continue to embrace sustainability in everything we do as a company to protect the environment for the future generation of Filipinos."

As one of DENR's strategic partners, Mr.



ENVIRONMENT PARTNERS. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources celebrates World Environment Day with the support of its private sector partners, including SM Supermalls. From left: Makilala Mining Head of Information Management Judy Roia, Makilala Mining Head of Mining Patrique Jane Duran, San Miguel Corp. Project Manager Jimmy Lu, Marubeni Philippines President Shimoda Shigeru, DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Loyzaga, Holcim Philippines President Horia Adrian, SM Supermalls Senior Vice President for Operations Bien Mateo, DMCI Mining President Tulsi Das Reyes, Best Inc. Senior Vice President Jan Vincent Mercado, and Plastic Credit Exchange Founder Nanette Medved-Po.

Mateo highlighted SM's initiatives on energy conservation, solid waste reduction, and water conservation, among others.

To contribute to energy efficiency, SM uses LED lights in all its properties and maintains 50% of its electricity supply from renewable sources. Likewise, SM's 17 malls with solar power installations were able to generate 20.165 megawatts of peak energy.

SM has supported Earth Hour for the last 15 years, and its participation in the Global Lights Switch Off has resulted in conserved energy equivalent to CO2 emissions from over 400,000 individual smartphones charged.

SM's solid waste management initiatives have helped divert trash from ending up in landfills and large bodies of water. These include its flagship program, Trash to Cash Recycling Market, which has collected more than 1 million recyclables a year; the daily collection of solid waste in 14 malls in partnership with Friends of HOPE; electronic waste collection booths in Cyberzone and designated mall areas; and regular coastal and community clean up drives.

As part of this year's Philippine Environment Month celebration, SM will mount Coastal Clean Up activities around World Oceans Day on June 8, in partnership with the DENR, Local Government Units (LGUs), and schools. Nearly 1,500 volunteers are expected to join nationwide.



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IN BRIEF

DENR: PH losing war against plastic

THE Philippines is losing the war against single-use plastic as the country continues to generate thousands of tons of plastic daily, Environment Secretary Toni Yulo-Loyzaga said Tuesday.

Data based on World Bank and Asian Development Bank studies showed that the country generates around 61,000 metric tons of garbage per day, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources said.

Of this amount, 12 percent or over 7,000 tons is plastic, in stark contrast to the 16,000 metric tons of trash generated 7 years ago.

Yulo-Loyzaga admitted the plastic problem is multifaceted and must be faced using different lenses.



Govt finalizes El Niño preparations

BY KRISTINA MARALIT AND MOISES CRUZ

MALACAÑANG urged the public to support preparations to mitigate the impacts of the looming dry spell as the National El Niño Team held another coordination meeting in Camp Aguinaldo last Monday.

The Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said the meeting, led by the Civil Defense deputy administrator for operations, Assistant Secretary Bernardo Rafaelito Alejandro 4th, and attended by representatives of various member agencies, centered on the development of the national action plan for El Niño.

They also discussed the actions taken by the different agencies to prepare for the climate phenomenon's projected adverse impacts on food, health, water, energy, security and public safety.

"Discussions among government agencies continue to finalize and settle pressing concerns on El Niño preparations. We are continuously working together to ramp up our efforts and ensure that all areas of concern will be handled properly. As we implement measures to address the impacts of this phenomenon, the involvement of various sectors is necessary, especially the public," Alejandro said.

During the meeting, the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) outlined the interagency coordination for the development of the national action plan, taking into account the climate projections to determine priority interventions for specific regions.

The respective preparations and interventions of government agencies in various key areas of concern were also presented.

The Department of Agriculture (DA), the lead agency for food security, highlighted prevention, mitigation and

preparedness measures on water management, crops, fisheries and livestock.

As the lead for water security, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) presented its objectives which include integration of all water-related data, strengthening of water conservation and development of alternative water sources.

The agency also outlined its immediate, medium- and long-term measures to address the impacts of El Niño and the updates on the status of water resources.

The Department of Health (DoH), meanwhile, shared its continuing efforts to ensure health risks posed by the impending dry spell would be effectively addressed and that health services are provided continuously along with the strengthening of the preparedness of health facilities.

The management of El Niño-related diseases was also discussed.

On the other hand, the Department of Energy (DoE) outlined power projections for the El Niño period and the interventions and programs in place to reduce the incidence of power interruptions, while the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) reported continuous coordination with all local government units for the implementation of measures to regulate the operations of water-intensive businesses, strengthening local water conservation campaign drives, and ramping up the readiness of local police and fire protection services, as well as the enhancement of local disaster plans.

"Public education on this climate

phenomenon and its impact is essential to ensure that they support all efforts such as water conservation and other remedies. Again, the whole-of-nation approach remains key to the effectiveness of our preparations and interventions," Alejandro said.

"We encourage our people to join the national effort to prepare for the challenges of the El Niño phenomenon. Your cooperation, at the household level, will ensure that our preparations will be holistic and encompassing," he added.

Meanwhile, Deputy Speaker and Las Piñas Rep. Camille Villar submitted House Resolution 1024 to examine potential government interventions.

"Apart from agriculture, water resources, power generation, health and sanitation, other sectors are likely to be impacted by El Niño, and concerned state agencies must prepare to mitigate the impacts of severe weather conditions," Villar said.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said that El Niño will likely be felt late this month or in July.

Taking into account the country's experience with El Niño which resulted in lower agricultural output, Villar warned that the dry spell might harm the farming and fishing subsectors, as well as workers' livelihood and food security.

El Niño, the World Meteorological Organization said, could have far-reaching consequences for health, food security, water management and the environment.

35 face falsification raps over Mindoro oil spill

By MARC JAYSON CAYABYAB

Eighteen counts each of falsification and perjury charges were filed yesterday against 35 people in connection with the sinking of motor tanker *Princess Empress*, which spilled around 800,000 liters of industrial fuel into the waters off Oriental Mindoro in February.

The National Bureau of Investigation-Environmental Crimes Division (NBI-ECD) said the owners and officers of the tanker falsified the vessel's certificate of public convenience to allow it to sail 18 times from December last year until it sank on Feb. 28.

The charges were filed before the Department of Justice (DOJ) against the officers of RDC Reield Marine Services, owner of the *Princess Empress*, as well as officials of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) and the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina).

The DOJ said each of the 18 voyages between Dec. 3, 2022 and Feb. 26, 2023 would be considered as one count of falsification.

In a press briefing yesterday, Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla said there was "bad faith" in the use of a falsified document

by the shipping company.

"They were not compliant with all the responsibilities required from people who secure certificates of public convenience. As a service for hire in our seas, extraordinary diligence is required of them," Remulla said, referring to RDC Reield Marine Services.

"They took things for granted. They took shortcuts, and things they never expected would happen, happened. So they have to pay the price for that," Remulla added.

Seven incorporators and directors from RDC Reield Marine Services, six crewmembers of the *Princess Empress* and 19 PCG officers were named respondents in the complaint for falsification as provided under Article 172 of the Revised Penal Code.

Based on the first page of the complaint seen by journalists, among the company officers named as respondents are members of the family that owns the firm - Reymundo, Criselda, Fritzie, Reia, Franciz John and Reield Faye - all surnamed Cabial.

The complainants include the NBI and Mayor Jennifer Cruz of Pola, Oriental Mindoro.

"The CPC was made to appear as a certified true copy 'when no such original document exists,'" DOJ Assistant Secretary Mico

Clavano said during a press briefing.

The PCG personnel were found liable for their failure to check the validity of the CPC during pre-departure inspections, Clavano said.

Meanwhile, the heads of the Marina-Bicol and Marina shipyard regulation service in the region were found liable for "illegally registering *Princess Empress* using false documents."

Their involvement stemmed from the fact that the tanker was a scrap ship refurbished into a larger vessel at a shipyard in Navotas.

The company officers were also accused of perjury for using a falsified construction certificate, affidavit of ownership and builder's certificate to obtain a tonnage measurement certificate from the Marina.

The DOJ is not yet discounting the role of higher officials, up to the Marina administrator, and more charges for violating environmental laws due to the damage caused by the oil spill.

PCG public information officer Armand Balilo said he respects the decision of the DOJ to include the Coast Guard in the charges.

However, Balilo said they would wait for the official document before making a proper comment on the issue.

- With Mark Ernest Villeza



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BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business



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RECLAIM, 'REKLAMO' Despite concerns raised by fisherfolk and environmentalist groups, workers continue reclamation activities along Manila Bay in Pasay City. These groups want the government to cease all reclamation and dredging projects, highlighting the potential adverse impact on approximately 27,000 hectares of the country's valuable coastal areas. NONIE REYES



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DENR, JICA reaffirm cooperation on management of PHL forestland

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) vowed to strengthen forest management in the Philippines to boost the livelihood of upland dwellers and farmers to help sustain economic development.

JICA is the sole Japanese government agency that implements Official Development Assistance, providing technical cooperation, loans, and grants, to overcome challenges common in developing nations. It operates in more than 150 countries and regions worldwide, including the Philippines.

JICA Chief Representative to the

Philippines Sakamoto Takema paid a courtesy visit and was received by DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga at the DENR Central Office in Quezon City on May 29.

During the visit, Loyzaga and Takema discussed the Forestland Management Project (FMP), a joint DENR-JICA undertaking that aims to strengthen forestland management in three critical river basins in the country, namely, the Upper Magat and Cagayan, Pampanga, and Jalaur on Panay Island.

A 10-year project that started in 2012, the FMP focused on rehabilitating degraded forestlands and improving the socioeconomic conditions of affected communities

surrounding the three river basins.

FMP employed collaborative and comprehensive community-based management strategies, such as empowering people's organizations; securing land tenure rights; enterprise development for food security and income; and development, conservation, protection, and sustainable use of forestland resources.

Loyzaga and Takema also talked about other possible areas of cooperation for environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, and disaster risk reduction.

At the same time, Takema introduced JICA's other environment-related projects and activities, such

as the Pasig-Marikina River Channel Improvement Project, Flood Risk Management Project in various cities, and Disaster Risk Reduction and Management-Capacity Enhancement Project, among others.

DENR and JICA have been working closely for the protection and conservation of the environment and natural resources for six decades.

Most recently, JICA sponsored DENR's training program on Sustainable Forestry Management with Community Participation in 2019. It also provided technical assistance in establishing ecological solid waste management programs in the cities of Calbayog, Sagay, and Davao in 2022. *Jonathan L. Mayuga*



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PH, Japan eye stronger forest management ties

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) have reaffirmed continued partnership to strengthen forestland management in the Philippines (FMP) for improved livelihoods and economic development.

This comes as Environment Secretary Antonia Loyzaga received a courtesy visit from JICA chief representative to the Philippines Sakamoto Takema at the DENR Central Office in Quezon City on May 29.

Loyzaga and Takema discussed the Forestland Management Project (FMP), a joint DENR-JICA undertaking that aimed to strengthen forestland management in three critical river basins in the country—Upper Magat and Cagayan, Pampanga, and Jalaur on Panay Island.

First Gen, farmers' groups to reforest 1,209 hectares in Pantabangan watershed

Clean energy provider First Gen Corporation and four farmers' organizations in Pantabangan, Nueva Ecija, have agreed to work together in reforesting a 1,209-hectare portion of the Pantabangan-Carranglan Watershed Forest Reserve (PCWFR) as part of a program to protect and enhance the vital watershed area and provide income for the farmers.

The reforestation agreement, finalized recently by the parties, supports also government efforts to fight climate change by creating a forest capable of absorbing large amounts of carbon dioxide, one of the heat-trapping greenhouse gases that aggravate climate change.

First Gen through five of its subsidiaries—First Gen Hydro Power Corporation (FG Hydro), First Gas Power Corporation (FGPC), FGP Corp. (FGP), First NatGas Power Corp. (FNPC), and Prime Meridian Powergen Corporation (PMPC)—will implement the reforestation project in collaboration with the Villanueva Farmers' Association, Maluyon Indigenous Christian Farmers Association, Cadaclan Farmers' Association, and Liberty Fisherman and Farmers Association.

First Gen Senior Vice President Dennis P. Gonzales said that, under the agreement, FG Hydro will provide the

program design, as well as technical supervision in implementing the reforestation activities; while FGPC, FGP, FNPC, and PMPC will finance the project and monitor its implementation.

The four farmers' association, in turn, will provide the manpower, expertise, equipment, and supplies (excluding seedlings and fertilizers) for replanting and for taking care of the seedlings.

Straddling portions of Nueva Ecija, Nueva Vizcaya and Aurora provinces, the PCWFR serves as sanctuary for various plant and animal life in Central Luzon. Aside from rivers and forests, the 84,000-hectare watershed area also hosts the Pantabangan Dam, considered one of Southeast Asia's biggest dams and the source of crucial irrigation water for thousands of hectares of farms in Central Luzon.

First Gen considers PCWFR's health important because Pantabangan Dam's water generates electricity for First Gen Hydro's 132-megawatt Pantabangan-Masiway hydroelectric power plants. First Gen Hydro also is scheduled to start construction within the year of its 120-MW Aya Pumped Storage Hydroelectric Power Project near its existing hydroelectric plant.



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Israel offers Phl agri, water management support

By HELEN FLORES

The Israeli government has offered the Philippines support in the areas of agriculture and water management as the country braces for the impact of El Niño, which may last until early next year, Malacañang said yesterday.

During a meeting at Malacañang last Monday, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen told President Marcos that his country could collaborate on water management, noting Israel's vast experience in this sector, according to a statement from the Presidential Communications Office.

"I think that we can work together on the segment of agriculture. I just let you know that our land, 60 percent of our land is desert. But although 60 percent of our land is desert, we were able to provide all our water needs," Cohen said.

"And I think that we can work together, and let's say that less import, more export for the Philippines," he said.

Due to water scarcity, Israel has been reusing large portions of its water resources.

An Israeli expert can visit the Philippines to provide advice, according to Cohen.

Marcos told the Israeli official that the Philippines is looking at Israel and Singapore for best practices that can be imitated.

Marcos said he considers agricultural development as very important for the nation, as he expressed admiration for Israel's advancement in agriculture.

The President concurrently heads the Department of Agriculture.

"Because when we look at the economy as hard to just test, we said, how do we fix the economy? It always comes down to agriculture first, how to fix every policy, then everything else would be great. So that's the position that we find ourselves in," Marcos said.

"So, the offers that you make for assistance and partnership in those two areas are very, very welcome," he told Cohen.

The Marcos administration has assured that sufficient measures have been formulated to cushion the possible effects of the long dry spell on the agriculture sector.

In February, the Chief Executive approved the creation of a Water Resource Management Office under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to manage the country's water resources and respond to the current environmental

challenges.

Direct flights

Meanwhile, Israel is hoping to launch direct flights to the Philippines next year, according to Cohen.

Israel's top diplomat raised the plan to establish direct flights between Manila and Tel Aviv to boost the two countries' tourism and economic ties during his meeting with Marcos.

"There's another thing that we, both of us, took for an action item – to have a direct flight ... your external sea between Israel and the Philippines," Cohen told the President.

"And I think that we agree that both ministries will work together to have the direct flight, and this is also to bring more business people to come to invest and reach the place between us. So this is also another important action item that we will do," Cohen added.

The Israeli minister told Filipino and Israeli business groups at a forum in Makati City on Monday that both governments would work together to open direct flights.

"We will start in 2024. I think this will be great news for the tourism industry and the business community," he said.



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Editor
Maria Edralyn L. Benedicto

DECEPTIVE CALMNESS The summit of Mt. Mayon in Albay province, which is partly covered with clouds in this photo taken on June 5, appears calm but it has been under alert level 2 after exhibiting signs of unrest since Sunday. —MARK ALVIC ESPLANA

Mayon's danger zone off-limits to Albay folk

Local gov'ts order 5,000 families to suspend farming, tourism activities on volcano's slopes as it can erupt anytime

By Ma. April Mier-Manjares
@MaAprilMierINQ

LEGAZPI CITY—At least 5,000 of mostly farming families living close to the slopes of Mt. Mayon were ordered on Tuesday to suspend all their activities within or at the boundary of the volcano's 6-kilometer-radius permanent danger zone due to the threat of a "hazardous" eruption after state volcanologists raised its warning status to alert level 2 on Monday.

In Sto. Domingo alone, one of the eight localities in Albay province at the foot of the volcano, about 5,788 families, or 24,222 people, in high- and moderate-risk areas were advised to stop attending to their farms while Mayon remained restive, said Mayor Joseling Aguas Jr.

These families were living near the danger zone and along the river channels in the villages of Lidong, Fidel Surtida, San-

ta Misericordia and San Isidro. "Most of them own farmlands and are very active in quarrying operations near the 6-km danger zone," Aguas said in a phone interview on Tuesday.

Aguas said they have already set up tents in open fields and had designated evacuation buildings for these families in case the volcano erupts.

On Monday, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) raised the warning status of Mayon to alert level 2 due to the increasing number of rockfall events that indicate "increasing unrest" or the possibility of hazardous eruptions.

Legazpi, too

In Legazpi City, the local government has also prohibited all human activities, including all tourism-related events, inside the danger zone "because phreatic explosions and rockfalls can

happen anytime," said Miladee Azur, head of the city's disaster risk reduction and management office, in an online chat message on Tuesday.

She said village officials were instructed to monitor their respective areas, especially the entry and exit points of the volcano.

She said around 13,000 residents in high-risk areas from the boundary of the danger zone to a 9-km radius in the villages of Mabinit, Bogña, Matanag, Buyoan and Padang would be the first to be evacuated if the situation worsened.

Lava debris

Paul Karson Alanis, resident volcanologist at Phivolcs' Mayon Volcano Observatory Station here, said the increase in rockfall events around the volcano was caused by "a shallow pressure at the lava dome."

In its Tuesday bulletin, Phivolcs said they recorded 74 rock-

fall events, lasting from one to four minutes, based on seismic and visual observations in the past 24-hour monitoring period.

Phivolcs said thin brownish-gray ash from the rockfalls also drifted to the general southwest.

Alanis said materials from the rockfalls could possibly affect the southeast portion of the volcano, including the upland villages of Legazpi and in the towns of Camalig, Daraga and Sto. Domingo.

"The crater lip is lower in these areas, so most of the materials go there," Alanis explained.

The agency also monitored moderate degassing from the summit crater that produced steam-laden plumes drifting to the west-southwest portion, while sulfur dioxide emissions were last measured at an average of 208 tons per day on Monday.

—WITH A REPORT FROM MICHAEL B. JAUCIAN INQ

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74 rockfall events recorded in Mayon

A major eruption of Mayon Volcano remains a remote scenario for now, but it is showing increased volcanic activity, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said yesterday.

Phivolcs resident volcanologist Paul Alanis said there could be either a quiet or a major eruption following the recent activity in the volcano.

The first possible scenario could be a quiet eruption similar to the one in 2014 where there was rockfall and minor lava flow.

"Second scenario is that Mayon Volcano could just be taking its time and it's possible that like in 2018, there could

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be a strong eruption and lava flow," he said in mixed English and Filipino over *Unang Balita*.

The Phivolcs official said they are monitoring pressure concentrated near the crater of the volcano, adding there were 74 rockfall events recorded in the past 24 hours.

Still, he said a major eruption is still remote and that minor explosions could follow the volcanic activity. These events lasted one to four minutes and emplaced lava debris, with thin ash drifting to the southwest. There has been continuous moderate degassing from the summit crater that produced steam-laden plumes, while sulfur dioxide emission was measured at an average of 208 tons/day on Monday.

Alanis advised the public to strictly comply with the entry prohibitions into the six kilometer-radius permanent danger zone (PDZ) in case of sudden explosions, rockfalls and landslides.

Phivolcs said Alert Level 2 or increased unrest prevails over Mayon, meaning phreatic eruptions or hazardous magmatic eruptions could be possible.

Meanwhile, Phivolcs is also monitoring the increased

activity in Taal volcano, recording one volcanic tremor since the morning of June 2.

Taal also produced a sulfur dioxide flux of 9391 tons per day on June 5 and there has been pronounced upwelling of hot volcanic fluids in the main crater lake.

Vog was observed and plumes of up to 1,800 meters tall were also monitored. Taal volcano remains on Alert Level 1 or low-level unrest.

Pulmonologist Dr. Maricar Limpin has advised residents living near Taal volcano to stay indoors and continue wearing face masks to avoid getting sick.

"Sulfur dioxide is irritating to the respiratory system. Those with asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) may experience asthma and COPD attacks because of this. Even those with heart ailments may have difficulty in breathing," said Limpin, director of Action on Smoking and Health Philippines.

Limpin said affected residents should evacuate or, if not possible, should avoid going outside. "The children may inhale sulfur dioxide that can lead to swelling of the lungs. This is detrimental to a child," Limpin warned.

"Pregnant women with asthma should also be careful since they could have asthma attack and this will lead to lower oxygen level that will have a negative impact on the baby."

Phivolcs yesterday reported that Taal volcano has been emitting more sulfur dioxide, from around 5,000 tons earlier, to over 9,000 tons. Repeated exposure to sulfur dioxide is toxic for humans, and can lead to severe respiratory distress, especially among the vulnerable population.

Monitoring

The Office of Civil Defense (OCD) assured the public yesterday that it is closely monitoring the situation of the country's volcanoes in coordination with the Phivolcs.

Assistant Secretary Raffy Alejandro, OCD spokesman, said the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC) is prepared for any emergency following reports that Mayon and Taal volcanoes are acting up.

"We have instructed our regional civil defense offices and regional DRRM councils to ensure that all preparations are in place in case a repeat of the previous volcanic episodes happen," he said.

"This is standard procedure for the OCD as we con-

tinue to ensure that local governments are onboard and ready for any contingency," OCD chief Ariel Nepomuceno said.

"Though there is no imminent threat of a major eruption coming from Taal and Mayon, as seen in the latest bulletins of Phivolcs, our mandate to proactively prepare for these possible hazards dictates that preparations continue to prevent casualties and other damages," he added.

No-fly zone

The Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP) has updated its Notices to Airmen (NOTAM) yesterday, informing and alerting aircraft of the current alert levels and associated risks amid the ongoing unrest of Taal, Mayon and Kanlaon volcanoes.

CAAP spokesman Eric Apolonio said Kanlaon volcano is currently on Alert Level 1, indicating an abnormal condition.

Under NOTAM B1957/23, flight operators are strongly advised to avoid flying in close proximity to the volcano's summit due to the possibility of steam-driven or phreatic eruptions. Additionally, entry within Kanlaon's 4km permanent danger zone has been prohibited.

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LPA becomes storm Chedeng

By ROMINA CABRERA

Tropical cyclone Chedeng could intensify into a storm over Tuesday night and Wednesday morning and may continue to intensify into a typhoon by tomorrow.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said that despite its intensification, Chedeng is unlikely to directly bring heavy rainfall over any part of the country in the next few days.

Chedeng was monitored 1,150 kilometers east of southeastern Luzon and is almost stationary. It was packing maximum sustained winds of 55 kilometers per hour near

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the center and gustiness of up to 70 kph.

PAGASA said Chedeng may further intensify into a severe tropical storm by tonight and intensify into a typhoon before reaching peak intensity by Friday or over the weekend due to favorable environmental conditions.

Chedeng will remain far from the Philippine landmass as it moves northwestward. It is unlikely that the tropical cyclone wind signals will be hoisted at this time but Chedeng may enhance the southwest monsoon.

The timing and intensity of monsoon rains over parts of the country may still change depending on the movement and intensity of Chedeng and its interactions with other weather systems.

Currently, the southwest monsoon is bringing scattered rainshowers over Palawan. Isolated rainshowers are also expected over Metro Manila and the rest of the country due to the monsoon and localized thunderstorms

Prepare for El Niño

Senior administration lawmakers are calling on the national government to prepare for the incoming extended dry spell or El Niño and its adverse impacts on various sectors like food security.

"Apart from agriculture, water

resources, power generation, health and sanitation and other sectors are likely to be impacted by El Niño, and concerned state agencies must prepare to mitigate the impacts of severe weather conditions," said Deputy Speaker Camille Villar, who filed House Resolution 1024 to look into possible government interventions in the light of the return of El Niño.

House Deputy Speaker Ralph Recto said the Marcos administration should be pro-active and address the threat of El Niño by adopting a whole-of-government approach, if only to ensure food security and spare farmers of the serious problems.

"Scarcity in water leads to scarcity in food. This is not an alarmist statement. It is a fact, because without water, you cannot grow food," he warned, urging a comprehensive nationwide response to the possible impact of an extended drought.

For his part, Rizal Rep. Fidel Nograles said the national government and LGUs should undertake a massive nationwide tree-planting program to help lessen the impact of the anticipated extended dry spell season.

"Tree planting is an excellent communal activity that has a positive effect, and I hope more local leaders will organize and engage in this activity so that we can restore our country's greenness," he said.

- With Delon Porcalla