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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



Govt forms El Niño Team to prepare for dry spell

BY FRANCO JOSE C. BAROÑA AND JAVIER JOE ISMAEL

THE Office of Civil Defense (OCD) is set to convene the National El Niño Team to ensure harmonized implementation of efforts to address the possible impacts of the El Niño phenomenon.

The National El Niño Team will be convened on July 19 in Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City during a meeting to be presided over by Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno, Civil Defense administrator and National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) executive director.

During the meeting, the ongoing activities of the government agencies for El Niño will be discussed.

Among the discussion points are the presentation of the short-, medium- and long-term plans of the various team clusters to address the effects of El Niño on food security, water security, energy security, health, public safety and cross-cutting issues.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) will also be providing an updated forecast of the climate phenomenon, as well as the status of the various dams in the country.

Nepomuceno said they are looking forward to the finalization of the National Action Plan for El Niño by the National El Niño Team, as the OCD continues to undertake various activities specific to the agency's mandates to ensure that the effects of the El Niño-induced dry spells and drought to the country can be countered.

Pagasa has declared the start of the El Niño phenomenon on July 4. It also forecast its possible movement from a "moderate" to "severe" by the latter part of 2015.

The National El Niño Team regularly convenes for updates on the actions taken by agencies following President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s instructions for a science-based, whole-of-nation strategy to prepare the country for the adverse effects of the climate phenomenon.

Legarda chimes in

Senate President Pro Tempore

Lorna Regina "Loren" Legarda also underscored support for programs dedicated to attaining disaster resilience.

Legarda, a United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Global Champion for Resilience, said there must be proactive ways to help the country withstand the effects of calamities battering the country annually.

"The Philippines is constantly hit by endless natural disasters every year, so we must be able to face any possible danger head-on," she said.

"Since we have identified most of the causes of damage to property and lives, the state and the citizens must work together to mitigate them by preparing ourselves, starting with simple things such as waste segregation and heeding disaster warnings," she added.

The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone nations on earth, where various natural calamities such as typhoons, earthquakes and volcanic activities affect millions yearly.

Situated along the Pacific Ring of Fire, seismic and volcanic activity occurs more often here than in the rest of the world, usually to a more dangerous degree, putting millions of lives at risk.

"I call on local government units to seriously consider ways to conserve the water supply. We cannot expose ourselves to the risk of seeing it dry up completely — it will be catastrophic," warned Legarda, who also welcomed the administration's move to release an El Niño mitigation plan to help the country brace for its adverse effects.

The President announced Monday that the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), Department of Agriculture (DA), and National Irrigation Administration (NIA) have joined forces to boost mitigation efforts for the coming of El Niño. Legarda welcomed this development.

"Let us also look at building standards and determine if structures can withstand tremors and various waterways to see if they are clear from debris that might cause overflow and flooding in low-lying areas," Legarda said.

"Lastly, we must be able to ensure that our people are capable enough in fending off disaster themselves by empowering them and could live comfortably without the danger of their surroundings," she added.



Heavy rains fail to raise Angat water level

By BELLA CARIASO

Heavy rainfall experienced in the past days have not been enough to improve the water level of Angat Dam, National Water Resources Board (NWRB) executive director Sevillo David Jr. said yesterday.

Data from the provincial disaster risk reduction office of Bulacan showed that the water elevation of Angat Dam had only slightly increased to 178.09 meters as of 11 a.m. yesterday, and was monitored at 177.99 meters as of 5 p.m.

David noted that the water level of Angat is still below its minimum oper-

ating level of 180 meters.

In a radio interview, David reiterated his call for the public to conserve water amid the uncertainties brought by the El Niño phenomenon.

"We continue to appeal to the need to save water. It is better for us to take advantage of the rains so that our

dependence on the water from Angat Dam will be lessened," David said.

According to David, the water from the rains can be used to support domestic needs.

At the same time, the rains will also help farmers in Bulacan and Pampanga

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to be able to plant after the water allocation for the irrigation decreased to 20 cubic meters per second from the previous 28.5 CMS David said.

David said that the NWRB continues to monitor the water level of Angat Dam, adding that based on the projection of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, rains will continue to come in August and September.

"We are anticipating rains for July, until August and September so that our dams will be recharged. At present, we need to prepare for the expected El Niño at the end of the year and until next year," he said.

According to David, there is a need to manage the supply of water in the dams, particularly Angat Dam, to prevent prolonged water interruption during El Niño.

Angat Dam provides the potable water needs of more than 90 percent of Metro Manila, irrigation supply to some 25,000 hectares of Bulacan and parts of Pampanga and hydro-power generation needs of the Luzon grid.

Customers being serviced by Maynilad Water Services Inc. are experiencing at least nine to 11 hours daily water interruptions after the NWRB implemented the 48 CMS water allocation for the two water concessionaires.

The 48 CMS will be in effect for the entire month of July.

David said the NWRB will decide whether to adjust the 48 CMS water allocation for Maynilad and Manila Water if the water level of Angat Dam improves or further drops.

Preparations

Amid reports that many farmers have decided not to plant palay over fears of the dry spell, a ranking official of the Department of Agriculture (DA) said the government is preparing for the worst-case scenario amid the possible impact of the El Niño phenomenon.

In an interview with The STAR, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and deputy spokesman Rex Estoperez added that the DA already prepared action plans for mild, moderate and worst El Niño scenarios.

"While we do not know the extent of the effect of the El Niño, it is better to anticipate the worst so that we can prepare. All is prepared, including fisheries, agriculture crops and animals," Estoperez added.

According to Estoperez, the DA has yet to come up with the calculations on the possible damage of the dry spell to the agriculture sector.

At the same time, Estoperez said the DA is now conducting an information campaign to assure farmers that they can still plant palay amid fears of the drought.

On the other hand, Estoperez said the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF) submitted its recommendation to address the report of the Commission on Audit after the National Food Authority (NFA) was found to have failed to reach its target of rice procurement of 300,000 metric tons.

"The buying price of the NFA is not competitive that is why the PCAF submitted its recommendation to increase the buying price of NFA to increase their stocks," Estoperez added. - With Ramon Lazaro



Groups press probe into reported use of 'dead' corals in construction of Sorsogon road project

THE Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) is calling on the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to investigate the ongoing coastal road project in Gubat town in Sorsogon that allegedly involves the use of extracted corals as construction materials.

"We call on the DENR to look into the ongoing construction of a coastal road project in Sorsogon that involves dead corals. The agency should order its provincial environment office to conduct an inspection of the project site and assess if these corals have been

deliberately extracted elsewhere. It would be unacceptable if coral reefs are being destroyed and uprooted for a dump and fill project," said Pamalakaya national chairman Fernando Hicap.

"Corals are a very fragile underwater ecosystem that could take a year to grow into a couple of centimeters, while a decade to form from a group of larvae. They are vital to marine biodiversity because they serve as habitat to many creatures and ensure bountiful resources to fishing communities," he added.

Local fishers in Sorsogon have been protesting the coastal road project because it threatens their

fishing livelihood and coastal communities, the group said.

Allan Espallardo, president of Pamalakaya affiliate Save Gubat Bay Movement (SGBM), said the Sorsogon Coastal Road project would "pose serious harm" to the coastal environment, as well as the livelihood of small and subsistence fisherfolk in the town's at least 13 coastal villages.

"Aside from the possibility that coral reefs are being destroyed for the coastal road project, the project's impact on the environment and fishery production will surely affect us because of reclamation. They dump and fill with soil the

coastal waters which is the primary source of our income and livelihood," Espallardo said.

According to Espallardo, the first to be affected by the project are fishers that harvest mud crabs, locally called alimango.

Pamalakaya and SGBM vowed to consult with environmental experts for further assessment of the environmental impacts of the coastal road project.

The Sorsogon Coastal Road is a project of the Department of Public Works and Highways under the Build, Build, Build (BBB) program of the previous Duterte administration. *Jonathan L. Mayuga*



Mangroves for coastal protection

WITH the advantage of modern drone shots of islands and islets in the Philippines and the information provided by Pagasa transmitted to people through social media, Filipinos have come to the realization that many of our local government units are indeed located less than a kilometer or two from coastlines. As such, the first that comes to mind is the vaunted value of mangrove forests for coastal protection.

This was proven true by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami originating from an earthquake in the sea off Sumatra which devastated 12 countries, including Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Immediately, Ramsar Center Japan's 4th Asean Wetland Symposium recommended, among others, to "prioritize the natural coastal defenses through greenbelt/coastal 'bioshield' development." In that connection, Asean countries agreed to provide concerted national efforts to integrate impacts of natural disasters in coastal areas.

As proven by the abovementioned earthquake occurrence,



AMBASSADORS'
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mangroves proved excellent defense against the onslaught of typhoons and tsunamis. The roots of vegetation in mangrove forests helped to hold sediments in place against the impact of strong winds, waves and currents. Thereafter, the strategy of planting mangrove saplings began as a community volunteer activity in the long coastlines ("where water meets land"). Apart from mangrove saplings, planting of bamboo with high quality of sturdiness which could withstand environmental disturbances made people embrace whatever could lead to a source of income for them.

Environmental security in Asean metamorphosed to include an Asean Working Group on Coastal and Marine Environment. Indeed, Asean-wide advocacy initiatives about mangroves for disaster risk reduction gave climate change

resilience the priority that it deserves for the needed Asean disaster resilient system.

Mangrove ecosystem services

In general, mangrove ecosystem services can be summarized as follows:

Coastal protection — The dense root systems of mangrove forests trap sediments flowing from rivers and off the land. Trapped sediments help stabilize the coastline and prevent erosion from hurricanes, high waves, storms and floods.

Fisheries — The mangrove forest is home to a large variety of fish, crab, shrimp and mollusk species. It is an essential source of food for coastal communities.

Timber and plant products — Mangrove wood is extremely valuable for construction material. It is also a source of medicinal plants.

Tourism — Proximity of mangrove forests to tourist spots such as sandy beaches and coral reefs make it an easy add-on as tourist sites. Bicol and Palawan offer snorkeling expeditions in and around mangroves to witness a

variety of fish against an enchanting scenario of interwoven roots that make the trees appear to be standing on stilts above the water. Actually, many mangrove forests in the Philippines have connecting boardwalks now for on-site learning about mangrove forests.

Threats to mangrove forests

Unfortunately, there are many challenges that place mangrove forests under threat. These are:

- 1) Mangrove forests are being cleared to make room for agriculture, human settlements and infrastructure such as piers, airports, industrial zones, tourist developments and aquaculture;
- 2) Overharvesting of mangrove trees have taken place for many years and it is no longer sustainable;
- 3) Construction of dams reduce the amount of water reaching mangrove forests changing the salinity level of the water. With high salinity, mangroves cannot survive. Diversion of freshwater can lead to mangroves drying out;
- 4) Fertilizers, pesticides, sewage and

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■ TOLENTINO FROM A4

Mangroves for coastal protection

other toxic man-made chemicals carried by river systems from upstream sources can kill species in mangrove forests; and 5) Rapid sea level rise will likely be the greatest climate change challenge to mangrove ecosystems.

PH mangrove-related legislation

The Philippines has quite a number of laws related to mangrove

forests. Aside from fishery, forestry and land laws, other examples are Republic Act (RA) 7586, or the "1992 National Integrated Protected Areas System Act"; and RA 7611, or the "Strategic Environmental Plan for Palawan Act." Connected to the latter is Presidential Proclamation 2152, S. 1981, declaring Palawan province and parts of the public domain as mangrove swamp forest reserves.

Administrative orders cover-

ing mangroves are in place, too, like DENR Administrative Order 30 (1994): Implementing Guidelines for NGO-assisted Community-based Mangrove Forest Management; DENR Administrative Order 56 (1992): Designation of Pagbilao Mangrove Swamp Experimental Forest as Genetic Resource Area and National Training Site for Mangroves; DENR Administrative Order 03 (1991) Policy and

Guidelines for the Award and Administration of Mangrove Stewardship Agreement; and DENR Administrative Order 5 (1990): Regulations for the Utilization, Development and Management of Mangrove Resources.

Be that as it may, what matters most is effective implementation of Philippine laws and executive pronouncements/proclamations to make mangrove forests not only a reliable coastal protection against

natural calamities but a source of livelihood for people as well.

(Note: Mangrove forests fall now under the rubric of "wetlands" per the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention 1971) which categorizes more than 40 wetlands as natural or artificial wetlands.)

As defined by the convention, of which the Philippines is a party, wetlands include a

wide variety of habitats such as marshes, peatlands, floodplains, rivers, lakes and coastal areas such as saltmarshes, mangroves and seagrass beds but also coral reefs and their marine areas no deeper than 6 meters at low tide as well as human made or artificial wetlands such as waste-water treatment ponds, drinking water reservoirs, rice paddies and fishponds.

Incidentally, July 26 is UN World Mangrove Day.



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Stock rainwater, farmers told

Agri Dept., OCD set plans to limit El Niño damage on food production

By Vince Lopez, Rio N. Araja and Macon Ramos-Araneta

THE government has put in place water management strategies to limit the damage that the El Niño dry spell will have on agricultural production, including collecting and storing rainwater, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said Friday.

The DA said it encourages food producers to stock rainwater for future use, citing that the country sees an average rainfall volume of 2,348 millimeters.

It is also implementing other water management projects, such as the improvement of irrigation canals and other small-scale irrigation projects.

Other mitigation projects include the replacement of unserviceable pumps and engine sets.

The chairman of the DA's National El Niño Team, U-Nichols Manalo, said they are closely working with operating units under the department to address the possible effects of the weather phenomenon.

"These are just some of the measures

that the government has been doing early on to prevent production losses due to the dry spells that El Niño entails," he said.

Early this week, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. announced that the government would release an El Niño Mitigation Plan to enable the public to take part in national actions to cushion the effects of the weather phenomenon.

Weather experts expect an unusual warming of sea surface temperatures, which may lead to the strengthening of

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Stock...

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the abnormal weather phenomenon in the coming months.

The likelihood of below-normal rainfall is anticipated, causing dry spells and droughts in some areas of the country.

However, the western part of the country may still get above-normal rainfall due to the enhanced southwest monsoon.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction Council-Office of Civil Defense (NDRRMC-OCD) on Friday said it will convene the National El Niño Team in Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City on July 19 as it synchronizes the preparations for the looming drought and dry spell.

"We are looking forward to the finalization of the National Action Plan for El Niño by this team as we continue to undertake various activities specific to our agency mandates." OCD Administrator and Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno said in a statement.

Various team clusters are expected to

present short-, medium-, and long-term plans to address food security, water security, energy security, health, and public safety issues due to the El Niño effects.

The state weather bureau is expected to provide an updated forecast of the climate phenomenon as well as the status of the various dams in the country.

On July 4, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) declared the start of the El Niño phenomenon in the Tropical Pacific. Its effects, the state weather bureau said, are now expected in the Philippines.

The El Niño phenomenon is characterized by the abnormal warming of sea surface temperature in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean and below normal rainfall.

Due to the El Niño, PAGASA said that as of June 30, dry spells were already experienced in Apayao, Cagayan, and Kalinga based on the provinces' three-month actual rainfall.

A dry spell is three consecutive months of 21 percent to 60 percent reduction in

the average rainfall or two consecutive months of over 60 percent reduction.

PAGASA said dry conditions were also experienced in Isabela and Tarlac provinces.

Meanwhile, PAGASA said the Angat Dam in Bulacan needs at least four to five tropical cyclones to enable its water elevation to go back to normal.

Richard Orendain of PAGASA's Hydrometeorology Division said with one tropical cyclone, the dam's water elevation could only go up to its minimum operating level of 180 meters.

Angat Dam's normal high water level is 210 meters.

About 65 millimeters of rain poured over the Angat watershed last Thursday.

On Friday morning, the Angat water level increased to 179.09 meters, still below the minimum operating level of 180 meters.

Orendain said there is a lag time of 18 to 24 hours for the rains dumped upstream to reach the reservoir.

He added that another storm after tropical depression Dodong could also increase Angat's water level.

Roy Badilla, Hydrometeorology Division chief, said the rains due to the southwest monsoon or "hanging habagat" were not sufficient to significantly raise Angat Dam's water elevation.

The dam supplies 97 percent of Metro Manila's potable water.

Also on Friday, Senate President Pro Tempore Loren Legarda called on Metro Manila residents to take advantage of the heavy downpour during the afternoon and evening.

"We can innovate many ways to collect rainwater and use that for watering our plants or flushing down our toilets," she said. "We conserve water consumption as levels in Angat Dam have continued to fall beyond its minimum operating level."

As a result of the declining levels, Maynilad Water Services, Inc. had announced that a nine-hour water service interruption would affect about 600,000 of its customers.

Maynilad operates in 17 cities and municipalities scattered across the west zone of the Greater Manila Area, servicing at least 9.5 million consumers.



SM City Baguio installs facility that converts rainwater to potable water

SM City Baguio has launched the first of its kind in a mall-setting facility that converts rainwater to potable water and helps contribute to the city's water conservation and recycling efforts.

"The mall's Rainwater Filtration facility will supply the mall with enough potable water that can be redistributed to mall tenants for various uses, including washing, cleaning and safe for drinking, to help reduce sourcing from the communities' water table, leaving more water supply for the Baguio community to use," SM Supermalls Senior Vice President Bien Mateo disclosed.

While SM has been recycling water for decades since the 1990s, the water-saving innovation is part of SM Prime's sustainability program toward responsible consumption and

carbon footprint reduction, according to Mateo.

In 2022, it has recycled a total of 3.58 million cubic meters of water across its properties in the Philippines.

As of June 2023, SM Prime has already installed water catchment basins in 25 malls to help prevent flooding as well as soil erosion during sudden high volumes of rainfall.

The rainwater catchment system installed in SM City Baguio can draw and store a total of 51 million liters of rainwater in a year, based on the 2022 Pagasa rainfall volume for Baguio City. This is equivalent to 20 Olympic-size swimming pools, 13.4 million gallons of drinking water, 373,510 full baths and 672,318 10-minute showers.

Watch video at <https://fb.watch/IE moyVS1KV/?mibextid=5eVWNK>. "This will greatly help reduce sourcing



■ SM Prime Holdings and SM Supermalls officials with Baguio City Mayor Benjamin Magalong (fifth from left). CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

from the city's water table and more water supply for the community to use. Not only does SM consider what's best for its shopping customers, but also takes into consideration the importance of water security as one of its priorities," Cordillera Autonomous Region Department of Environment

and Natural Resources regional director Jean Borromeo said in a message to SM Prime.

The Rainwater Filtration facility is one of SM Prime Holding's initiatives to its commitment toward sustainable development in the communities it serves.



EDITORIAL

And now, investment 'green lanes'

Another administration, another commitment to speed up the processing of business requirements. Rodrigo Duterte, even before he assumed the presidency, had promised to reduce the waiting time for simple transactions with the government to just three working days.

In 2018, he signed into law Republic Act 11032, the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act. RA 11032 amended RA 9485, the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007, enacted during the presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

RA 11032 gave national and local government agencies just three days to complete simple transactions, seven days for more substantial transactions, and 20 days for highly technical transactions. The law also ordered all local government units to set up a "one-stop shop" for all business requirements, to lure more investors.

Not even Duterte's track record for lethal violence could compel proper compliance with the provisions of RA 11032. Investors sighed that to start a business in this country, the law-imposed deadline of three to 20 days added up to over a year for voluminous and often redundant requirements, with corresponding fees,

imposed by national and local government agencies as well as barangay offices. The problem remains a major disincentive to foreign direct investments, despite the passage of laws meant to attract more FDI such as the Public Service Act, the Foreign Investments Act and the Retail Trade Liberalization Law.

The Marcos administration has found it necessary to issue Executive Order No. 18, creating the latest incarnation of the business one-stop shop, the "Green Lanes for Strategic Investments." The idea is for investors to be given access to green lane personnel who will do all the legwork necessary for securing the requirements from different government agencies.

In launching the program on July 13, President Marcos noted that it was taking up to 36 months to complete investment requirements in the Philippines, compared to just three days to two weeks in Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. Investors, he said, found the process in the Philippines too costly and not worth the trouble. This is true especially when there are neighboring countries that are business-friendly not just in unfulfilled political promises and unenforced laws, but in reality.



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Malabon Zoo owner Manny Tangco shows a newborn white lion to members of media yesterday. Saying that there are only 12 white lions in the wild, Tangco invited the public to visit the zoo and suggest names for the cub. He called on the youth to ask their parents to reduce, reuse and recycle to improve the plight of animals in the world.

ERNIE PEÑAREDONDO