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DENR

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RESILIENCE CHAMPIONS

The 35th National Disaster Resilience Month Culminating Activity is capped with the giving out of Dangal Bantayog ng Katatagan Champion awards to (third from left): Department of Science and Technology Secretary Renato Solidum Jr., Center for Disaster Preparedness President Zenaida Delica-Willison, Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, and SM Prime Holdings Inc. Chairman of the Executive Committee Hans Sy. They are joined by from left: Office of Civil Defense (OCD) Assistant Secretary Raffy Alejandro IV, OCD Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno, Department of National Defense (DND) Senior Undersecretary Irineo Espino, and DND Assistant Secretary Joselito Ramos at the Philippine International Convention Center. Inset photo shows Hans Sy (middle), the first-ever awardee from the private sector, who was recognized for his outstanding leadership and unwavering support to the effective delivery of core Disaster Risk Reduction and Management mandates that served as both bridge and catalyst for all stakeholders. SM SUPERMALLS



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DISASTER RESILIENCE CHAMPS — The 'Dangal Bantayog ng Katatagan' champions were recognized at the 35th National Disaster Resilience Month Culminating Activity awards at the Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City on Monday, July 31, 2023. The awardees are (from third, left) Science and Technology Secretary Renato Solidum, Jr., Center for Disaster Preparedness President Zenaida Delica-Willison, Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, and SM Prime Holdings, Inc. Chairman of the Executive Committee Hans Sy. Others in the photo are, from left, Office of Civil Defense (OCD) Assistant Secretary Raffy Alejandro IV, OCD Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno, Department of National Defense (DND) Senior Undersecretary Irineo Espino, and DND Assistant Secretary Joselito Ramos. Inset shows Sy as the first-ever awardee from the private sector.



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Manila Bay reclamation must consider the 'Big One' – DENR

By RAYMUND ANTONIO
and JOSEPH PEDRAJAS

Reclamation projects at Manila Bay should consider the possibility of a major earthquake, described as the "Big One," the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said on Wednesday, Aug. 2.

In a Palace press briefing, Environment Secretary Antonia Yulo Loyzaga said the Big One is among the geological events needed to be considered when dealing with the current reclamation projects at Manila Bay.

While there would be a cumulative impact assessment composed of Filipino scientists and foreign experts, the DENR

chief underscored the need "to do the cost benefit analysis in terms of the impact to the ecology and the longer-term impact in terms of possibly what could result from climate change."

"For example: sea level rise needs to be considered, the different possible geological events that could actually take place—as you know, ▶5


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Manila Bay reclamation must consider the 'Big One' – DENR 1◀

there has been a lot of talk about the Big One," she explained.

The official furthered that any reclamation project without taking into consideration the rising sea levels could also derail the "Oplan Yakal Plus," the Metro Manila Earthquake Contingency Plan that illustrates and defines the roles of each government agency in case of the Big One hitting the country's capital.

"All of these need to be taken into consideration in terms of scenarios for reclamation as well as the subsidence that is ongoing because of the extraction of groundwater from the coastal areas of Manila Bay," Loyzaga said.

Currently, the DENR is assembling the team that will do the cumulative impact assessment to determine the impact of the Manila Bay rehabilitation projects on ecology.

She also shared that the agency had already asked allegedly non-compliant companies engaged in the reclamation projects to submit the necessary documents.

The official explained there could be "challenges" to this because the permits given during the previous administration came with conditions that have to be reconciled with conditions required by different government agencies for the issuance of a certificate of no objection.

"So, while on the surface, there may have been processes wherein no objection from certain agencies was elicited, we are now looking into actually the compliance of the conditionalities that were imposed in order for those certifications of no objection to actually be valid," Loyzaga added.

At least 5,000 hectares of Manila Bay will be needed for the 13 reclamation projects that have been approved.

US embassy worried over Manila Bay reclamation

Her comments came amid concerns raised by the US embassy in Manila about the ecological impact of the rehabilitation project.

The US embassy also expressed

concern over the reclamation activities in Manila Bay as the projects may have ties to a Chinese communications company reported to have helped in the militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea and cited to be allegedly engaged in fraudulent activities.

Kanishka Gangopadhyay, the embassy's spokesman, issued the statement on Wednesday, Aug. 2, as they continuously engage with the Philippine government regarding the ongoing reclamation projects, with some of them being conducted just near the vicinity of their headquarters in Manila.

Gangopadhyay said the embassy is concerned that the reclamation projects may be connected to the Chinese company "which has been added to the US Department of Commerce's Entity List for its role in helping the Chinese military construct and militarize artificial islands in the South China Sea."

The militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea is illegal as China has no legal rights based on international law over the waters.

"The company has also been cited by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for engaging in fraudulent business practices," Gangopadhyay added.

The Chinese Embassy in Manila still has no response on the US Embassy's pronouncement as of press time.

The embassy's spokesman raised concern on the long-term effect of the projects, particularly on the environment and commerce.

"We have expressed concerns about the potential negative long-term and irreversible impacts to the environment, the resilience to natural hazards of Manila and nearby areas, and to commerce," he said.

Gangopadhyay said the embassy would continue "to support high quality, sustainable, and transparent investments to benefit the Filipino people."

It would also "continue to engage with the appropriate authorities on this matter," he added.



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DENR: Consider 'Big One' earthquake, tsunamis in Manila Bay reclamation

By Charles Dantes

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources on Wednesday underscored the need to consider the possibility of a major earthquake or the so-called "Big One" as well as tsunamis in

the reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

In a press briefing in Malacañang, Environment Secretary Antonia Yulo Loyzaga said there is a need to observe ecological changes during the reclamation projects.

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The United States Embassy in Manila earlier raised concerns over the possible environmental impact and the "ties" of a Chinese firm to the ongoing Manila Bay reclamation projects.

However, Loyzaga acknowledged the reclamation projects would be crucial in reviving the country's economy.

The reclamation projects were approved during the term of former President Rodrigo Duterte.

"On the geological hazards: So far what we see in terms of the studies I have looked at for reclamation projects is the reference on the 7.2 movement sa

West Valley Fault," Loyzaga said.

Local seismology experts have been warning the country for the longest time of a possible major earthquake or the "Big One" along the West Valley Fault that could cause massive damages and casualties in Metro Manila.

Loyzaga said the rising sea level and various geological changes should be monitored when it comes to the said reclamation projects.

"There is what we call the Manila Trench that is located in Manila Bay. That is the geological event we are looking at in terms of the generation of a potential tsunami," she said.

She said the DENR is also assessing the cumulative impact of the reclamation projects.

The US Embassy said they are concerned that the projects have ties to the China Communications Construction Co. (CCCC) "which has been added to the US Department of Commerce's Entity List for its role in helping the Chinese military construct and militarize artificial islands in the South China Sea."

US Embassy spokesperson Kanishka Gangopadhyay said the company "has also been cited by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for engaging in fraudulent business practices."

"We continue to support high-quality, sustainable, and transparent investments to benefit the Filipino people and will continue to engage with the appropriate authorities on this matter," the US official said.



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The Manila Times

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Chinese reclamation in Manila Bay worries US

US diplomats have raised security and environmental concerns with the Philippines over the involvement of a Chinese company in a land reclamation project in Manila Bay, a US embassy spokesman said Wednesday.

A subsidiary of China Communications Construction Co, which was blacklisted by Washington in 2020, has been contracted to reclaim 318 hectares (786 acres) in waters fronting the US embassy and Philippine Navy headquarters, the Philippine Reclamation Authority said.

US embassy spokesman Kanishka Gangopadhyay said the American diplomatic mission had expressed several concerns

with the Philippines, including the project's "potential negative long-term and irreversible impacts to the environment." "We are also concerned that the projects have ties to the China Communications Construction Co., which has been added to the US Department of Commerce's Entity List for its role in helping the Chinese military construct and militarize artificial islands in the South China Sea," he said in a statement.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea and has reinforced its stance by ripping up thousands of hectares of reef to create new land for artificial islands in the Spratly archipelago.

Environmental groups have long warned that land reclamation in Manila Bay will worsen flooding in the sprawling metropolis of 13 million people.

The P34.4 billion, four-year project is a joint venture between the Manila City government and Waterfront Manila Premier Development, said Joseph Literal, assistant general manager at the reclamation authority.

The Chinese subsidiary was contracted by the joint venture to carry out the work, he said.

The government permit requires

the contractor to provide a 200-meter (219-yard) access channel for the Philippine Navy, he added.

Waterfront company representatives could not be reached, while the Chinese embassy in Manila did not comment when asked.

Philippine Environment Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga on Wednesday said other parties had also raised "concerns" about the project and the ministry "will be conducting a cumulative impact assessment of the reclamation projects" on the 1,700 square-kilometer (656-square-mile) bay.

In 2020, the government of then president Rodrigo Duterte said it would not follow the US lead in blacklisting Chinese companies involved in island-building in disputed waters.

AFP



House clears bills for transition from coal for energy, Pencas

By JOVEE MARIE N. DELA CRUZ
@joveemarie

THE House of Representatives on Wednesday endorsed for Senate approval two of the Marcos administration's priority bills allowing a shift of the country's power generation from the use of coal to the utilization of natural gas and establishing the Philippine Ecosystem and Natural Capital Accounting System (Pencas).

This was after lawmakers approved on third and final reading House Bill (HB) 8456, or the Philippine Downstream Natural Gas Industry Development Act, and House Bill (HB) 8443 to establish the Pencas.

HB 8456, which was approved by 215 and opposed by three lawmakers, seeks to promote the role of natural gas as a safe, environment-friendly, efficient, and cost-effective source of energy.

"It's high time that we enforce, implement, and use clean energy to mitigate the effects of climate change. We have to start now to veer away from the conventional but hazardous method of generating power, for the benefit of our future generation," Speaker Ferdinand Martin Romualdez said.

The bill also provides regulatory policies and promotes the conversion of existing equipment and facilities from using fossil fuels to natural gas.

HB 8456 will compel the Department of Energy to supervise and monitor the development of the PDNGI as well as the regulation of the construction and operation of natural gas pipelines and related facilities for the transmission, distribution, and supply of natural gas.

The authors of the bill said environmental risks or health hazards, or emissions from coal use as a result of combustion, include a substantial contribution to acid rain, smog, and haze that result in respiratory illnesses and lung disease among youngsters and old alike.

They added that about 65 percent of the country's power needs are derived from coal use, which is why several lawmakers have been pushing for the approval of such a bill to accelerate investments, where domestic incentives can entice foreign investors, or LNG players, to come in.

House Committee on Ways and Means Chairman Joey Sarte Salceda said the tax provision of the bill seeks to accelerate investments shifting the country's power supply away from coal generation.

Salceda, a principal author of the measure, said he wrote the tax provisions and key economic portions of the bill, including tax incentives to encourage immediate infrastructure investments in the liquefied natural gas (LNG) sector.

"This will expedite the shift away from coal. Right now, we rely on coal for 65 percent of our electricity needs. It's cheap and base-loadable. Renewable energy is slowly getting there. But we need emissions reduction now. LNG is that transitional fuel that reduces emissions while providing base-load power," Salceda said.

Salceda added that "because we have proven reserves of Natural Gas in the West Philippine Sea, LNG also has the potential to bring us more energy independence."

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House clears bills

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Under this proposal, Salceda said the sale of LNG and the local purchases of the sector are VAT-zero-rated, akin to the VAT privileges of the local renewable energy sector.

Salceda said that, "until 2038, when coal shall have been displaced significantly, LNG is a carbon avoidance scheme. It produces less than half the emissions of coal power."

Expenses for converting a power plant from coal to LNG are also chargeable as a capital expenditure and are therefore subject to a 150 percent deduction pursuant to the CREATE Law, added Salceda.

"The conversion incentive will be crucial for plants like Ilijan, which aim to convert from coal to LNG. That has the highest potential to make more coal plants shift to more emissions-friendly LNG," he said.

Salceda also pushed for a longer income tax holiday for LNG projects by pushing for their inclusion under Tier III of the CREATE Law.

Salceda also introduced a provision

that allows investors to avail themselves of the special incentives as long as they register within the next four years.

According to the lawmaker, LNG as a source of power generates as much as 50 percent less carbon dioxide than coal.

Accounting system

MEANWHILE, the House, voting 215 affirmative, 0 negative, and 3 abstention, passed HB8443 to establish Pencas, a framework that takes into account the country's natural capital and its impact on the economy.

The bill seeks to establish a system for the collection, compilation, and development of natural capital accounts in the government as a tool for development planning and programming, policy analysis, and decision-making.

The Pencas will also serve as a comprehensive data framework for the generation of natural capital statistics and account for their progressive integration into macroeconomic indicators.

"We acknowledge that solid data is crucial in preserving and developing

our natural capital, and with this proposed legislation, we hope to provide tools and measures that can contribute to the protection, conservation, and restoration of ecosystems," Speaker Romualdez said.

"This bill also intends to provide a framework in the generation of natural capital statistics and accounts toward their progressive integration in macroeconomic indicators. That is why the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the Interagency Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Statistics (IACENRS), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) shall work hand-in-hand in the implementation of the measure," Romualdez added.

Under HB 8443, the PSA will have overall responsibility for institutionalizing and implementing Pencas following the System of Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA) framework.

This refers to a framework that integrates both economic and environ-

mental data to provide a more comprehensive and multipurpose view of the interrelationships among the economy, the environment, and ecosystems, as well as the stocks and changes in stocks of natural assets as they bring benefits to humanity.

Section 9 of the bill also provides participatory mechanisms and citizen remedies wherein any citizen will have the right to information on any account generated under the measure, to have the standing to compel the performance of any of the mandates under the proposed law, and to seek justification from any government agency that may have ignored or neglected Pencas data in their policy or decision-making.

The bill also requires Neda approval before commencing any development projects involving Pencas, which are proposed to be undertaken by the national government, national government agencies, government-owned and controlled corporations, LGUs, and private investors.



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DENR bares ECC guidelines for proposed 'floating solar' projects in Laguna de Bay

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA
@jonlmayuga

PROponents of floating photovoltaic (FPV) projects targeting Laguna de Bay would go through the proverbial eye of the needle to get their applications for environmental compliance certificates (ECC) approved.

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Administrative Order No. 2023-08 signed by Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga on July 17 outlined the environmental and social considerations on every phase of development of FPV projects, from the pre-construction stage, development or construction stage, operation and maintenance stage, up to the decommissioning stage.

FPV plants or "floating solar" is relatively new in the Philippines. In January, the DENR chief issued an order halting the acceptance and processing of ECC applications for FPVs and offshore wind power projects, noting that some regional offices of the DENR started accepting and processing, or even issuing ECCs.

In crafting the guidelines, the DENR sought the help of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to come up with measures to ensure that "FPV development adheres to the highest environmental sustainability standards."

To ensure a holistic approach to environmental management, a programmatic environmental impact assessment shall be conducted for FPV projects in Laguna de Bay.

The Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) has been mandated as the proponent of the provision and shall secure the programmatic ECC for its initial pre-determined areas for the proposed projects.

The environmental impact statement, meanwhile, should have a thorough discussion on a number of environmental impacts of the projects, including cumulative impact assessment

of the projects within the lake for the existing and proposed projects, analysis of the carrying capacity of the lake, ecosystem accounting and cost-benefit analysis, potential effect on habitats and species due to vegetation clearing for assembly and laydown areas; potential change in water quality, potential leaching of chemicals from the structure component of the FPV systems, occurrence of accidental oil, lubricant, and chemical spills during construction, operations and maintenance phase, and risk to freshwater ecology and aquatic life due to shading and breeding ground for mosquitoes.

Only the Secretary or the Director of the DENR's Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) has the authority to approve ECC applications subject to the carrying capacity of the lake.

The guidelines, specifically crafted for floating solar projects for Laguna de Bay, as part of the "Declaration of Policy" highlights the crucial role of renewable energy sources, particularly FPV plants, in achieving a sustainable future and addressing the challenges brought about by climate change in accordance with the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

"FPV plants promote sustainable economic growth, while reducing the environmental impact of energy production. These plants contribute to both the green and blue economies by harnessing the benefits of solar energy in a way that is environmentally sustainable, while also creating economic opportunities," the order said.

To ensure the sustainable development of FPVs and mitigate the environmental risks in the implementation of the project in Laguna de Bay, the order highlighted the importance of establishing a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulatory framework that incorporates careful planning and management.

The order further stated that the

pre-construction stage involves the identification of a suitable location within the Laguna de Bay for the FPV project, an assessment of the entire area, and the conduct of a feasibility study to determine if the proposed site is suitable for the installation of FPV.

The order also requires a baseline study and stakeholder analysis to establish the existing environmental, social, and economic conditions, including land and water use, flora and fauna, and livelihoods of the communities that may be affected.

"The main environmental considerations are water quality and aquatic supported biodiversity. The factors affecting the same are the location, seasonality, size of the water body, percentage covered, and materials used as part of the installation," the order stated.

Moreover, the potential increased sedimentation due to reduced flow in the area, surface heating, degradation of littoral zone plant growth as a result of reduced sunlight, impact on benthic habitat due to submerged electrical cable and/or installation of mooring systems, and positioning of array systems vis-à-vis flow patterns must be considered in the project planning.

Meanwhile, key social considerations include the potential impact on the livelihood and economic activities of users of the aquatic environment.

The proponents must also consider the availability of the areas for recreation, increase in visual clutter, and proximity to an identified navigational lane and or access lane for public areas to productive fishing areas.

In the conduct of the public scoping as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment process, where information and project impact assessment requirements are established to provide the proponent with the scope of work or the terms of reference of the report, must be submitted to the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB).

The proponent during the public

scoping is also required to work with the DENR, Department of Energy (DOE), and other relevant government agencies to identify the parameters for the EIA as part of the scoping process.

Before actual development or construction, proponents are required to conduct a climate risk assessment to determine the impact of climatic conditions on the construction, foundation, system design, and layout and reliability of the FPV projects.

The proponents are also required to assess the carrying capacities of identified water bodies, particularly rivers, inland lakes, and reservoirs in relation to other existing water uses to consider climate change risks and impacts.

During the construction stage, which includes the site preparation, delivery, and installation of the floaters, PV panels, inverters transformers, electrical cables, and other equipment, anchoring and mooring interconnection to substation and grid, testing and commissioning would have to be conducted to ensure that the project is operational and at par with environmental safeguards and safety standards.

Moreover, the order maintains that occupational health and safety hazards during the development or construction stage should include physical hazards from the use of heavy equipment, cranes, hazardous materials, dust and noise, falling objects, live power lines, and electric and magnetic fields.

Meanwhile, during the operation and maintenance phase of the project, the proponents are required to regular, preventive, corrective, and predictive maintenance and repair of the plant to ensure its safe and efficient operation.

Even after the plant is set for decommissioning, the order strictly requires the removal of the facility and the process involves the restoration of the site to its original state as much as possible, and managing any waste and debris generated during the decommissioning is a must.



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Reviving the Pasig River, again

The latest publicity photos of South Korean actor Kim Seon-ho showing him in front of his Bench billboards near the Guadalupe bridge in Makati City went viral on the internet recently—but not exactly because of his good looks and winsome smile.

Stealing the scene from the charming celebrity were the murky, greenish waters of the Pasig River in the background. Netizens were quick to poke fun at Kim, whom they praised for enduring the foul smell and the nasty sight of detritus floating on the river that had been declared “biologically dead” in the 1990s, for being incapable of sustaining marine life.

There is nothing funny, however, about the sorry state of the Pasig River that had deteriorated over the years due to the lack of sustained and serious efforts by the government to rehabilitate it and elevate its status from a Class C river.

It is thus with cautious optimism that the public welcomed President Marcos’ Executive Order No. 35 constituting the Inter-Agency Council for the Pasig River Urban Development to be headed by the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development, and co-chaired by the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority. The council is composed of 15 government agencies to “synchronize and strengthen interagency efforts to accelerate the implementation of policies, programs, and projects that aim to improve the water quality, restore marine life, and develop the banks of Pasig River, its tributaries, and surrounding communities.”

The executive order issued on July 25 acknowledged the 27-kilometer river’s “immense historical and cultural significance, as a vital waterway, which facilitates trade, transportation, and communication, and serves as a prominent landmark and tourist attraction.” Thus, the “urgent need” to rehabilitate it and “enhance the quality of life” along its banks, the executive order stated. A tall order, to say the least, given the numerous failed attempts by previous administrations to similarly clean up the Pasig River often denigrated as Metro Manila’s toilet bowl.

The dismal record says it all. As early as 1973, the first Marcos administration formed the Pasig River Development Council to implement the Pasig River Development Program that eventually failed because of lack of follow through. In 1989, the Cory Aquino administration spearheaded the Pasig River Rehabilitation Program aimed at bringing back “ecological health” to the river system. This was followed in 1999 by the creation of the Pasig River Rehabilitation Commission by then President Joseph “Erap” Estrada. It achieved some success in 2018 when the Pasig River was awarded the inaugural Asia Riverprize by the International River Foundation for its efforts to breathe new life into the river by bringing decent housing to some 18,000 people, and transforming this community into environmentally responsible citizens.

Former president Rodrigo Duterte failed to build on that success and instead took a U-turn when he abolished the commission in 2019, dismissing the river as “uncleanable.” All ongoing projects were then transferred to the Manila Bay Task Force.

In April 2021, the Pasig River was given the ignoble title of being the most polluted body of water and leading source of plastic wastes dumped into the ocean, according to a study of rivers worldwide published in *Science Advances*, a journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

That study noted that of the 20 countries tagged as major contributors of plastic wastes now floating in the world’s oceans, the Philippines was number one. Of the 1,656 rivers found to contribute harmful plastic wastes into the oceans, Pasig River led the pack.

Despite such massive scale of problems hounding Pasig River, the only project of note from the government was the launch in December 2019 of the Pasig River ferry, but even that has failed to attract a critical mass because the service was intermittent, and people had to contend with the offensive odor from the river.

The only massive effort to clean up the river comes from San Miguel Corp. which embarked on a P2-billion Pasig River cleanup program in 2021. Since then, the conglomerate has already removed 1.3 million tons of silt and solid waste, and hopes to complete by next month its target of removing 1.5 million tons of wastes from the polluted waterway.

As to how the Marcos administration would help and if this latest effort would succeed where its predecessors had failed, remains to be seen. But it must not lose heart and instead learn from lessons from the past. Indeed, there is no shortage of studies and master plans to show exactly how to clean up the river. What had been missing over the past 50 years are the political will and resources to translate these well-thought-out plans into meaningful action.

With Mr. Marcos enjoying popular support and with his seeming commitment to make a difference in Pasig River with the latest interagency body, perhaps this all-too-familiar tale of upgrading the river where people used to bathe will finally have a different ending.



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NCR mayors eye rain catchment system—Zamora

By Joel E. Zurbano

METRO Manila mayors have proposed the installation of a rain catchment system in anticipation of possible water shortages in the National Capital Region.

Members of the Metro Manila Council (MMC) made the proposal Wednesday after its meeting with the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority.

According to MMC president and San Juan City Mayor Francis Zamora, the structures may be built at city and village halls and public schools, among others.

"The rainwater caught by our roofs and gutters will flow to drums so we can store and use them," he said.

He added the MMDA can provide tanks for the catchment system.

MMDA acting chairman Romando Artes said his agency researched about modular rain catchment systems.

In July, the government floated an idea to regulate water usage in Metro Manila.

Zamora said local chief executives have the autonomy to decide on the matter, saying not all cities in Metro Manila have establishments that need large amounts of water.

The issue of water usage regulation surfaced following the appeal of Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) to business establishments and those consuming massive volumes of water to conserve and limit their usage.

State weather bureau officials said earlier at least 30 provinces may experience a dry spell while at least two provinces may suffer from drought due to the El Niño phenomenon.

PAGASA climate monitoring chief Ana Solis said the possibility of El Niño is high.

She said rainfall is expected to decrease next month and may drop further from October to December this year.

Zamora urged fellow local officials to "conserve and recycle water as much as possible, and implement a rainwater catchment system to collect rainwater that could be used for other purposes."



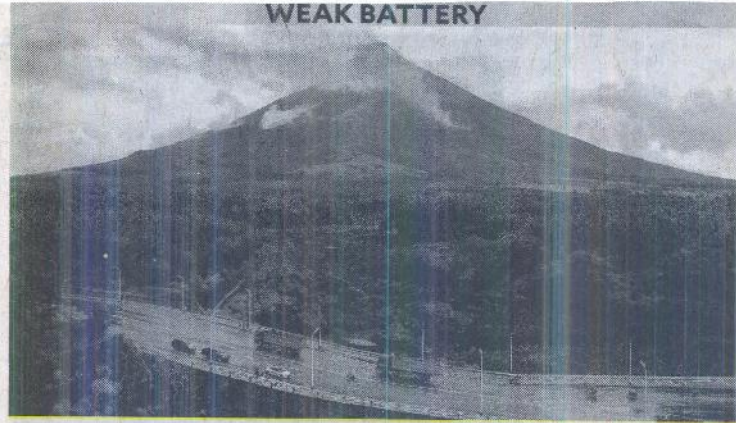
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WEAK BATTERY



LAHAR PATH Villages in areas identified as high-risk for lahar from Mayon Volcano are advised to be ready especially during the typhoon season as heavy and continuous rains may generate lahar flows along major channels. This image of Mayon was taken from Barangay Mabinit in Legazpi City on July 21. —MARK ALVIC ESPLANA

HEAVY RAINS CAUSE 'DATA GAPS' IN MAYON OBSERVATORY

By **Ma. April Mier-Manjares**
@MaAprilMierINQ

LEGAZPI CITY—Heavy rains that affected Albay province in the past few days caused equipment to discharge, leading to possible “data gaps,” or inaccurate record of volcanic activity on Mayon Volcano.

Paul Karson Alanis, resident volcanologist of Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) Legazpi, said in a private message Wednesday that from July 26 to July 30, the detection of pyroclastic density currents (PDCs, or fast-moving mixture of ash, gases and volcanic debris) and rockfall had been affected by the powering down of the solar-powered Anoling, Camalig Observation Station (VMAN) as it has not been recharged for days.

The VMAN is inside the 6-kilometer-radius permanent danger zone (PDZ) and the closest station to the Mi-isi and Bonga gullies of the volcano.

“It was not damaged, likely the battery became empty due to constant rains lately,” Alanis said on Wednesday.

He said it was possible that their instruments missed recording some volcanic events due to this problem.

In the Phivolcs bulletins issued from July 27 to July 30, only the low frequency volcanic earthquakes (LFVQs) and rockfall events were monitored.

When the instrument became fully functional again on July 31, Phivolcs recorded phases of intermittent ashing with 100-meter gray ash plumes at the north-

east portion of the volcano.

Its Aug. 1 bulletin showed that 258 volcanic earthquakes, including one tremor event with a duration of a minute and 30 seconds; 256 LFVQs; 57 ashing events; and 100 rockfall events were recorded by the Mayon Volcano Network.

Phivolcs, in its Aug. 2 bulletin, said 57 LFVQs, five PDCs, 225 rockfall events and four ashing events were recorded.

Ashfall, lahar alerts

Phivolcs said that with the prevailing wind pattern, ashfall may most likely occur on the south side of the volcano, facing Legazpi City, and towns of Daraga and Camalig.

Tim Lawrence Florece, information officer of Camalig town, said no ashfall was noted in the town but residents near the slopes and river channels had to be on alert for possible lahar flow during heavy rains.

“The disaster management officials conducted lahar preparedness information drive in the high-risk villages,” Florece said on Wednesday.

All residents inside the danger zone of the volcano were already evacuated in the said town.

As of Tuesday, 5,813 families (20,331 people) were still in evacuation sites in the cities of Ligao, and Tabaco, and the towns of Daraga, Camalig, Guinobatan, Malilipot and Sto. Domingo.

Alert level 3 still prevails over Mayon Volcano, which indicates the possibility of a hazardous eruption within weeks or even days. The alert has been up since June 8. INQ



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Conservation advocates hit Mati City LGU order to shut down marine turtle hatchery

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA
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ENVIRONMENTAL advocates belonging to the Amihan sa Dahican Balud sa Paglaum Inc., a nongovernment organization that operates a marine turtle hatchery in the Dahican beach in Mati, Davao Oriental slammed the decision of the local government to dismantle their facility reportedly to commercialize and take over the ecotourism business for the community.

"We've been operating our hatchery for more than two decades now to protect and conserve our marine habitat and their nesting ground," Nicolai Bacalso, board member of Amihan sa Dahican, told the BUSINESSMIRROR in a telephone interview.

He said they were told to transfer their hatchery to another location, but were surprised when the Office of the Mayor sent men to dismantle their facility despite their stiff opposition to the proposal.

"We have conducted three mediation meetings and every time, we registered our opposition to the plan to transfer our hatchery because it is a well known fact that marine turtles return to the place where they were hatched to lay their eggs," he explained in a mix of Filipino and English.

Dahican Beach is a 7-kilometer stretch of white sand facing the Pacific Ocean. This Boracay-like

beach is slowly gaining popularity among local tourists because of its white sand beach. It is known for watersports activities, which provide jobs and livelihood to the community, including funding for the operation of Amihan Dahican's marine turtle hatchery.

The beach is also a known nesting ground for marine turtles. At least three of the five known marine turtles nest in the Dahican beach, which the group secures in their hatchery to protect the eggs from various threats and see to it that they hatch and the hatchlings are released safely back into the wild.

In 2021, Amihan sa Dahican claimed that over 100,000 hatchlings were released by the group in the last three years. In a span of 20 years of its operation, Bacalso said the number could reach 600,000 hatchlings or more.

Bacalso is appealing to the

Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to save their hatchery from business interests, adding that a certain family is pushing to commercialize the beach operation and wants their group out of the picture for profit.

It was learned that on Monday, armed with an order from the Office of the Mayor of Mati City, the local government of Mati had sent men to start the dismantling of the hatchery, even when there are still no clear plans for relocation.

The order dated July 17, 2023, was signed by Alan E. Andrada, City Administrator of Mati on behalf of the mayor ordering the dismantling of the hatchery.

The order stated that the operator of the marine turtle hatchery has no permit or documents that warrant their demand as the main facilitator of marine conservation in the area.

The letter addressed to Pedro

G. Plaza, Amihan sa Dahican president, a copy of which was obtained by the BUSINESSMIRROR, stated that a notice to terminate the hatchery operation was issued to the group on March 27, 2023.

"Be informed that the property leading to your hatchery shall be used as public access, docking areas for fisherfolk to unload and market their produce and for seasonal activities like watersports and the likes," the order stated.

"Anent hereto, you are advised to remove or dismantle the hatchery... or this City LGU will take further action if your group will again, choose to overlook this memorandum," the order further warned.

"As a warning, your organization's continued, controversial, and defaming claims against the city government will be [met] legally in a proper forum and venue," the order further stated.



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OP again seeks bulk of intel, secret funds

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The Office of the President (OP) is seeking P4.56 billion in confidential and intelligence funds for 2024—almost half of the P10.14 billion in secret appropriations tucked into the proposed national budget submitted by economic managers to Congress on Wednesday.

Once approved, the confidential and intelligence funds requested by President Marcos' office will have been unchanged from this year's allocation and slightly higher than in the last three years of the Duterte administration.

The Office of the Vice President (OVP), on the other hand, is asking for another P500 million in confidential funds on top of the P150 million in confidential funds sought by the Department of Education (DepEd).

The two offices under Vice President and Education Secretary Sara Duterte received the same allocations this year.

The 2024 National Expenditure Plan (NEP), or the budget document prepared and submitted by the executive to the House of Representatives and the Senate for approval, earmarked P4.86 billion for confidential expenses and P5.28 billion for intelligence expenses, representing less than 0.02 percent of the proposed P5.77-trillion national budget.

Next year's proposed confidential and intelligence funds are higher by about P120 million than the P10.02-billion allocation for 2023.

Besides the OP, other agencies with the largest requests for secret funds were the Department of National Defense with a combined P2.68 billion in confidential and intelligence expenses, the Department of the Interior and Local Government with P906.62 million, and the Department of Justice with P471.29 million.

Corruption source

Confidential and intelligence funds are earmarked for surveillance-related activities of civilian government agencies. But the grant of such funds has been widely criticized as a source of corruption because the appropriations, by their nature, are not subject to the usual audit by the Commission on Audit.

State auditors have noted that these secret funds are difficult to examine since they are generally used for surveillance and intelligence-gathering activities related to national security and peace and order.

The release of intelligence funds is subject to the President's approval. Agencies using these funds are required to submit a quarterly accomplishment report on the use of the funds.

Confidential funds, on the

CONFIDENTIAL AND INTELLIGENCE FUNDS

Budget of Expenditures and Sources of Financing 2024

| Department | 2023 | | 2024 (PROPOSED) | |
|---|---------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| | INTELLIGENCE | CONFIDENTIAL | INTELLIGENCE | CONFIDENTIAL |
| Office of the President | 2.31B | 2.25B | 2.31B | 2.25B |
| Office of the Vice President | | 500M | | 500M |
| Department of Agriculture | | | | 50M |
| Department of Education | | 150M | | 150M |
| Department of Environment and Natural Resources | | 13.96M | | 13.95M |
| Department of Finance | | 80.5M | | 111M |
| Department of Foreign Affairs | | 45M | | 50M |
| Department of Information and Communications Technology | | | | 300M |
| Department of the Interior and Local Government | 806.02M | 100.6M | 806.02M | 100.6M |
| Department of Justice | | 721.88M | | 471.29M |
| Department of National Defense | 1.75B | 87M | 1.81B | 87M |
| Department of Social Welfare and Development | | 18M | | 18M |
| Department of Transportation | 10M | 5.59M | 10M | 5.6M |
| Other Executive Offices | 340.2M | 790M | 340.2M | 695M |
| Commission of Audit | | 10M | | 10M |
| Office of the Ombudsman | | 31M | | 51.468M |
| Commission of Human Rights | | 1M | | 1M |
| Total | 5.217B | 4.804B | 5.277B | 4.864B |

SOURCE: DBM

INQ GRAPHICS

BUDGET OF PRIORITY SECTORS IN BILLION PESOS

| | 2024 (PROPOSED) | 2023 |
|---|-----------------|-------|
| Education (DepEd, SUCs, CHED, Tesda) | 942.7 | 895.2 |
| Department of Public Works and Highways | 822.2 | 894.2 |
| Health (DOH, PhilHealth) | 306.1 | 314.7 |
| Department of the Interior and Local Government | 259.5 | 253.2 |
| Department of National Defense | 232.2 | 203.4 |
| Department of Social Welfare and Development | 209.9 | 199.5 |
| Department of Transportation | 214.3 | 106 |
| Agriculture (DA and attached corporations, DAR) | 181.4 | 173.6 |
| Judiciary | 57.8 | 54.9 |
| Department of Labor and Employment | 40.5 | 47.1 |

SOURCE: DBM

INQ GRAPHICS

other hand, are released upon approval by the secretary of the department concerned. The agency is also required to submit a quarterly report on the use of the funds.

Based on the NEP, the OP is again eyeing the largest chunk of secret funds next year—P2.25 billion for confidential expenses and P2.31 billion for

intelligence expenses.

In the last half of Rodrigo Duterte's government, the OP received P2.25 billion each in intelligence and confidential funds for a combined P4.5 billion.

The amount had ballooned from the P500 million in secret funds given to the OP during Benigno Aquino III's presidency.

As for the OVP and DepEd,

this year was the first time both agencies received huge confidential funds.

During the 2023 budget deliberations last year, the Senate had cut down DepEd's share to P30 million and realigned the amount to other departments.

But the bicameral conference committee later restored DepEd's confidential funds despite criticisms that they were unwarranted in an agency that was not directly involved in law enforcement and security.

'Excess fat'

At a press briefing, Budget Secretary Ameh Pangandaman assured the public that government agencies would strictly follow guidelines for the disbursement of confidential and intelligence funds.

Independent opposition Rep. Edcel Lagman of Albay stressed that Congress should exercise its power of the purse and "excise any budgetary fat, whether overtly or covertly hidden in the NEP."

"I will pursue my advocacy against the profligate allocations for confidential and intelligence funds in the President's 2024 NEP, the excess fat of which must be excised and reallocated to socioeconomic services, particularly education and health," he said in a message to the Inquirer. INQ