

08 August 2023 Tuesday



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EPR a 'big leap forward' to eliminate plastic waste – Cynthia Villar

By MARIO CASAYURAN

By embracing the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Act of 2022 and the circular economy, Senator Cynthia Villar said "we are ready to pave the way for a more sustainable future."

"The EPR law is not a burden but a call to partnership and cooperation, recognizing that we all have a role to play," Villar said, adding that the time to act is now.

Villar was the guest speaker during the recent EPR Act of 2022 Campaign Launch at Conrad Hotel, Pasay City.

Villar said the theme of the event organized by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and UNDF was "LOOPFORWARD: Linking Opportunities and Partnerships Towards Circular through EPR."

Villar exhorted everyone to unite in supporting the EPR Act and in advancing a circular economy.

"This law offers a better approach to plastic waste management than merely expecting citizens to segregate and manage it, or leaving the local government units across our more than seven thousand islands to handle overwhelming plastic waste," said Villar, principal author and sponsor of EPR or Republic Act No. 11898.

Without an EPR system, she considered as "messy and costly" collecting packaging waste in an archipelago like the Philippines.

EPR places the responsibility for products squarely on the manufacturers- from creation to disposal.



The sea has disappeared from Roxas Boulevard - BBM

By HELEN FLORES

Several problems have been found involving the reclamation projects in Manila Bay, President Marcos said yesterday, as he lamented that the sea has disappeared from Roxas Boulevard.

Marcos made the remark during a situation briefing in

Malolos City, Bulacan after a local official said the ongoing airport project in the province is being blamed for the severe flooding there.

"All are suspended, all reclamation projects are under review, except for one, which was allowed to push through as it was reviewed already," the President said.

He did not identify the project.

"This is another big problem that we need to address," Marcos said. "On Roxas Boulevard, the sea is gone."

During a recent press briefing at Malacañang, Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said

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The sea From Page 1

the agency is assembling a team of scientists and experts to conduct a cumulative impact assessment of Manila Bay reclamation projects.

"So, we have started to talk to the different scientists that will be part of that," she said.

Asked if the government will halt reclamation projects if there is a negative impact based on the cumulative assessment, Loyzaga said: "I think what's important is reclamation has a certain value, obviously in terms of the economy."

Include fisherfolk

Fishers' group Pangisda Pilipinas on Monday called on Loyzaga to include fisherfolk leaders in the panel, which will review all the reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

"Based on the previous experience, officials said reviews on the projects were done but in reality, no assessment was made. We were part of the problem that was created, we should then be part of the solution to be implemented," Pangisda Pilipinas national chairman Pablo Rosales said.

Loyzaga on Friday said the Department of Environment and Natural Resources will form a team to assess all ongoing reclamation projects amid the controversial issue on the Manila Waterfront City Reclamation Project, adding that the composition of the team will be announced soon.

"We can only say that the pronouncement (of Secretary Loyzaga) is true if the review of the panel starts. Why is it only now that this policy is made after many islands have sprouted in the Manila Bay and already displaced 100,000 fishermen?" Rosales said.

Rosales also welcomed the concern of the United States embassy on the environmental impact of the project, as well the involvement of China Communications Construction Co.

He said that fishers' groups are preparing to file cases before the Supreme Court against those involved in reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

Reclamation projects do not benefit ordinary people as mostly casinos, hotels and other commercial establishments are being built in the bay, he said.

- With Bella Cariaso



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'Reclamation to cause 8-meter floods'

By Macon Ramos-Araneta

SENATOR Cynthia Villar yesterday warned that a six- to eight-meter flood in Las Piñas City and other nearby areas could likely happen if the ongoing reclamation in Manila Bay reaches her hometown.

Villar, the chairperson of the Senate Committee on the Environment and natural resources, has been strongly objecting to any reclamation project at Manila Bay.

"I'm taking them [to the Supreme Court]. If they don't revise [their plan], we have no choice. Will I allow my hometown to be submerged in a six-foot flood?" she said.

"If they continue with the reclamation in our part of Manila Bay, there will be no outlet for our four rivers. It was predicted there will be six to eight meters of flooding. Six meters is [equivalent to a] three-story building," Villar added.

She said she already raised her concern with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga.

"I told them we are a legislated protected area. We are entitled to a buffer

zone of three kilometers provided for by the DENR," she said.

The Las Pinas-Parañaque Wetland Park is a protected area recognized as a Wetland of International Importance during the Unesco Ramsar Convention.

According to the senator, her committee will conduct a public hearing on the ongoing reclamation project.

She said she agrees with the observation of Justice Secretary Crispin Remulla that the awarding of the contracts for the reclamation project was rushed.



MORATORIUM EYED

SUSPEND RECLAMATION, DENR URGED

By Jane Bautista
@janebautistaINQ

An environmental group reiterated its call for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to put the ongoing reclamation projects in Manila Bay on hold as the agency conducts a cumulative impact assessment on these activities.

Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment (Kalikasan PNE) expressed alarm over the involvement of a Chinese construction company in the reclamation activities in Manila Bay. The same company was found to be involved in the construction of artificial islands in the West Philippine Sea.

"It is quite alarming that the very same company wrecking ecosystems in the West Philippine Sea is operating right here, legally, in plain sight in Manila Bay," Jon Bonifacio, national coordinator of Kalikasan PNE, said in a statement on Sunday.

"This is an insult not only to our natural heritage but also to our national sovereignty," he said.

The group urged the government to suspend China Communications Construction Co. and called for a moratorium on all ongoing reclamation projects. INQ



Floods: The new epidemic



The recent flooding of the North Luzon Expressway in San Simon, Pampanga, serves as a wake-up call to the worsening environmental situation in the area. This region is part of the Candaba Swamp, which acts as a natural flood retention basin, holding the overflow from five smaller rivers before draining into the Pampanga River. The Pampanga River, in turn, flows into Manila Bay, creating a complex network that leads to perennial flooding in the towns of Pampanga, Bulacan, and Nueva Ecija.

The ongoing infrastructural transformations in the Manila Bay area, such as massive reclamation projects and the construction of the New Manila International Airport in Bulacan, raise concerns about their impact on the already vulnerable environmental conditions. Environmental Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga suggests suspending the reclamation projects until a comprehensive evaluation of their cumulative impact is conducted. However, companies involved in the reclamation projects argue that they have complied with all regulations and possess environmental compliance certificates (ECC) from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Floods have become a new epidemic in the Philippines and many other regions around the world. Frequent flooding is affecting nations across Asia, Africa, North and South America, and Europe. The Philippines is no exception, with towns in Bulacan and Pampanga remaining flooded for decades, particularly after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo 32 years ago, which significantly altered river basins and reversed floodwater flows. In addition, the loss of mangroves and over extraction of groundwater have contributed to land subsidence and further flooding.

The boiling frog syndrome illustrates people's limited response to slow-onset disasters like rising floodwaters. When faced with intermittent floods, individuals tend to overlook the gradual changes and underestimate the long-term implications. Communities alongside Manila Bay have constructed dikes and dams, incrementally raising the level of roads to combat the floods, but these measures have hindered water from receding and exacerbated the situation.

Immediate onset disasters, like earthquakes or sudden flash floods, prompt immediate action and emergency responses. In contrast, slow-onset disasters unfold gradually, and their effects may not be immediately apparent, leading to delays in taking collective action. The boiling frog syndrome is particularly evident in areas where slow-rising floodwaters occur intermittently, as people tend to consider the floods manageable and focus on short-term fixes.

The floods not only disrupt lives, livelihoods, and economies but also have significant health implications, bringing diseases like leptospirosis and athlete's foot. Additionally, floods erode confidence in government officials and collective strategies for disaster response, reinforcing the belief that it is every person for himself.

The mandate from the Supreme Court to clean up Manila Bay, including its rivers, was a game-changing order. However, the objective should go beyond mere cleanup for aesthetic and recreational purposes. It should encompass mitigation actions to reverse environmental damage and prevent further flooding in the Bulacan and Pampanga region.

The lack of attention to floods in government discourse, such as in President Marcos' State of the Nation Address, reflects the perception that floods are a transient problem. This attitude needs to change. Slow-onset disasters like floods demand proactive and sustained efforts to mitigate risks and build resilience. To combat the flood epidemic, a collective approach involving regional, provincial, city, and municipal authorities is essential.

The science community and academia should engage with national disaster risk reduction and management officials in helping local communities understand their challenges and come up with feasible and sustainable flood management strategies.

The global typhoon and flood crisis have made floods a new epidemic, affecting communities worldwide, including the Philippines. The recent flooding in San Simon serves as a reminder to inconvenienced motorists and townfolk of the worsening environmental situation in the region. The ongoing infrastructural developments in the Manila Bay area raise serious concerns about their impact on flooding. At the level of civic engagement, the absence of the ability and readiness for community self-mobilization must be reversed so people can respond effectively to slow-onset disasters.

To address this crisis, a holistic approach is required, involving local communities and government authorities. Mitigation efforts should go beyond cleaning up Manila Bay to reverse environmental damage and prevent future flooding. Recognizing floods as a persistent and pervasive flagship concern by the government at the national and local levels is key to building resilience and finding sustainable solutions not only to the flood epidemic but those myriad vexations that defeat and stultify the Filipinos' collective spirit and action.



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The Manila Times



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A noise filter for the reclamation controversy

LAST week, what sounded like a potential scandal erupted following a statement from the US Embassy expressing "concern" over the large-scale reclamation projects being constructed in Manila Bay. The contractor doing most of the work to create the artificial islands in the bay has been blacklisted by the US government for its substantial role in building China's illegal artificial islands in the South China Sea. The implication of the statement, of course, was that the Philippines should not be allowing the same firm to do exactly the same kind of work that, in a sense, epitomizes the long-simmering maritime dispute between the Philippines and China right on the capital's doorstep.

For the sake of clarity, of which there has been precious little so far in this entire story, this is what the news reports from August 3 and 4 said to set off the controversy:

"US Embassy spokesman Kanishka Gangopadhyay, in a statement on Wednesday, said, 'We have expressed concerns about the potential negative long-term and irreversible impacts [of the reclamation projects] to the environment, the resilience to natural hazards of Manila and nearby areas, and to commerce.'

"We are also concerned that



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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.

"Gangopadhyay added, '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,' he said."

The projects in question

There are about a dozen reclamation projects currently ongoing in Manila Bay, but the US Embassy's "concerns" seem to be directed at three of them in particular. The first is a \$1 billion, 360-hectare area being developed by SM Prime Holdings offshore from the Mall

of Asia complex; China Communications Construction Co. (CCCC) subsidiary China Harbor Engineering Co. is one of two firms doing the construction work there.

The second is the 265-hectare Pasay Harbor City Reclamation Project (PHCRP), which is a joint venture between Pasay City and Pasay Harbor City Corp., which is, in turn, a joint venture of Udena Development Corp., Ulticon Builders Inc., and China Harbor Engineering Co. As Udena and Ulticon are headed by former president Rodrigo Duterte's cronies Dennis Uy and brothers Carlos and Raul Gonzalez, respectively, the ex-president's flip-flop in 2022 from rejecting any reclamation projects to allowing anyone with a boat and a shovel to start piling up mud in the bay might now make more sense.

The third project, and the one that has both received the harshest public criticism and probably concerns the US Embassy the most, as it is being built right outside the embassy's back door, is the 318-hectare Manila Waterfront City Project, a partnership between China First Highway Engineer Co. Ltd., another CCCC subsidiary, and Waterfront Manila Premier Development Inc. The latter company is led by the Gatchalian clan, a fact that has

seemingly become awkward for Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian in light of recent developments, prompting him to publicly disavow having anything to do with that part of the family's business in a news report in Philstar on August 4.

Who has blacklisted who?

Upon fact-checking the statement from the US Embassy, it is revealed that what was said may be considered not entirely accurate. The US Department of Commerce's Entity List that the embassy spokesman referred to is called the "BIS List," with "BIS" referring to the commerce department's Bureau of Industry and Security. It is true that CCCC appears on the most recent publicly available version of the BIS List (dated May 19, 2023), but the prohibition does not apply generally to the entire CCCC group, which has nearly two dozen subsidiaries, but instead specifies six particular ones, which have a total of 11 "aliases," or presumed sub-companies, among them. Neither China Harbor Engineering Co. nor China First Highway Engineer Co. Ltd. appears among those.

So, it is literally true that "the projects have ties to the China

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Communications Construction Co.," but it is not true that the entire CCCC "has been added to the US Department of Commerce's Entity List." Only certain parts of it have, and those do not include the two currently making a mess of Manila Bay.

However, what the US Embassy did not mention, and probably should have, is that the entire CCCC group does appear on a different blacklist, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctions list. The effect of that list, for what it's worth, is that named entities and persons are prohibited from doing any business with any US party; besides the sanctions, which are their own penalty, any person or company from the US doing business with anyone on the list is also subject to severe penalties.

Now, as for the assertion that, "The company has also been cited by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for engaging in fraudulent business practices," this is also literally true, but the way it was expressed is quite misleading. In 2011, the World Bank black-listed "China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) Ltd., and all its subsidiaries, for fraudulent practices under Phase 1 of the Philippines National Roads Improvement and Management Project." The penalty, which is properly called debarment, was for eight years, beginning Jan. 12, 2009 and ending Jan. 12, 2017.

That debarment and what led to it are another entire saga, one that will be interesting to discuss in the coming days and weeks, but we'll set that aside for now. The salient point here is that, as of now, neither CCCC nor any of its subsidiaries are on the World Bank's debarment list. Furthermore, the only reason the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was mentioned is because the multilateral development banks, or at least most of them, cooperate with each other to guard against shady actors. If one debars a particular contractor, the others will also add it to their own lists in what is referred to as "cross-debarment." I would not swear that CCCC or its various parts have not been debarred at some point by ADB in connection with an ADB-funded project, but as far as I could determine from the publicly available database, they have not been.

So, to summarize: The two companies in question, China Harbor Engineering Co. and China First Highway Engineer Co. Ltd., which are subsidiaries of CCCC, do not appear on the US Department of Commerce list of prohibited firms, contrary to the statement of the US Embassy. The parent company CCCC does appear on the OFAC sanction list, and that presumably applies to all of CCCC's subsidiaries, but that is not what the US Embassy said. There are currently no other known blacklists or other sanctions lists that apply to China Harbor Engineering Co. and China First Highway Engineer Co. Ltd., although further research may reveal something.

What all of that means is that allowing these two companies to carry out the construction work they are presently contracted to do is simply a matter of judgment on the part of the Philippine government and businesses involved. Appallingly poor, self-destructive judgment in my opinion, but we will delve into that at a later time.

However, there is one remaining troubling detail, if it is truly as it appears to be in public records. Allow me to quote directly from the Philippine Construction Accreditation Board (PCAB) website:

"RA 4566 as amended by PD 1746 provides that no contractor (including sub-contractor and specialty contractor) shall engage in the business of contracting without first having secured a PCAB license to conduct business. It is an offense to engage in contracting business without a license first being obtained."

PCAB maintains a continuously updated, searchable portal where one can verify if a particular contractor is properly licensed. China First Highway Engineering Co. Ltd., the contractor for the Manila Waterfront project, appears on the list. China Harbor Engineering Co., however, does not, nor does CCCC appear in any form at all where the apparent absence of a license on China Harbor Engineering's part to actually legally do work in the Philippines could be explained as being covered under some sort of parent company umbrella. If any of the parties involved have an explanation for this, now would be a good time to provide it.

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Marcos tells DPWH: Solve flooding in Central Luzon

A presidential visit to Pampanga, Bulacan also brings P1-B aid to the two provinces

By Carmela Reyes-Estrope,
Tonette T. Orejas
and Jerome Aning
@Team_Inquirer

CITY OF MALOLOS—President Marcos on Monday visited the provinces of Bulacan and Pampanga and brought nearly P1 billion worth of assistance to victims of widespread flooding following the onslaught of Typhoons "Egay" (Doksuri) and "Falcon" (Khanun) that left a trail of devastation in a large part of Luzon in the past two weeks.

The President also directed the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) to come up with long-term solutions to the flooding in Central Luzon, including coming up with water impounding projects, even as he ordered for the conduct of short-term solutions, such as river dredging, road elevation and new bridge construction works.

The financial assistance from Malacañang and other national agencies came just as Bulacan Gov. Daniel Fernando informed the President during a briefing that his province suffered almost P769 million in agricultural losses and P500 million in damage to infrastructure due to the rain-induced flooding, worsened by the rising tide and release of water from the dams located in Bulacan.

A total of 296,426 families, or 1.8 million people, in the province's 20 towns and four cities were affected by the floods, which continued to inundate low-lying areas due to the enhanced southwest monsoon, or "habagat," Fernando told the President.

Initially, Bulacan province received P15 million as first tranche of the P20-million aid; while the city of Malolos and

the towns of San Miguel, Hagonoy, Pulilan, San Rafael, San Ildefonso, Bustos, Calumpit, Paombong and Bulakan, all received P2 million each, the first tranche of the P3 million in aid.

Pampanga received a total of P64.8 million in aid from the President, said Gov. Dennis Pineda.

This included P15 million, as first tranche of the P20 million allotted for the province; while the City of San Fernando and the towns of Guagua, Sasmuan, Lubao, Arayat, Mexico, Apalit, Candaba, Macabebe, Masantol, Minalin, San Luis, San Simon, Sto. Tomas, Bacolor, Sta. Ana and Porac all received P2 million, the first tranche of the P3 million in aid due them.

Among the agencies that extended assistance to Pampanga, the Department of Social Welfare and Development distributed food packs and P10,000 to 1,000 beneficiaries; the Department of Labor and Employment extended P2.3 million to 500 beneficiaries under the Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating mga Disadvantaged Workers (Tupad) program, on top of the P30 million it downloaded to its regional office for the Tupad program in the province; while the Department of Agriculture gave the province P21.6 million worth of grain and vegetable seeds for distribution to its farmers.

Reclamation suspended

During a meeting with other Bulacan officials, Marcos was urged to direct appropriate agencies to dredge the rivers in Bulacan to ease the perennial flooding in the province.

In response, the President said his administration had already made initial efforts to ad-

dress the flooding by creating the Office of the Water Resources under his office while waiting for the passage of the law that would create a department of water resources management.

The President assured Bulacan officials and residents that the government already has a master plan for a flood control project as he also announced the suspension of the land development and reclamation in the coastal areas of Bulacan town pending a review.

"The reclamation there were all suspended now, except for one which had been reviewed and approved," Marcos said.

Before visiting Bulacan, the President was in Pampanga where he approved the plan of the North Luzon Expressway (NLEX) Corp. to elevate the portion of the toll road under Tulaoc Bridge in San Simon town that had caused a gridlock since July 28 due to flooding.

The President also directed the DPWH to elevate the bridge itself.

Rogelio Singson, president and CEO of Metro Pacific Tollways Corp. (MPTC), told the Inquirer in an interview that NLEX's 200-meter section under the Tulaoc bridge would be raised by 0.07 m. MPTC's NLEX Corp. operates NLEX.

Singson, a former DPWH secretary during the Aquino administration, said the construction work would be completed in three months and would be done one side at a time, regardless of the schedule of the DPWH's work on the bridge.

"The NLEX became a catchment basin," he noted, adding that the road's upgrade would start when the weather allows it.

Singson said NLEX Corp. was committed to finish an

interchange in Sto. Tomas in Pampanga. Sto. Tomas Mayor John Sambo asked Mr. Marcos to order the DPWH to start constructing a 1-kilometer connector road while Apalit Mayor Oscar Tetangco sought for the completion of a 1-km segment of MacArthur Highway in his town.

The NLEX-Sto. Tomas interchange and Apalit span of MacArthur Highway would have served as alternate roads during the flooding.

Impounding project

As part of the long-term solutions to the flooding problem in Central Luzon, the President ordered the conduct of an extensive study on the proposed construction of an impounding system in Pampanga's town of Candaba, noting that while dredging of rivers have to be done, this would not permanently solve the perennial flooding in the region.

Some local officials present in the meeting have opposed the plan, noting that it would displace some 9,000 mostly farming residents of Candaba, which is a major rice producer in the region.

But the President assured that local governments would be consulted and would be the ones to approve the project, adding that residents who would be displaced could be relocated to other equally productive areas.

The Candaba impounding project was proposed in 2013 by Singson, as a solution to flooding concerns in the region. Under his proposal, the government will secure or buy around 200 hectares or 10 percent of the 2,000-ha swampland in Candaba to build a water impounding area to prevent flooding in low-lying areas. INQ



Marcos eyes long-term solutions to Luzon floods

By ALEXIS ROMERO

The construction of a water impounding facility in Pampanga as well as the creation of a water resources management agency are among long-term measures being considered by

President Marcos to address massive flooding in Luzon.

Citing the need to prevent floods and to prepare for the effects of climate change and El Niño, Marcos yesterday said the water resources management department would

handle matters related to flood control, irrigation, fresh water supply and distribution.

While waiting for the enactment of a law establishing the agency, the President has created a water management

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Marcos From Page 1

office in the executive branch.

The department, he said, would also handle water impounding projects in accordance with the government's master plan.

The President previously announced plans to build water impounding facilities in areas outside of Metro Manila to mitigate floods and collect water for agriculture and other purposes.

Last April, Marcos signed Executive Order 22 establishing the Water Resources Management Office, a body tasked to integrate all government efforts to ensure the sustainable management of the country's water resources.

The President was briefed yesterday by Bulacan Gov. Daniel Fernando on the province's flood situation at the Hiyas ng Bulacan Convention Center in Malolos.

Fernando presented to the President the causes and possible solutions to the flooding due to the rains dumped by Typhoons Egay and Falcon, enhanced by the southwest monsoon.

Meanwhile, the government is looking to build a water impounding facility in Candaba, Pampanga to address perennial flooding in the province.

Marcos stressed that the location of the water impounding facility is "not a political decision, but it is a decision made for us by nature."

Former public works secretary Rogelio Singson made the proposal during a situation briefing presided over by the Chief Executive in San Fernando City.

Based on Singson's recommendation, the government will secure or buy around 200 hectares or 10 percent of the 2,000-hectare swamp land in Candaba to build a water



President Marcos leads the distribution of government assistance to flood victims at the Hiyas Convention Center in Malolos City, Bulacan yesterday.

impounding area to prevent flooding in low-lying areas.

Pampanga 4th District Rep. Anna York Bondoc, who attended the briefing, rejected Singson's proposal and threatened to walk out, saying the plan could displace farmers in the area.

Marcos allayed fears of some local officials who are opposing the planned construction amid fears on its impact on people's livelihood, particularly palay farmers. Candaba is a major rice producer in the region.

Aid for flood victims

The President yesterday led the distribution of aid for flood victims in Pampanga, which has been placed under a state of calamity since July 31.

The President handed P12.8 million worth of assistance to 1,600 flood victims who gathered at the Bren Z. Guiao Convention Center in San Fernando.

Of that amount, the President

handed P10,000 and food packs to 1,000 people for a total of P10 million under the Department of Social Welfare and Development's Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation.

The Chief Executive also distributed P2.3 million or P4,600 each to 500 people under the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE)'s TUPAD (Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers).

A total of 100 people received P5,000 each from the Department of Agriculture's Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Program.

In a meeting with Pampanga Gov. Dennis Pineda, Vice Gov. Lilia Pineda, Reps. Gloria Mapacagal-Arroyo and Anna York Bondoc and town mayors, Marcos handed checks worth P15 million to the provincial government and P37 million to local governments, or a total of P64.8 million.

- With Ramon Efren Lazaro, Ric Sapnu, Helen Flores



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Marcos seeks solutions to Central Luzon flooding

BY KRISTINA MARALIT

THE government is studying long-term solutions to the perennial flooding problem in Central Luzon, such as the construction of an impounding system in the Candaba Swamp and water collection pools.

During a situation briefing at the provincial capitol in the City of San Fernando following his inspection of typhoon-hit areas, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ordered an extensive study on the proposed impounding system.

"This won't be approved if you won't allow it. If you approve it, it will take up 10 percent of land for the impounding," he said in English and Filipino during his meeting with the provincial officials.

He also raised other possible solutions to the massive flooding in the wake of a typhoon. These

include dredging operations as a short-term solution and elevating certain structures in San Simon, Pampanga, to ease heavy traffic when it floods.

"We'll raise the NLEX so that what recently happened will not happen again. And then we will study alternative routes, maybe for trucks. ... Cars and other light vehicles will use other roads. We'll see," he stated.

A similar impounding project is also being planned for Bulacan, another province severely affected by the massive flooding caused by

the recent typhoons.

"That will be a long-term impounding project, where there will be a collection of water so that it won't reach the rivers and cause them to overflow just like what happened," the President said in a separate media interview.

"That's for the long term. This has been long-planned, but it has not yet been implemented. We will start it. The simplest solution there is for us to make impounding large scale," he added.

Marcos was referring to one of the provisions of the law that mandates the construction of rain-water collectors under Republic Act 6716.

The impounding areas will be huge and could cover around 200 hectares, the President explained, noting that such facilities could also be a source of water for irrigation and household use.

This is the administration's concept not only for flood control but

also for irrigation, he said, noting that power generation could also be added into the mix, if there is geographic suitability.

Aside from constructing impounding areas, there are a lot of things that should be changed in terms of water use and sourcing, he said.

Sourcing groundwater must be stopped, and the country must instead switch to tapping surface water sources, he added.

"We will be making a lot of changes. We must stop getting water from wells. We should be sourcing water from rivers," said the President.

"We should be collecting rain-water because the Philippines is not a dry land. But we experience drought because we don't efficiently collect water. We must learn how, as it is one problem we face, and [in doing so], we also mitigate the effects of climate change," he added.



TITLE:

Metro Manila: Sinking and swimming

"It's been raining in Manila, hindi ka ba nilalamig?"



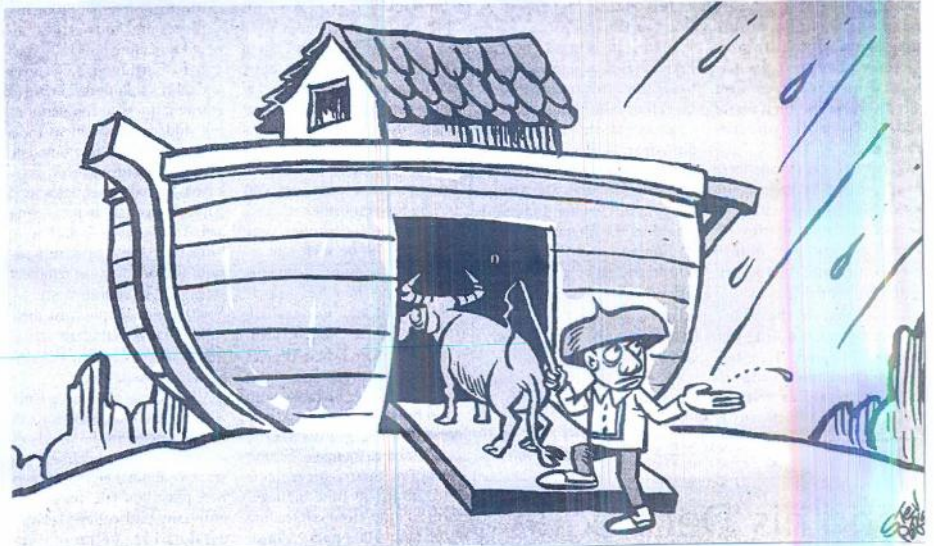
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was the last song syndrome of the National Capital Region in the past couple of weeks. Drenched in nonstop rains and floods, residents had to endure the strong winds and torrential rains brought by "Egay," "Falcon" and the enhanced southwest monsoon or "habagat."

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Metro Manila: Sinking and swimming

It was difficult to find places that weren't ankle-to-knee-deep in floodwaters, though some areas experienced even worse problems, particularly those hard-hit by Typhoon Egay. Landslides buried people and properties and displaced families. Flooded rivers swept away people trying to cross, never to be seen alive again. Those who survived the typhoons and the monsoon likely saw their livelihoods destroyed, particularly in agriculture. Indeed, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, the damage in the sector caused by the one-two punch of Egay, Falcon and habagat amounted to P2.9 billion. This was spread across the Ilocos Region, Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Western Visayas, Bangsamoro Region, and Cordillera Administrative Region.

Metro Manila didn't fare well either, especially in areas where rain and flooding have become synonymous. While not as severely affected as the provinces, it saw its fair share of gutter-deep waters. Students clamored for class suspensions on social media, while wage workers braved the situation on the streets. Traffic barely moved. Both the opening of pumping stations and canal declogging weren't quick enough to prevent or alleviate the problem.

If this prolonged state of major inconvenience is not sobering enough for the responsible

government units, then I don't know what will. The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) recently said that local government units are keen on developing a 50-year drainage master plan. MMDA Chairman Romando Artes said: "Our drainages are no longer designed to accommodate such a huge volume of water in Metro Manila. We almost ran out of soil that can absorb the water." The drainage master plan will ensure that the drainage systems are interconnected and are common in size and design for the next 50 years, which may help mitigate floods better.

Interestingly, this is not the first attempt at a flood control master plan for Metro Manila. In the aftermath of "Ondoy" in 2012, recommendations to modernize existing and create more pumping stations and improve solid waste management in communities with waterways were formally launched as the Metro Manila Flood Management Project (MMFMP). Its implementation started in the first quarter of 2018, with funding of \$500 million from the World Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank approved in 2017.

And yet, until this day, flooding has persisted. Without proper implementation, monitoring and evaluation, an ingenious master plan is just as good as a soggy, crumpled sheet of paper. The Commission of Audit recently found that 33 out of 47 projects worth

over P825 million under MMFMP Phase 1 have not been implemented by the MMDA. The agency acknowledged its shortcomings, saying that the pandemic and the election ban caused the delays.

On top of the delays in flood management project implementation, we also have various Manila Bay reclamation projects. They exacerbate the risks being faced not only by the coastal communities but also by the general public. A 2014 study by geology professor Dr. Kelvin Rodolfo said that the country's coastal areas sink as much as 9 centimeters per year, while other places in Manila sink as much as 8 cm per year.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga hinted at minimizing these activities until a cumulative impact assessment is done, but only after the US Embassy called out the government due to the involvement of a blacklisted Chinese company in the Manila Waterfront City project. We should constantly engage and hear out environmental organizations, especially scientists, before it's too late, like in that movie with Leonardo Di Caprio, Jennifer Lawrence and Meryl Streep.

We often forget that the sea is an ecosystem. It is alive. Whatever happened to the Supreme Court's mandamus on Manila Bay rehabilitation?

The reality these days dictates that short-term gains cannot be prioritized over the climate crisis.

Climate change is a long-term issue requiring sustainable solutions. Sea level rises each year due to global warming's melting of glaciers. Extreme weather systems are also felt. Add those to land subsidence, and it's even worse. Clever engineering solutions being offered even by the National Institute of Geological Sciences of UP, such as the elevation of roads and the construction of retention basins under streets, can only do so much.

The executive department, particularly the Department of the Interior and Local Government, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Department of Public Works and Highways, the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, and MMDA, among others, should be more firm in fulfilling the mandamus. The legislative arm should again consider taking up the long-overdue national land use plan. (I know there are legislators whose interests run in conflict with the NLUP, but after all these years, perhaps you've earned enough to secure the well-being of your grandchildren's grandchildren.)

Flooding cannot be resolved in silos at the local level as it is a trans-boundary problem. It is everyone's concern. I quote Tsireya from the blockbuster sequel to "Avatar": "The way of water has no beginning and no end... The sea gives, and the sea takes. Water connects all things: life to death, darkness to light."



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Elevated NLEX part, water impounding system to solve flood woes

By Charles Dantes,
Darwin Amojelar and Vito Barcelo

THE government is looking at two ways to mitigate the flooding problems

along the North Luzon Expressway that caused heavy traffic during the last two typhoons to hit the country.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Monday approved a proposal to elevate

a portion of the NLEX in Pampanga, then ordered the conduct of an extensive study on the proposed construction of an impounding system in the Candaba viaduct as a "long-term solution" to the

flooding in the province.

"We'll raise the NLEX to avoid what happened last time, and then we'll look for possible alternative routes. Trucks

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Elevated...

From A1

that can withstand the flood can use the old expressway. Cars, on the other hand, can use the elevated ramp. So we'll study that," Mr. Marcos said during a situational briefing in Pampanga, some parts of which are still underwater.

The President said the bridge in San Si-

mon will be raised to solve heavy traffic and avoid congestion during the rainy season.

Meanwhile, the water impounding system, once approved, will utilize at least 10 percent of the land mass in Candaba.

Last week, motorists passing through the San Simon northbound part of the Candaba Viaduct had to reduce their speed to about 10 kilometers per hour because of floods.

Metro Pacific Tollways Corporation president and former Department of

Public Works and Highways Secretary Rogelio Singson committed that the flooding issue will be fixed.

"We are committing that we will solve the NLEX San Simon segment. We hope to be able to finish it in about three months," Singson said.

The President underscored the need for the government and the public to prepare for the effects of climate change.

"We really need to prepare for climate

change. The weather is changing, and is not like what it used to be," he said.

"Everything we know about the weather is no longer applicable. The weather is changing. We are not going back to what we used to be. This is the reality of climate change."

"I'm sorry. It's really bad news and we all don't want to deal with it, but we have to," he added.

The DPWH, for its part, said it will

conduct extensive dredging operations along the Pampanga and Porac rivers to protect residents living close to rivers and mitigate flooding along the portion of NLEX in San Simon.

DPWH Region III Director Roseller A. Tolentino said the dredging operations along the Pampanga River, the second largest river in Luzon, will benefit towns and municipalities of Porac, Guagua, and Lubao in Pampanga.



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PBBM orders study for water impounding facility in Candaba Swamp as flood solution

By SAMUEL P. MEDENILLA
@sam_medenilla

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said the government is now eyeing the construction of a water impounding facility in Candaba Swamp to address the worsening flood problem in Bulacan and Pampanga.

In his situation briefings in Pampanga and Bulacan on Monday, the President ordered a study on the possible implementation of a 2013 recommendation of former Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) Secretary Rogelio L. Singson as a long-term solution to flooding along the Pampanga River, which he said is worsened by climate change.

Pampanga and Bulacan have declared a state of calamity due to the recent massive flooding brought about by the southwest monsoon and typhoons "Egay" and "Falcon," which affected about 1.7 million people.

Singson said the construction

of a 100-hectare to 200-hectare water impounding facility would help alleviate the excessive water in waterways in Bulacan, which is hindering the flow of water of Pampanga River to the Manila Bay.

Some lawmakers and local government officials, however, against the proposal, citing their concerns on its potential impact to the livelihood of 9,000 farmer-residents in the over 2,000-hectare Candaba Swamp.

Instead, they want the national government to assist in the ongoing dredging operation of the waterways in Pampanga and Bulacan.

Viable solutions

THE President said while dredging

can be a viable short-term solution to the plight low lying and flood-prone areas in Pampanga and Bulacan, he noted it may not be sustainable solution due to its cost as well as brief period of effectiveness, which he said can last only as short as six months.

"In the longer term we really have to study what we are going to do in terms of impounding. We have to study it well because if we don't do anything, it [flooding] will keep on happening even if dredged," Marcos pointed out.

The impounded water, he said, can be used for irrigation or alternative water supply, especially during the summer season.

The Chief Executive also assured they will be coordinating with local government units (LGU) to ensure the people, who will be affected by the construction of the water impounding facility will be given assistance by the government.

"You [LGUs] will be the ones to approve this [project], wherein 10 percent of the Candaba Swamp will be used for [water impounding]. Now if there is anyone who will be displaced, I will personally guarantee that each and everyone of the farmers will [be] transferred...to a better location," Marcos said.

Pending the said initiative,

Marcos also said the government is now considering elevating parts of the North Luzon Expressway (Nlex), which are prone to flooding, including a bridge in San Simon, Pampanga, to prevent heavy traffic during the rainy season.

Suspended reclamations

ASIDE from silted and blocked waterways, a local official also blamed the heavy flood in Bulacan to the ongoing reclamation projects at the Manila Bay.

Marcos said the reclamation activities in Manila Bay have been suspended pending the cumulative assessment being conducted by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on the said projects.

"There is only one [project] which is ongoing since it already went through the review. We saw many problems and mismanagement [in the reclamation activities]," the President said in Filipino.

"This is another big problem, which we have to fix, because if those projects are pushed through, many rivers will be blocked," he pointed out.

Last week, DENR announced it is now forming the team, which will conduct the cumulative assessment of ongoing land reclamation projects in Manila Bay.



STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION
AND
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THE EXPONENT OF PHILIPPINE PROGRESS
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Payment of Princess Empress claims ordered

By JERRY ALCAYDE

CALAPAN CITY, Oriental Mindoro — Gov. Humerlito A. Dolor has ordered the insurance firm of the sunken oil tanker MT Princess Empress to start the distribution of payment to damage claimants on or before September 30 this year.

The request was made after local government units led by the provincial government, Philippine Coast Guard, Office of Civil Defense, and other concerned national government agencies came out with a resolution terminating the oil spill response operations in Pola and the whole province on August 2.

MT Princess Empress sank off Naujan, Oriental Mindoro on February 28, causing an oil spill in the coastal areas of 12 municipalities and this city.

Maritime records showed that the ill-fated oil tanker was carrying 900,000 liters of industrial oil known in the energy sector as "black oil," a deadly and highly toxic kind of fuel oil to the environment.

The fisheries and agriculture sector in Oriental Mindoro, Antique, Palawan, and neighboring provinces sustained a total loss of more than P5 billion or P19 million daily due to the oil spill.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council reported that 27,850 fishermen from Batangas, Region 4-B, excluding Occidental Mindoro, and Western Visayas have been affected.

Justice Undersecretary Raul Vasquez revealed that the Philippines can only get roughly P15.7 billion as compensation from the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund and not \$1 billion or P55.4 billion as earlier reported.

Dolor told May Valles, in-charge of the claims office handling the indemnity issues of RDC Reield Marine Services, the owner of MT Princess Empress, that they will not wait for September 30 for the payment of remuneration.

"As we demobilized, the count-down for the insurance payment starts today. We will not wait for the end of

September. And on that day, you, me, and the IOPC will go to the municipalities to hand down the payment to the fisherfolk and affected Mindoreños," Dolor told Valles during the demobilization ceremony on Wednesday with an audience composed of officials and representatives that took part in the oil spill containment and clean-up activities for 155 days.

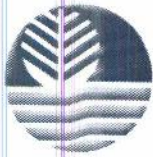
Commodore Geronimo "Toto" B. Tuvilla, commander of the Coast Guard District-Southern Tagalog who headed the oil spill crisis management team, said the demobilization refers only to the scaling down of the number of personnel and equipment involved in the operation but not totally terminating the oil response activities.

The Coast Guard official said they will not stop monitoring the waters and coastal zones in Mindoro, particularly in Pola, the most severely-hit town in central Mindoro, where the bulk of the oil-clogged major waterways and marine protected areas are located.

"From oil spill response, we will move to recovery phase," Dolor said.

He thanked President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte for their commitment to the response and recovery efforts.

Dolor also cited the close coordination of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and all other government agencies that answered his call for help after the maritime tragedy.



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Major Mayon eruption now remote - Phivolcs

By BELLA CARIASO

The possibility of a major eruption of Mayon Volcano is now low, although Alert Level 3 will remain in effect, according to the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs).

Paul Alanis, resident volcanologist at the Mayon Volcano Observatory in Legazpi, Albay, said that Mayon would remain under Alert Level 3 due to dangers brought by pyroclastic density currents, lava flows, rockfalls and other volcanic hazards.

In the past 24 hours, lava continued to flow from the summit crater, Alanis said.

Latest report from the Phivolcs showed that lava deposits have reached 3.4 kilometers, 2.8 km and 600 meters from the Bonga, Mi-isi and Basud gullies, respectively.

Debris from the summit dome has extended to four kilometers, Phivolcs said.

Alanis said at least 71 low-frequency volcanic earthquakes, 57 tremor events with durations between one and 15 minutes, and 191 rockfall events were recorded.

Volcanic sulfur dioxide emissions averaged 1,128 tons per day.

Phivolcs said the six-kilometer-radius permanent danger zone should remain unoccupied.

"Increased vigilance against pyroclastic density currents, lahars and sediment-laden streamflows along channels draining the edifice is also advised. Heavy rainfall can generate channel-confined lahars and sediment-laden streamflows in channels where pyroclastic density deposits were emplaced," Phivolcs said.

Pilots have been advised to avoid flying close to the volcano's summit as ash from any sudden eruption can be hazardous to aircraft.

Based on the current wind pattern, ash fall events most likely may occur on the south side

of the volcano, Phivolcs said.

Meanwhile, the office of the Department of Education (DepEd) in Bicol is urging concerned local government units (LGUs) to facilitate the decamping of Mayon evacuees who have been staying in public school buildings as classes will start on Aug. 29.

Mayflor Jumamil, spokesperson for the DepEd-Bicol said that classes this school year might be disrupted if the evacuees would remain in 38 public elementary and high schools across Albay.

Jumamil cited a DepEd policy showing the use of public school buildings for emergency purposes is allowed for only up to 15 days.

She said the evacuees have been allowed to stay in schools for more than 15 days now amid Mayon's restiveness.

"Concerned LGUs have to look for alternative areas for Mayon evacuees now to avoid disruption of classes," Jumamil said.

Should the evacuees continue occupying the school buildings, the teachers and the learners will be compelled to hold modular or online classes similar to what was done during the pandemic.

- With Cet Dematera