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DENR

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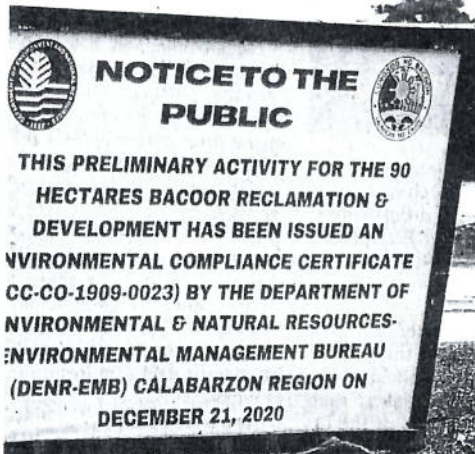
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DENR TAPPING EXPERTS TO STUDY RECLAMATION RISKS

NEWS / A4

NEW PLAYGROUND A group of children finds a new spot to spend their Sunday afternoon in this reclaimed area in a section of Manila Bay in Bacoor City, Cavite. This particular reclamation project was granted an environmental compliance certificate by the environment department in 2020. —RICHARD A. REYES



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DENR tapping more experts to study reclamation impact

By Jane Bautista
@janebautistaINQ

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has tapped the services of marine experts and scientists to determine the potential environmental risks posed by various reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

"At this point, let me be frank with you. We are seriously concerned [about] the level of science and level of evaluation that is available to us as [to whether] the department can meet up with the challenges on marine biodiversity," Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga told reporters on Monday.

She said that aside from marine biodiversity, there was also a need to evaluate chemical oceanography or the composition of water in the ocean, and how reclamation activities affect marine life.

"All of these are interrelated and what we're doing right now is really to build capacity," Loyzaga said, adding that the DENR has reached out to different higher education institutions like the University of the Philip-

pines-Marine Science Institute.

It was also forming a team led by local scientists for the "cumulative impact assessment" of ongoing reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

"There will be a composite team, different disciplines represented by Filipino scientists with advisory from foreign experts as well. We want to assemble the team by August and many of [them] have been involved in assessing the Manila Bay reclamation," Loyzaga said.

On May 8, the DENR conducted an experts forum on reclamation with scientists, academicians, government officials and representatives of civil society organizations who highlighted the need for cumulative assessment and "valuation studies."

Baseline studies needed

One of the points brought up by the panelists, according to the DENR, was the need for the government and project proponents to jointly come up with baseline studies that would examine the changes brought about by reclamation activities.

While the DENR's initiative



TAKING SHAPE Reclamation of this section of Manila Bay along J.W. Diokno Boulevard in Pasay City has been ongoing, as shown in this photo taken on June 25. Environmental advocates have expressed alarm over the impact of reclamation activities on Manila Bay's marine biodiversity. —GRIG C. MONTEGRANDE



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to review more than 20 reclamation projects was welcomed by environmental and fisherfolk groups, they reiterated their call for the agency to revoke the permits of developers pending the results of its assessment.

But Loyzaga had pointed out before that the DENR could not just declare the projects illegal and cancel permits.

"What we're doing in the DENR is we're reviewing what

has already been permitted. We're trying to understand how the lessons learned from these activities can actually inform actions and policies moving forward," she said.

On the sidelines of the DENR's multistakeholder experts' dialogue on reclamation on Monday, she pointed out the importance of articulating the perspective of different sectors.

"In the previous permitting

processes, there was not much transparency nor was it consultative in terms of trying to include the many expertise we have," she said.

This time, with the help of Filipino scientists leading the cumulative impact assessment team, the DENR aims to come up with a "holistic" evaluation of the ecosystems affected by reclamation activities.

"We have ecosystem services like flood management from mangroves which may disappear if we don't include them in the evaluation and assessment of these projects," Loyzaga said.

Policy gaps

Environment Undersecretary Jonas Leones, on the other hand, identified the policy gaps among agencies involved in the evaluation of and issuance of permits to reclamation projects.

These include the policy on the easement of reclaimed lands—the Philippine Reclamation Authority enforces a 3-meter easement zone policy, contrary to the DENR's 40-meter easement zone from the edge of bodies of water.

Leones said they were also considering where and when the environmental impact assessment, risk assessment and public consultation for the proposed reclamation projects should take place.

Under the current reclamation development cycle, the studies and public consultation are done after the local government concerned and private entity have entered into an agreement to undertake the reclamation project.

"Meaning to say, the concern here is that there are already investment costs on the part of the proponent when they secure the ECC (environmental compliance certificate)," Leones said.

He noted that while reclamation projects spur economic activities and generate revenues for the government, "it should not only be confined within the economic parameters."

Reclamation should also take into account environmental protection and conservation, disaster risk and climate change mitigation steps that are backed by science and evidence, he added. INQ



'NCR reclamation projects to spur devt'

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said that the major reclamation projects in the National Capital Region (NCR) could "spur economic development."

DENR Undersecretary Jonas Leones referred to the nine reclamation projects amounting to P330.6 billion that include the 287-hectare Parañaque Reclamation Project with an estimated project cost of P76.7 billion; the 260-hectare Pasay City Reclamation Project worth P72 billion; and the Navotas Coastal Bay Reclamation

Project worth P58 billion.

Another project in Parañaque covering 300 hectares worth P50.1 billion was also included, as well as the P37.8 billion Las Piñas-Parañaque Coastal Bay Reclamation and Development Project; the MICT Berth 6 Northern and Southern Extension Project worth

P22.4 billion; the Manila Harbor Reclamation Project amounting to P6.9 billion; and the Philippine Fisheries Development Authority reclamation project, which costs about P6.7 billion.

Leones said that reclamation spurs economic activities and generates revenues for the government.

"However, reclamation should not only be confined within the economic parameters, but also on the context of environmental protection and conservation, disaster risk and climate change mitigation that are science- and evidence-based," he added.

He cited the need to harmonize the policy gaps among national government agencies tasked to review and approve reclamation projects, including those that issue compliance certificates.

"Mainstreaming nature-based solution in infrastructure development in reclamation is the key to sustainability and viability," he said.

Meanwhile, DENR Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga admitted that they are worried about the means the department has to meet the challenges alongside reclamation.

"We are seriously concerned with the way the level of science and the level of evaluation that is available to us at the department can meet the challenges on marine biodiversity," said Yulo-Loyzaga.

She added that they are building capacity by reaching out to different higher educational institutions like the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute and University of the Philippines Los Baños.



MGB XIII TO HOLD FIRST RESILIENT MINING WEEK



THE Mines and Geosciences Bureau Region 13 (MGB XIII), in collaboration with the Philippine Society of Mining Engineers-CARAGA (PSEM Caraga) and the Chamber of Mines-Caraga Region (CMCRI), is set to host a groundbreaking event that will bring together various mining companies in the CARAGA region.

Taking place during National Disaster Resilience Month, the first-ever Caraga Resilient Mining Week (CRMW), anchored on the theme "Responsible Mining: Pathway to Community Resilience," will serve as a platform for mining industry leaders to discuss their climate change plans and programs aimed at promoting the resilience of communities in mining areas.

"As the mining capital of the Philippines, CARAGA has a responsibility to lead the way in sustainable and responsible mining practices. This event marks a significant milestone as the first-ever gathering that will unite mining companies to

discuss and address climate change with a common goal of ensuring the resilience of communities where mining operations take place," says Engr. Larry M. Heradez, MGB XIII Regional Director.

Moreover, the event aligns with the efforts initiated by DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga towards responsible mining that reinforces the urgent need for balance between mineral extraction, environmental stewardship through application of Environmental Protection and Enhancement Program (EPEP), and the development of mining communities by implementation of Social Development and Management Programs (SDMP) in the mining sector.

"We are excited to participate in the CARAGA Resilient Mining Week and share our best practices in climate change adaptation. This event provides a valuable opportunity for industry stakeholders to learn from each other and contribute to the overall resilience of our communities,"

says Engr. Artemio E. Valeroso, AVP-Resident Mine Manager of Taganito Mining Corporation (TMC), an affiliate of Nickel Asia Corporation (NAC).

The event will feature high-level panel discussions, expert presentations, workshops, and interactive sessions, providing a conducive environment for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and the development of innovative solutions to foster strong partnerships among mining industry stakeholders, government agencies, and local communities, ultimately enhancing the sustainability of mining operations in the region and help create resilient communities.

"We believe that by working together, we can achieve a harmonious coexistence between mining activities and the environment. The CARAGA Resilient Mining Week is a significant step forward in promoting responsible mining practices and ensuring the well-being of our communities," says Engr. Francisco J. Arañes Jr., President of the Chamber of Mines—CARAGA Region.

The CARAGA Resilient Mining Week is scheduled to take place from July 24 to July 29 in Surigao City. The event promises to be an unparalleled opportunity for mining industry leaders, experts, and stakeholders to engage in meaningful dialogue, exchange best practices, and reinforce Caraga as the center for responsible mining that contributes to building the resilience of the communities.



WRMO eyes national, regional integrated water resource management down to barangay level

THE Water Resource Management Office (WRMO) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is looking at an integrated water resources management approach at the national and regional levels going all the way down to barangay level to address the perennial problem of water supply shortage in the country.

DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga stressed this point in reaction to issues on the challenge of water supply shortage brought about by the increasing population and water consumption by an expert panelist during the Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Reclamation on Monday.

In particular, Yulo-Loyzaga was reacting to the presentation made by Jan Jaap Brinkman, director of Deltares Singapore, who said massive reclamation, including the construction of the Manila Bay bridge that will connect Cavite to Bataan, will cause people to move near Manila Bay areas, further stressing the already limited water resources available for the current population.

Brinkman led the team that crafted the Manila Bay Sustainable Development Master Plan and has worked on projects globally, including more than 10 years in Indonesia.

Brinkman's team formulated different options to deal with the sinking and sea level rise in Jakarta.

In his presentation, Brinkman said while huge investments were poured in reclamation projects in Manila Bay, environmental challenges and problems caused by these projects become the sole responsibility of the government.

Brinkman underscored the need for a cumulative impact assessment that will address the projected population growth in the Manila Bay region, which was among the highlights of the Manila Bay Sustainable Development Master Plan.

An expert in water resources, climate change, drought, and flood risks management, Brinkman was particularly concerned about the projected population growth in Manila Bay, especially because of the urban expansion through land reclamation.

In response, Yulo-Loyzaga bared the DENR-WRMO's effort to address the water issues.

"There is an effort...where the DPWH [Department of Public Works and Highways], DILG [Department of Interior and Local Government], Neda [National Economic and Development Authority], and LWUA [Local Water Utilities Administration] as well as MWSS [Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System] to actually begin to cohesively manage water resources in the different regions, especially in Metro Manila and its surroundings," the DENR chief said.

On Angat, she said there is a very intensive public and private cooperation at this moment between the two service providers, Maynilad and Manila Water, and MWSS.

"That is an ongoing dynamic discussion to provide water for NCR [National Capital Region]. There is also a plan for the Bulacan area to actually have its own sustained water resources and not just rely on the share of Angat. We know that at this point,

El Niño persists and rainfall continues to fall below expectations and that the agriculture sector will suffer the most, particularly in Pampanga and Bulacan," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

She added the integrated water management approach is high on President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s agenda and assured participants that the DENR-WRMO is already addressing issues raised by the resource speaker.

In her opening remarks, Yulo-Loyzaga said reclamation is an environmental issue that must be addressed from a lens that considers the "intersectionality" between ecological dynamics, socioeconomic and building environments, and the costs and benefits of such activities.

"Reclamation decisions must consider the interaction between land, air, and sea and the multitude of environmental factors from physics and chemistry of water, biodiversity, the demand for resources of food, power, and water," she said.

During her talk, the DENR chief underscored the Manila Bay mandamus ruling, where the Supreme Court ordered 13 agencies with DENR as lead agency are mandated to clean, rehabilitate, and preserve the waters of Manila Bay and to restore and maintain its water sewer level fit for commercial propagation of shellfish and spawning area for milkfish.

The DENR chief also highlighted the country's vulnerability to extreme weather events and multiple hazards like earthquakes, which should also be considered in implementing reclamation projects.

The Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Reclamation invited international experts as guest speakers to get valuable inputs from the experiences of other countries.

Mr. Obaid Ali Humaid Al Shamsi, a biologist from the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) talked about UAE's practice on reclamation projects, particularly on reforesting surrounding areas with mangroves and implementing coral farming.

Mr. Hiroyuki Kudo, First Secretary of the Embassy of Japan in the Philippines who worked at the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure Transport and Tourism and was involved in planning, budgeting, and design of airport and port projects discussed the interventions made for the reclamation in building the Haneda Airport, which underwent a series of large-scale expansions.

He also discussed the good practice of Kansai Airport, a fully reclaimed airport with two 4,000-meter runways and two passenger terminals that opened in 1994.

David Perkey, Program Manager, US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), a research scientist for the US Army Corps of Engineers and worked as a manager for the USACE Regional Sediment Management Program, discussed about the Regional Sediment Management (RSM) program.

RSM, a systems approach using best management practices for more efficient and effective use of sediments in coastal, estuarine and inland environments for healthier and more resilient systems, was applied by USACE in reclamation projects.

Jonathan L. Mayuga



'Ibong Adarna' spotted in Mindanao

By Gabriellea Pariño

A RARE bird compared to the mythical "Ibong Adarna"—a female Philippine Trogon—was recently spotted by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Davao Region in the tropical forests surrounding Mount Apo.

The department shared photos of the colorful, long-tailed avian, scientific name *Harpactes ardens*, perched on a tree branch.

"The female Philippine Trogon, captured

here by the DENR Protected Area Management and Biodiversity Conservation Section (PAMBCS) Region XI, displays shades of mustard-yellow underparts and an olive-brown head. On the other hand,

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REAL-LIFE 'IBONG ADARNA.' A female Philippine Trogon (*Harpactes ardens*), with subdued shades of mustard yellow underparts and an olive-brown head, is spotted in the tropical forests surrounding Mt. Apo in Davao. The bird, which has been associated with the fictional Ibong Adarna, is endemic to the Philippines. **Facebook page of DENR Davao**

the male ones show bright colors," the agency added.

The bird has been associated with the creature of legend from the 16th-century epic poem "Ibong Adarna" due to the bright and colorful tones of its feathers.

The DENR has called on the public to help protect and preserve the legendary bird.

The female Trogon possesses subdued shades of mustard-yellow underparts and an olive-brown head. They feed on insects and fruits and shelter in tree hollows, according to the DENR.

The bird can be found near the dormant stratovolcano located in the Southern Mindanao region and are found "blissfully living in the darker portions of our forests as they are reluctant to people," the agency said.

The lush forests of the Philippine archipelago contain around 741 bird species, 74 of which are considered threatened, with the country ranking 9th among countries with the most number of globally-threatened birds.

About 200 species of avians in the country have also been deemed endemic, with at least 15 considered critically endangered, 12 as endangered, 47 as vulnerable, and 59 as near threatened, according to a study by Haribon Foundation.

The threat to local bird species is attributed to high levels of deforestation, habitat degradation, wildlife exploitation, lack of wildlife protection, and lack of funding for conservation efforts, according to a study from the University of Utah.





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LOSSES AT P45M

FISH KILL HITS TAAL LAKE ANEW; 343 TONS OF TILAPIA, 'BANGUS' TURN BELLY UP

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
@dtmallarijrINQ

LUCENA CITY—At least 343 tons of tilapia (black carp) and “bangus” (milkfish), including fingerlings, died in another fish kill phenomenon in Taal Lake in Batangas province, authorities said on Monday.

The fish kill that started last week already destroyed 300 tons of freshwater fish in the town of Talisay, 32 tons in Agoncillo and 11 tons in Laurel, according to Sammy Malvas, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources director in Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon).

The three towns are among the localities in Batangas that surround the lake, along with the municipalities of Sta. Teresita, San Nicolas, Alitagtag, Cuenca, Balete and Mataasnakahoy, and the cities of Tanauan and Lipa.

Malvas placed the estimated value of dead fish to around P45 million, affecting 156 fish cage operators.

“Based on our water samplings, the dissolved oxygen level is low in the affected area,” Malvas said.

He explained that the dissolved oxygen level drops every time there is a sudden change in the water temperature, usually from hot to cold and vice versa.

Fish kill is a natural phenomenon in Taal Lake that occurs when the weather triggers a drop in dissolved oxygen in the water.

Tilapia and bangus cage farming is a multimillion-peso industry in Taal Lake, the country’s third-largest freshwater body.

Low oxygen level

Fish cage owners were advised to monitor their cages and take measures by installing oxygen tanks and pumps to augment the declining oxygen level.

The water’s dissolved oxygen level serves as a parameter used to check whether the water remains favorable to aquaculture. The oxygen level is considered normal at 6 parts per million at the lake’s surface level.

In August last year, at least 31 tons of cultured tilapia also died in fish cages in Taal Lake in Agoncillo town due to low levels of dissolved oxygen in the water.

Malvas said they had advised the affected cage operators to immediately harvest the remaining marketable fish to recover part of their investments.

Since last week, fish cage operators have begun harvesting in areas that remained unaffected.

Taal Lake has more than 7,000 cage structures for milkfish and tilapia production.

“We also advised fish cage operators to lessen their fish feed during this time,” Malvas added.

Last February, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) had ordered fish cage operators to stop scattering sinking fish feed in Taal Lake.

According to the DENR, the commercial fish in the lake do not consume all the sinking feed, and the excess settles at the bottom of the lake and rots. The rotten feed affects the water quality of the lake, the DENR noted.

Cheaper sinking feed is made up of sticky pellets, which break up into fine powder when they hit the water.

No volcano link

But Malvas maintained that the fish kill was not connected to the restiveness of Taal Volcano, which sits in the middle of the lake.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) which has been recording continuous activity at Taal Volcano, warned in an advisory on July 13 that “should current low-level activity worsen or pronounced changes in monitored parameters forewarn of increasing unrest, the alert level may be raised to alert level 2.”

In its 5 a.m. bulletin on Monday, the Phivolcs reported that the volcano emitted 5,887 tons of sulfur dioxide over the past 24 hours that rose to 900 meters above Taal Volcano Island. It also reported that four tremors were recorded by the seismic stations of the Taal Volcano Network.

The Phivolcs reminded the public that alert level 1 prevails over Taal Volcano, “which means that it is still in an abnormal condition and should not be interpreted to have ceased unrest or ceased the threat of eruptive activity.”

Taal Volcano has been on alert level 1 since July 11, 2022. INQ



UNDER WATCH Policemen in Talisay, Batangas, monitor the Taal Lake shoreline in Barangay Poblacion 6 in this photo taken on Monday. At least 300 tons of freshwater fish in this town have been lost to fish kill since last week due to low levels of dissolved oxygen. —TALISAY POLICE FACEBOOK PAGE



Angat, Bustos Dam levels back to normal, release water

By **BELLA CARIASO**

Angat Dam has returned to its normal operating level of 180 meters after days of decline, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

"The water level of Angat Dam is back to its minimum operating level of 180 meters or at least 0.98 meters increase in the last 24 hours, so it's good news," PAGASA senior weather specialist Rosalie Pagulayan said yesterday in a radio interview.

Maynilad Water Services Inc. suspended its water service interruptions as Angat Dam and Ipo Dam's

water levels increased, aided by the southwest monsoon and Tropical Storm Dodong.

Angat Dam supplies more than 90 percent of Metro Manila's potable water needs and provides for the irrigation needs of 25,000 hectares of farmlands in Bulacan and Pampanga.

The water level of Ipo Dam in Bulacan improved by 0.80 meters after it reached 100.82 meters compared to its previous level of 100.02 meters, Pagulayan said.

"Ipo Dam has a separate watershed which is six to eight kilometers downstream of Angat Dam, so it has increased by 0.80 meters," she said.

La Mesa Dam in Quezon City is

at 79.28 meters or up by 0.29 meters compared to its previous level of 78.99 meters, Pagulayan said.

"The water level of La Mesa Dam also increased for the past three days. It is near its spilling level of 80.15 meters," she added.

Pagulayan reminded the public to continue conserving water in preparation for El Niño.

Water levels at other dams in Luzon, except for Binga Dam in Benguet, also improved.

The Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (PDRRMO) of Bulacan recorded Angat Dam's water level at 180.13 meters compared to 179.14 meters the previous day.

Bustos releasing water

Meanwhile, Bustos Dam is still releasing water as of July 17.

The dam's water level is at 17.20 meters and its Sluice Gates 1 and 2 are raised at one meter each, according to National Irrigation Administration regional director for Central Luzon Josephine Salazar.

The PDRRMO of Bulacan reported that a total of 123 families or 439 individuals were brought to 10 evacuation centers due to rising floodwaters.

Rationing still possible

The improvement in Angat Dam's

water level, however, is expected to last only for a few days.

"We have a crisis in the sense there is a shortage in terms of the supply from the Angat Dam so what will happen is if it does not improve... we have a few more days of water supply, but if the rainfall does not continue, we will go back to rationing," Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said during a water forum in Quezon City.

"Our measures to conserve should be year-round and our education should be year-round in the way we use our water," Loyzaga added.

- With Ramon Efren Lazaro


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Rains boost Angat Dam water level by nearly 1 meter

The Angat Dam's water level has been gradually rising after a few days of rain brought on by the southwest monsoon, or "habagat," which was strengthened by the passage of tropical storm Dodong.

Based on the monitoring of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) on Monday, July 17, Angat Dam's water level increased by **▶ 3**

Rains boost Angat Dam water level by nearly 1 meter **1◀**

nearly one meter to 180 meters around 6 a.m.

This is up from 179.06 meters on Sunday, July 16.

However, its current level is still 0.86 centimeters short of the rule curve elevation of 180.86 meters, and significantly lower than its 212-meter normal-high water level during the rainy season.

PAGASA defines rule curve elevation as the minimum reservoir elevation that dam operators must maintain to ensure the availability of water for irrigation, power generation, and

domestic supply.

The water level of Angat Dam, which supplies 98 percent of Metro Manila's water requirements, has been gradually decreasing due to lack of significant rains over the watershed area in the past few months.

Authorities have emphasized the importance of conserving water in order to avoid a possible water shortage in the coming months as a result of El Niño, a climate phenomenon that causes warmer and drier conditions than usual. (Ellalyn de Vera-Ruiz)



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Maynilad allocates P1 B for deep well projects

By DANESSA RIVERA

West zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc. (Maynilad) has allocated P1 billion this year to reactivate existing deep wells and construct new ones to generate more water supply in time for El Niño.

The water company expects to produce around 32 million

liters per day (MLD) of additional supply from more than 60 deep wells in different parts of its concession areas.

Maynilad said it is reactivating deep wells in Caloocan, Quezon City, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, Parañaque, Bacoor, Cavite City, Kawit and Imus.

The expected 32-MLD additional supply from this project

is enough to supply the water requirements of 175,000 customers.

To date, Maynilad is operating eight of these reactivated or new deep wells.

By end-July, Maynilad's total yield from deep wells in 19 locations will reach 12.38 MLD.

The water concessionaire is closely coordinating with the relevant government units and several homeowners' associations so it can reopen more deep wells in the succeeding months.

While groundwater is not a sustainable source of water supply, the reactivation of deep wells is allowed during times of contingency, such as during expected supply shortages due to El Niño.

"The number of deep wells we can reactivate in the west zone is limited, because our proximity to Manila Bay makes groundwater reserves salty and unusable in some areas. However, we have found some viable deep wells, and their yield will add to our water supply should El Niño further affect the availability of water from traditional sources," Maynilad president and CEO Ramoncito Fernandez said.

The reactivation of the deep wells is one of Maynilad's mitigating measures for a possible supply crunch due to El Niño.

Its other supply augmentation measures include the commissioning of modular treatment plants that will draw supply from rivers, the sustained production of potable reused water, and the recovery of water from repairing pipe leaks and replacing old pipelines.

Maynilad is the largest private water concessionaire in the Philippines in terms of customer base.

It is a concessionaire of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) for the west zone of the Greater Manila Area, which is composed of the cities of Manila (certain portions), Quezon City (certain portions), Makati (west of South Super Highway), Caloocan, Pasay, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, Valenzuela, Navotas and Malabon all in Metro Manila; the cities of Cavite, Bacoor and Imus, and the towns of Kawit, Noveleta and Rosario, all in Cavite Province.



EDITORIAL

Angat Dam raises hopes

WITH El Niño exhaling threats on the Philippines, there appears good reason to smile with the water level at Angat Dam, which supplies more than 90 percent of Metro Manila's potable water needs, rising a bit.

The water level at Angat Dam, on the southeastern part of Central Luzon, originating on the slopes of the Sierra Madre Mountains, has increased to 179.06 meters on Sunday.

But the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said while the dam's water level had slightly increased due to rains brought by the southwest monsoon, it remained below its minimum operating level of 180 meters.

The Angat Dam, which energizes a hydro-electric power plant, also provides for the irrigation needs of 25,000 hectares of farmlands in Bulacan and Pampanga.

PAGASA however said the water level in Angat Dam may still fall.

With this possibility, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources - Water Resources Management Office (DENR-WRMO) issued Bulletin 1 or its water conservation guidelines for government agencies following Malacañang's Memorandum Circular

“The country's problem with water has an adverse effect on the food supply”

22, which requires WRMO to track other departments' progress in water conservation by analyzing their monthly water bills.

While El Niño—projected by PAGASA from June to first quarter of 2024—does not directly cause water scarcity, the reduced rainfall it brings can influence decreased water supply and droughts.

Only last month, Senator Loren Legarda pointed out in a statement that “we are facing the alarming truth that our water resources are already depleting at a disturbing rate.”

There is a need for everyone to

conserve water and act swiftly to avoid a potentially devastating water crisis that would impact our daily lives, food production, and the environment.

No less than President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. raised an indictment with his belief the government has not been examining the water crisis in the country.

“We do not look at it, just find other ways and put up with the idea that once in a while we'll have to pull out our buckets and fill our bathtubs with water because there's not going to be water for the next 24 hours,” the President said.

According to the President, the country's problem with water has an adverse effect on the food supply, citing the importance of irrigation in the agriculture sector.

“And so when they say water is life, it's not just a cliché, it's a truism. And it is something that we must always keep in mind especially now,” he said.

The President has signed an executive order that will create the Office of Water management, which aims to manage the country's water resources and respond to environmental challenges.

In the meanwhile, we join officials in asking citizens to conserve water, but local government units must as well assure clear and constant communication with water suppliers to manage demand,



PERCEPTIONS

ARIEL NEPOMUCENO



Save water, save lives

Our country has an abundant supply of water, mostly untapped though. We have not fully employed available engineering and technological solutions to harness what nature provides us during the annual rainy season. Sadly, a part of what's available in our water supply system is wasted. And worst, contamination persists in some areas.

I have discussed in my previous column that at least 24 million Filipinos lack access to improved water treatment and sanitation. At this modern age and time, it is mind boggling why around 20 percent of our countrymen still suffer from this deprivation. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) report in 2016, we needlessly lost 139,000 lives from "acute watery diarrhea," which is considered among the top ten causes of death in the country. Presumably, these victims ingested unsafe water from our pipes and other improvised sources.

Ironical consequence. We lack potable water. Yet, our archipelago is completely surrounded by water. And perennially, we are beset with heavy rains that at times fall in torrential proportions. Floods are almost expected already, and no city is exempted from these. We're practically resigned to this fate of merely surviving the onslaught of tropical cyclones. But I'm sure most of us are deeply puzzled with the possibility that drinking water will be rationed soon, and that parts of our agricultural lands will dry up.

It's all over the news. The El Niño phenomenon causes less precipitation which consequently lowers the amount of rainfall compared to normal weather conditions. It also significantly increases the temperature in the Pacific Ocean and the general level of heat that we can experience. Then when typhoons occur, they are stronger and more devastating.

As advised by our government, we must brace and prepare for the detrimental impact of El Niño. Again, the backdrop is, our country has an almost endless access to water.

Remiss in social and corporate responsibility. We must seriously assess the property development sector. For the last decade, hundreds of new subdivisions and condominiums were built. Thousands of additional residents migrated to the densely populated metropolis of Metro Manila, Cebu, Baguio and other urban centers. The corresponding challenging impact on water supply has to be factored in, beginning with the permits required prior to selling and construction. Take note, we shall not account only for drinking water. The same potable water is used for garden-

ing, washing cars and dishes, general cleaning of housing units and flushing of toilets!

The main culprits in contaminating our primary source of water are the residential, commercial and industrial establishments that don't have their own sewage treatment plants (STPs). Meaning, they directly dislodge chemical, biological and other forms of wastes that will destroy our surface and underground sources. Our local government units and national agencies, hopefully, must strictly enforce compliance with environmental ordinances which oblige owners of establishments to invest in their own, or shared STPs. The Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA), for example, has the authority to make this. Why? All establishments that directly and indirectly release untreated wastes through the river and water tributaries towards Laguna de Bay can be held accountable by this special agency.

My long-time friend, Aristeo "Putch" Puyat, passionately engages me with several issues of national concern. Sustainable water supply is one of his patriotic concerns. We have agreed to have this as one of our major advocacies.

Engineering interventions will be the way forward. Catch basins, additional dams and new canals must be constructed strategically to control funds and, more importantly, to use the huge volume of water for our growing drinking and sanitation requirement, irrigation and electricity demand.

The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) is at the forefront of converting our idle agricultural lands into a robust additional rice granary and producer of other high value crops. I'm confident that my friend, NIA administrator Ed Guillen, will competently pursue a science-based program that will deliver the urgent rescue and long-term mission to increase the productivity of our farms and achieve resilience against the perennial calamities that challenge our basic agricultural sector.

We need a comprehensive thesis to provide the needed framework that will address our creeping water crisis. This challenge is complex, and it entails financial resources that are not immediately available to an economy like ours.

But the collective recognition that we have to start rolling the sustainable programs towards stabilizing our water supply is a good start. Political will in the national and local levels of government, and the consistent cooperation of our citizens and corporate establishments, will be essential to overcome this water crisis.



US climate envoy Kerry holds talks in Beijing

BEIJING: United States climate envoy John Kerry held four hours of talks with his Chinese counterpart in Beijing on Monday, reviving stalled diplomacy on reducing planet-warming emissions.

Climate talks between the two biggest greenhouse-gas emitters came to a halt last year after Nancy Pelosi, then-speaker of the US House of Representatives, enraged Beijing by visiting self-ruling Taiwan, which China considers to be part of its territory.

Kerry, a former secretary of state, has enjoyed comparatively cordial and consistent relations with China despite Washington and Beijing locking horns over Taiwan and a number of other issues.

Chinese state media reported he met his Chinese counterpart Xie Zhenhua for four hours of talks in Beijing on Monday.

"Xie Zhenhua, China's special envoy for climate change affairs, concluded his talks with John Kerry, the special envoy of the US president for climate issues, which lasted for around four hours," state broadcaster China Central Television said.

It did not share further details about the meeting.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told CNN on Sunday that Kerry would press Beijing not to "hide behind any kind of claim that they are a developing nation" in order to slow-roll efforts to cut emissions.

"Every country, including China, has a responsibility to reduce emissions," Sullivan said. "And the world, I do believe, should step up

and encourage — indeed, pressure — China to take far more dramatic action to reduce emissions."

China has long used its official status as a developing nation to justify its high emissions, with Sullivan saying "there is more work for them to do on that front."

"Secretary Kerry will make that point when he's in Beijing," he added.

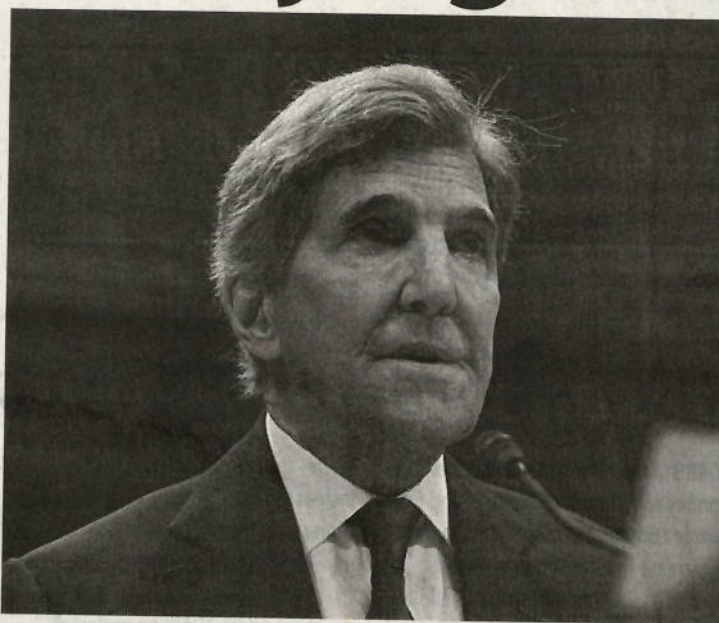
Kerry's trip follows two other high-profile visits by US officials — Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen — that were aimed at stabilizing US-China ties.

His trip to China came as the Northern Hemisphere endured record-setting summer heat waves, which scientists say are being exacerbated by climate change.

"The Kerry visit and the resumption of climate interaction underscores the critical importance of coordinated efforts to address the climate crisis," Chunping Xie, senior policy fellow at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, told Agence France-Presse (AFP) in written comments.

"It also demonstrates their shared determination to navigate a complex geopolitical relationship to promote the common good," said Xie.

As the leading emitter of the greenhouse gases driving climate



CLIMATE CRISIS United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry testifies during a hearing of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Oversight and Accountability Subcommittee in Washington, D.C. on July 13, 2023. XINHUA PHOTO

change, China has pledged to peak carbon emissions by 2030 and achieve complete carbon neutrality by 2060.

President Xi Jinping has also said the country would reduce its coal use from 2026.

But Beijing in April approved a major surge in coal power — a move Greenpeace said prioritized energy supply over the emissions reduction pledge — fueling concerns that China will fail to meet its targets.

"In terms of specific outcomes, one thing that I hope could be moved forward at least is the methane action plan," Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst at the Center

for Research on Energy and Clean Air, told AFP.

Methane was the main new area of agreement between the two countries in a joint declaration following the 2021 Climate Change Conference in the Scottish city of Glasgow, Myllyvirta said, although significant progress has not since been achieved by China.

"Given the massive clean energy growth that is taking place in China, it does look like the country would be in place to commit to a stronger target than it currently has," he added. "But it's going to take more than one intercontinental flight by Kerry to bring that about."

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New LPA enters PAR, likely to become tropical depression within 1 to 2 days

By ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ

The low-pressure area (LPA) being monitored by the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) has entered the country's area of responsibility on Monday afternoon, July 17.

PAGASA weather specialist Aldczar Aurelio said the LPA was

spotted 925 kilometers east of northeastern Mindanao at 3 p.m.

He advised the public to continue monitoring updates on this weather disturbance, as it will likely develop into a tropical depression within one to two days.

The latest forecast track also shows that the LPA may approach the northern part of the country in the coming days. ▶ 4

New LPA enters PAR, likely to become tropical depression within 1 to 2 days ◀

Based on PAGASA's list of tropical cyclone names for 2023, the next cyclone will be named "Egay."

Following the passage of tropical storm Dodong last weekend, Egay may become the second cyclone to enter the country's area of responsibility this month.

'Habagat' weakens

Meanwhile, Aurelio said the LPA has no direct effect on the country

yet, but the southwest monsoon or "habagat" may continue to bring rain showers over some areas in the next 24 hours.

Cloudy skies with scattered rain showers and thunderstorms may prevail over Metro Manila, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, Mountain Province, Zambales, Bataan, Pampanga, Tarlac, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Aurora, Antique, Aklan, Capiz, Il-

oilo, Negros Occidental, and Guimaras.

PAGASA said the frequency of monsoon rains will gradually decrease as tropical storm Dodong's influence on the habagat weakens.

However, PAGASA said that isolated rain showers caused by localized thunderstorms may still occur in some areas.

It warned that severe thunderstorms could cause flash floods or landslides.



LPA enters PAR - Pagasa

The low-pressure area (LPA) in Mindanao has entered the Philippine area of responsibility (PAR) and may develop into a typhoon in the next 24 hours, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

The state weather bureau said as of 3 p.m. on July 17 the LPA was located 925 kilometers east of north-eastern Mindanao.

PAGASA weather forecaster Obet Badrina added the LPA is expected to develop into a typhoon in the next 24 hours.

He added the LPA has no direct effect in any part of the country, particularly in the Visayas and Mindanao.

Once it develops into a typhoon, it will be named Egay, the fifth typhoon to enter the country in 2023.

"Usually, the track of typhoons in July is towards Luzon or it may recurve towards Japan. We encourage

the public to continue monitoring the updates from PAGASA," Badrina said.

Badrina said that Davao and Cebu will start to experience cloudy weather because of the LPA.

PAGASA said it expects at least four typhoons this month.

According to Badrina, the southwest monsoon continued to affect many areas in the country, particularly the western part of Luzon, Bataan, Zambales and other parts of Central Luzon, Mimaropa, Calabarzon and Metro Manila.

"There was a significant decline in the rains," he added.

Badrina said that today, an improvement in the weather condition is expected in Metro Manila and other parts of Luzon.

"By Wednesday and Thursday, we expect improved weather in most areas in Luzon," he said.

On the other hand, Badrina said that Davao and Cebu will start to experience cloudy weather because

of the LPA.

Tropical Storm Dodong continues to move away from the country as it was located 825 kms west of extreme Northern Luzon.

"It is heading towards the southern part of China," Badrina added.

The state bureau said among those affected by the southwest monsoon yesterday were Zambales, Bataan, Occidental Mindoro, Metro Manila, Calabarzon, the Ilocos region, Cordillera Administrative Region, the rest of Mimaropa, the rest of Central Luzon and Western Visayas.

Class suspensions

Due to the southwest monsoon, face-to-face classes in all levels for public and private schools in Iloilo City were suspended yesterday.

Mayor Jerry Treñas announced Sunday evening that he approved the recommendation of the City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office for the suspension of face-to-

face classes.

But since most public schools had their graduation rites last week, only several schools were affected by the suspension.

Treñas has also cancelled the holding of the flag raising ceremony of City Hall employees, as well as the use of biometrics "in consideration of those employees affected by the flooding in different areas within the city."

As of 6 p.m. on July 16, the Iloilo City Operations Center recorded a total of 20 flooded barangays in the metropolis. As of 10 p.m., Treñas said they have reached 374 affected families and 1,521 individuals.

"We are working tirelessly to support barangays impacted by Tropical Depression Dodong," he said.

According to the Office of Civil Defense Region 6, a total of 135 families or 575 persons were affected by the inclement weather in the region.

- **Bella Cariaso, Jennifer Rendon, Michael Punongbayan**



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Agency eyes repurposing of P276-b flooding budget

By Othel V. Campos

THE Water Resources Management Board (WRMO), a newly-formed agency at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) seeks to repurpose part of the P276-billion budget intended for the flood control program of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH).

WRMO head and DENR undersecretary for Environmental Science Car-

los David said the proposal will help the country sustain the supply of clean and potable water which is finite and dwindling.

"We've been talking to NIA (National Irrigation Authority) and the DPWH if we can, perhaps, repurpose some of the (flood control) projects so they can longer be dikes alone but actually impounding projects, small hydro dams and reservoirs for water supply of communities and irrigation," he said at the Water for Life forum organized

by Stratbase ADR Monday.

He mentioned projects such the P744 million San Cristobal River in Calamba, Laguna, can be repurposed into building many small water impounding systems. This year, one side of the river has been fitted with dikes and the other side by next year. From the same budget, the government can initiate the rehabilitation of a small dam upstream of the river that can provide irrigation to nearby towns, he said.



Phivolcs logs significant increase in Mayon quakes

By ELLALYN V. RUIZ

The number of earthquakes caused by Mayon Volcano's heightened unrest has significantly increased in the last 24 hours, based on the monitoring of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) between Sunday, July 16, and Monday, July 17.

Phivolcs, in its bulletin released at 8 a.m. on Monday, said it recorded 184 volcanic earthquakes in the past 24 hours. This is an increase from the nine earthquakes detected during the previous 24-hour monitoring.

Mayon Volcano's ongoing unrest was also marked by sustained lava flow, pyroclastic density currents (PDCs), and rockfall occurrences.

"In the past 24-hour period, very slow effusion of lava from the summit crater of Mayon Volcano continued to feed lava flows and collapse debris on the Mi-isi (south) and Bonga (southeastern) gullies, as well as rockfall and PDCs on these and the Basud (eastern) gullies," Phivolcs said.

The approximate lengths of lava flow stayed at 2.8 kilometers (kms) and 1.4 kms, respectively, along the Mi-isi and Bonga

gullies, while collapsed debris was still deposited four kms on the Basud channel.

Moreover, Phivolcs recorded 238 rockfall events and three PDCs caused by Mayon Volcano's collapsed lava dome.

According to Phivolcs, Mayon Volcano is still experiencing a relatively high level of unrest, and a potentially hazardous eruption is still possible within weeks or even days.

It noted that Mayon remains on Alert Level 3 because of ongoing "increased magmatic unrest."

Phivolcs advised communities near the restive volcano to maintain increased vigilance against lahars and sediment-laden stream flows on channels draining the volcano edifice, as heavy rainfall could cause channel-confined lahars and sediment-laden stream flows.

Since Mayon Volcano's status was upgraded twice in the past month, first to Level 2 on June 5 and then to Level 3 on June 8, Phivolcs strongly advised that entry into the six-kilometer Permanent Danger Zone be strictly prohibited.

Furthermore, it warned that ash fall may occur in areas south of Mayon Volcano due to current wind patterns.



Mayon quakes intensify anew

LEGAZPI CITY - From nine earthquakes the other day, Mayon Volcano's seismic activity shot up to 184 in the past 24 hours, accompanied by a high sulfur dioxide emission of 1,689 tons, 238 rockfall events and three pyroclastic density currents (PDCs), the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) reported yesterday.

Paul Alanis, Phivolcs resident volcanologist at the Lignon Hill Observatory in this city, said these high values of abnormal parameters indicated active magma movement at the volcano's upper chamber, which continuously pushed lava out of the crater.

"Although these volcanic earthquakes still lack energy to trigger a strong eruption, these indicate that massive degassing and magma ascent is taking place inside Mayon," Alanis said, adding that the volcano's surface remains inflated.

Phivolcs' records showed that volcanic earthquakes peaked at 109 on July 10 and 39 on Saturday before dropping to nine on Sunday.

The fluctuating volcanic quakes and other abnormal signs showed that Mayon's overall condition remains within the Alert Level 3 status, Alanis said.

"As fluctuations in the values of abnormal parameters continue, we cannot tell yet where the volcano is leading us. We have to observe a sustained decline in at least two weeks, or a sudden spike in the overall abnormal behavior before we can lower or elevate Mayon's alert status," he said.

As prolonged eruption is being anticipated from Mayon, officials of the Albay disaster management council are looking for alternative programs for displaced residents, whose sources of livelihood are within the six-kilometer-radius permanent danger zone.

Cedric Daep, chief of the Albay public safety and emergency management office, said that relocated residents who have no means of livelihood would keep going back to the danger zone even when the volcano is in a high level of unrest.

"This is a perennial problem. Their sources of livelihood in the danger zone entice them to sneak back," Daep told **The STAR** yesterday.

Meanwhile, 1,624 people displaced by Mayon have been diagnosed with respiratory infections, according to the Department of Health.

DOH spokesman Eric Tayag said the figure was recorded from June 12 to July 16, wherein the affected evacuees were found to be suffering from colds, cough and flu.

"If there are cases that we deem suspicious, the DOH immediately conducts confirmation as cough and colds are also symptoms of COVID. We subject the affected persons to COVID tests," Tayag said.

He said that so far, no new COVID cases have been reported in evacuation centers.

As this developed, the Department of Labor and Employment has released P4.9 million in financial assistance for Mayon victims.

The amount covers the salaries of 1,248 residents of Guinobatan town, who were provided emergency employment. - **Cet Dematera, Rhodina Villanueva, Mayen Jaymalin**



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ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Quake rocks E. Samar areas

A magnitude-4.7 earthquake rocked several areas in Eastern Samar before dawn yesterday, according to the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology.

Phivolcs said the quake's epicenter was located four kilometers east of General MacArthur town.

The quake, which occurred at 3:18 a.m., was tectonic in origin. It was felt at Intensity 4 in General Macarthur, and Intensity 3 in Balangiga, Giporlos, Guiuan, Lawaan, Llorente, Maydolong, Mercedes, Quinapondan and Salcedo.

Intensity 2 was felt in Balangkayan, Borongan and San Julian; Basey, Calbiga, Marabut and Santa Rita in Samar, and Babatngon, Palo, Tacloban and Tanauan in Leyte.

State seismologists said no damage or aftershocks were expected from the quake.

- Bella Cariaso