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MANILA BAY RECLAMATION PROJECTS

Marcos pressured by the rich – Enrile

By RAYMUND ANTONIO

Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Juan Ponce Enrile disclosed that there was “pressure” coming from the “rich” on President Marcos following his decision to suspend all Manila Bay reclamation projects.

One of the developers of the suspended projects even

pleaded for the President to allow the reclamation to continue, the former Senate president said in an interview on television program “Dito sa Bayan ni Juan” on Saturday, Aug. 19.

“Ang daming pressure ng mga mayayaman sa kanya (The rich are pressuring him),” he claimed, referring to the chief executive.

“Ang alam ko may- ▶ **6**

Marcos pressured by the rich – Enrile 1◀

roong isang nagre-reclaim ng lupa diyan sa Manila Bay. Alam ko ito dahil nirekomenda namin kay Presidente na huwag nang payagan, eh. Halos lumuhod sa Presidente dahil malaki ang utang sa bangko (I know that there is one reclaiming land there in Manila Bay. I know this because we recommended to the President not to allow it. The developer was close to kneeling while appealing before the President because of a huge bank debt).”

Enrile, however, did not name the developer.

The official shared that Marcos allowed what the developer already finished reclaiming, but suspended those that have not started yet.

“Pinagbigyan ng Presidente, ‘yong natapos mo okay na pero ‘yong mga susunod dahil ‘yong kanyang

reclamation is 250 hectares yata, so hanggang doon siya. ‘Yong mga iba na hindi pa nag-umpisa, wala na ‘yon (The President allowed what was finished, but not the next because the reclamation is around 250 hectares, so it’s up to there. Those that haven’t started won’t proceed),” Enrile said.

He also detailed why the Manila Bay reclamation projects must be suspended, especially amid backlash because of the flooding in several Luzon provinces.

In fact, even Malacañang won’t be spared from flooding because water from Manila Bay would go to rivers, including Pasig River at the presidential residence’s own backyard.

“Yong pupuntahan ng ma-disperse na tubig sa Manila Bay, back-

ward it will backflow sa mga Pasig River, Angat River, Meycauayan River, kung ano-anong mga river rian. Lahat iyan magiging flooded kapag pinayagan mong lahat ‘yong reclamation rian sa Manila Bay (The dispersed water from Manila Bay will backflow to Pasig River, Angat River, Meycauayan River, and all those rivers. All of those will be flooded if all reclamations in Manila Bay will be allowed).”

“Pati Malacañang babahain (Even Malacañang will be flooded),” Enrile added.

Marcos had earlier ordered the suspension of all reclamation projects in Manila Bay, which the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said were approved during the Duterte administration.



Accor will still manage Sofitel PH Plaza despite reclamation controversy

BY MA. STELLA F. ARNALDO

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Special to the BUSINESSMIRROR

INTERNATIONAL hospitality chain Accor remains committed to managing Sofitel Philippine Plaza, despite the reclamation of Manila Bay, which has already blocked its guests' view of Manila's iconic sunset from the hotel's pool area.

In a statement sent to the BUSINESSMIRROR, Accor said, "Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila has become a cornerstone of the country's capital since it first opened its doors in 1976. Throughout the years, the hotel has continuously adapted to the ever-changing landscape of Manila. The hotel remains committed to working alongside the local authorities to ensure that minimize any disruptions to the guests whilst the reclamation project takes place."

Accor added, "We look forward to the future and adapting to the opportunities that the city's expansion will bring. Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila is dedicated to improving the guests' experience by implementing several enhancement projects over the next 12 months. Accor has a longstanding relationship with the owning company of Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila that we look forward to continuing into the future."

Pasay-SM partnership

THE "owning company", Philippine Plaza Holdings Inc., will be rehabilitating the 50-year-old hotel, which sits on a property leased from the Government Service Insurance System. The holding firm estimated that the refurbishment will cost

them some P4 billion.

Accor is the leading international hotel operator in the Philippines with 10 hotels, resorts and branded residences currently operating and a committed pipeline of 16 hotels scheduled to open within the next five years. Its other brands are also looking to add more properties to manage in the country. (See, "Fairmont looking to expand its footprint in PHL-exec," in the BUSINESSMIRROR, February 24, 2023.)

A recent video of the hotel's backyard, shot by economist and UP Professor JC Punongbayan, has been making the rounds of social media and showed a wall of soil and sand on the bay waters.

The reclamation of Manila Bay behind Sofitel Philippine Plaza is a project of the Pasay City government, in partnership with the SM Group. The project spans 260 hectares and estimated to cost P72 billion.

'Wala nang dagat'—PBBM

SOURCES in SM Group intimated that the group has been "talking" with the hotel owner and operator to enjoin their cooperation amid the reclamation activities. In a news statement on December 6, 2019, SM Prime Holdings Inc. said the reclamation project will cover 360 hectares of Pasay City's municipal waters, and will be connected to the Mall of Asia complex, which also sits on reclaimed land.

SM Group sources said the new reclamation project will be a "mixed-use" development and include condominiums and other living spaces, along with commercial and retail areas.

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BusinessMirror

A broader look at today's business

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Accor...CONTINUED FROM A10 W

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. expressed concern that the waters of Manila Bay "were gone" so government will be suspending the reclamation projects due to "management issues." While he did not mention it, the United States government also pointed to security issues over the reclamation projects, which use the services to China Communications Construction Co. The firm, said the US Embassy in a news statement on August 2, has a "role in helping the Chinese military construct and militarize artificial islands in the South China Sea."

At least 22 reclamation projects in Manila Bay will be reviewed and evaluated by the Department

of Environment and Natural Resources, according to its Secretary Ma. Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga in a news briefing on August 10. Yet no written suspension order bearing the President's signature has been released to the public so far, even as DENR sources assured there was one, although none of them have seen it either.

In July, DENR Undersecretary Jonas Leones had defended the Manila Bay reclamation projects, telling reporters that nine of these projects amounting to some P331 billion, including that of Pasay City's, could "spur economic development." The DENR is supposed to issue an environment clearance certificate before reclamation projects are carried out.



'Halt notice on reclamation could shoo away investors'

BY ANDREA E. SAN JUAN

THE head of one of the country's big business groups on Monday said "advertising" that the Philippines is halting reclamation projects might drive away potential investors.

However, former lawmaker, three-term Manila mayor and environment secretary Lito Atienza fully supported the President's move to order the suspension of projects until after a thorough review led by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Atienza told journalists at the Kamuning Bakery Forum reclamation should only be allowed under "extremely justified" exceptions, such as if the government badly needed land for a well-planned resettlement program for the homeless.

Atienza said all stakeholders should support the review of nearly two dozen projects, as announced by DENR secretary Maria Antonia

Yulo-Loyzaga, because reclamation effectively deprives future generations of their right to benefit from the country's resources.

He noted that way back when he was vice mayor of Manila, the city council he led had enacted an ordinance banning reclamation at Manila Bay, but this was reversed by succeeding administrations.

The current mayor, Honey Lacuña, was, however, "bypassed" in the decision-making for the current reclamation projects that DENR halted upon President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s orders, Atienza added. The latter said he asked Lacuña why so many reclamation projects were approved in Manila, and she explained that the proponents did not get permits from her office.



FORMER Manila mayor, DENR chief and deputy speaker Lito Atienza (left) assails the flurry of reclamation projects at the Kamuning Bakery Forum in Quezon City on Monday, August 21, 2023. At right, Philexport president Sergio Ortiz-Luis Jr., who warned that the suspension of reclamation could negate the drive to attract investors. JOEL C. PAREDES/BUSINESSMIRROR FILE PHOTO

Asked if he would support congressional investigations of the flurry of reclamation projects that critics worry would make it impossible to follow the Supreme Court's mandamus ruling to clean up and rehabilitate Manila Bay, the former deputy speaker said such inquiries by either house of Congress must lead to prosecution and imprisonment for those who have laid to waste the natural resources.

'Difficult to deal with PHL'

THE suspension of reclamation could backfire on the Philippine investment climate however, accord-

ing to Sergio Ortiz-Luis, Jr., president of the Philippine Exporters Confederation, Inc. (Philexport). He emphasized the suspension of reclamation projects in the country might not bode well for investors.

"The problem is the president and a lot of us are trying to get investments abroad, and one of the things that they've (investors) been telling us is that it's very difficult to deal with the Philippines because of our inconsistent policies. That is why they choose Vietnam or Thailand," Ortiz-Luis said in a televised interview on Saturday.

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'Halt notice on reclamation could shoo away investors'

Continued from A10

In the case of the reclamation, he noted, "to advertise that we are halting 22 projects is really damaging."

"The issue of inconsistent policy is one but stopping projects is something that will really terrorize possible investors, and we have a lot.... Now I think they will all disappear because of this," Ortiz-Luis added.

An earlier BUSINESSMIRROR story quoted DENR Secretary Yulo-Loyzaga telling a press conference in Malacañang last August 10 that all 22 land reclamation projects are suspended pending a cumulative review to determine the soundness of the projects.

"We have been obligated to do [the review] by the Supreme Court. We need to do the review of these projects," said Loyzaga.

She said 22 land reclamation projects were approved during the Duterte administration before she took the helm of the DENR, which regulates the issuance of ECCs (environmental compliance certificates) for environmentally critical projects like land reclamation in environmentally-critical areas such as Manila Bay, an economically important water body and major fishing ground in Luzon.

Loyzaga said all 22 reclamation projects at

Manila Bay will remain suspended pending the result of the DENR review on their compliance with environmental regulations.

The Environment chief said the agency has started sending suspension orders to contractors of the said projects.

She also noted they expect to complete within August the list of members of the scientific team, which will conduct the cumulative assessment on the economic, social and environmental impact of the projects.

She said projects found to have a negative impact on the environment or violated government regulations, will be given time to implement corrective measures.

"There is due process here now ... If they do not comply. It's possible for the ECCs [environmental compliance certificate] to be suspended," Loyzaga said. (Full story here: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2023/08/11/denr-to-order-stop-work-for-manila-bay-reclamation/>)

Ortiz-Luis said that while these projects are placed under the microscope, "I just hope that they [government and businesses involved in reclamation] will not hire purely academicians but they will include our economic managers."

Meanwhile, Ortiz-Luis cited Felino Palafox Jr., a Filipino urban planner who has worked in 40 countries, for his positive view of reclamation perse. "Done properly, all this reclamation in Singapore, in Japan, in Hong Kong and in the Philippines, should be a boon for the country because number one it will give spaces where the city can expand, can bring new technology," Palafox reportedly said.

Ortiz-Luis also noted that the planned expansion of an area via reclamation could moderate "escalating prices of land in the area."

The Philexport chief said with the additional land that will be reclaimed, land prices will stabilize and can be more affordable. As such, he noted that the income generated for Manila "will probably give them a net income to be able to give services that they can no longer afford because of limited income and the expansion that they did."

Manila Bay stretches across cities and municipalities from the provinces of Cavite, Bulacan, Pampanga, and Bataan, and covers the entire National Capital Region (NCR).

With a report by Butch Fernandez



Leave Candaba alone

The Candaba wetlands in the Philippines, nestled in the intersection of Pampanga, Bulacan, and Nueva Ecija within the Pampanga River Basin, are a hidden gem. The wetlands span 32,000 hectares, encompassing ponds, swamps, marshes, and grasslands. Seasonal shifts dictate land use, from rice and crop planting to serving as a natural flood retention basin during rainy months.

The wetlands' avian diversity offers birdwatchers and nature lovers a vibrant experience. The declaration of Candaba as a bird sanctuary and the establishment of the Candaba Swamp Wildlife Reserve showcase efforts to protect the area's avian diversity.

However, the provinces of Pampanga and Bulacan, plagued by frequent floods, have triggered a private sector-initiated, government-considered proposal to transform a portion of the Candaba wetlands into a floodwater impounding area.

While the impulse to mitigate flooding is understandable, the environmental cost of such an intervention is incalculable. The eruption of Mount Pinatubo has disrupted the region's hydrology and, unbeknownst to many, is arguably the main culprit in the large-scale flooding in Pampanga and Bulacan. Climate change exacerbates these challenges, making flooding a recurring nightmare. Over the years, infrastructure projects have aimed to address flooding, such as floodways and protective dikes. The P900-million megadike project to armor Pampanga towns from lahar deposits has yet to fulfill its promise, and various ring dikes and other flood control measures of local government and residents have proved futile.

At first, the main threat to the Candaba wetlands was the proposal to drain and reclaim the area for more extensive agriculture. Now that floods are the main problem, the threat is the submergence of one-tenth of the wetlands as an impounding area for floodwater.



ON THE MOVE

SEGUNDO ECLAR ROMERO

This proposed infrastructural intervention project is daunting. As proposed, a 200-hectare floodwater impounding area will be carved out of the Candaba wetlands. Assume that the retaining wall of this impounding area is five meters high, it can hold approximately 10 million cubic meters of water. Ten million cubic meters of water, if one meter high, would cover only an area of 10 square kilometers and may not have the flood-reduction impact expected from the project. How much would the eight-kilometer retaining wall of this impounding area cost? Also, for this impounding area to be effective, it should not absorb water from the mighty Pampanga River, which means that the riparian towns of Bulacan and Pampanga subject to flooding must be sealed from the river. Floodwater would also need to be pumped into the impounding area.

President Marcos has ordered the conduct of an extensive study on the proposed construction of a floodwater impounding system in the Candaba wetlands as a long-term solution to the flooding problem in Bulacan and Pampanga. Evaluating a single policy option is not sound. The President should enlarge the study to look into all possible options that consider the environmental, eco-

nomical, technological, sociocultural, and political aspects. A larger, landscape-scale study is needed. It is clear that there is significant political and environmental opposition to the proposal. We should learn from the experiences of other countries. Japan's Sendai River basin suffered catastrophic damage due to heavy rain and river channel alterations. It is clear that infrastructure projects can have unforeseen consequences.

Several non-hard infrastructure options should be considered, including rehabilitating the Pampanga River Basin's watershed, planting suitable native species for riparian stabilization, and rehabilitating and extending the protective riparian dikes using environmentally sound engineering principles.

The agricultural value of the Candaba wetlands should not be discounted. The development and use of crop cultivars with a strong flood tolerance like the scuba rice that had been developed by the International Rice Research Institute could reinvigorate agriculture in naturally functioning wetlands like Candaba. Scuba rice is rice that can survive two weeks of complete submersion in floods, stay dormant, and thereafter recover to produce a reasonable yield. Such a strategy will make intrusive reclamation measures and the inordinate use of fertilizers and pesticides unnecessary.

If the President is indeed seeking a long-term, sustainable solution, he should be open to other policy alternatives, so that the Pampanga River Basin and the Candaba wetlands can stand as a potential model for ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Strategies combining infrastructure and non-infrastructure measures offer a path to maintaining biodiversity and harnessing the benefits of wetland ecosystem services.

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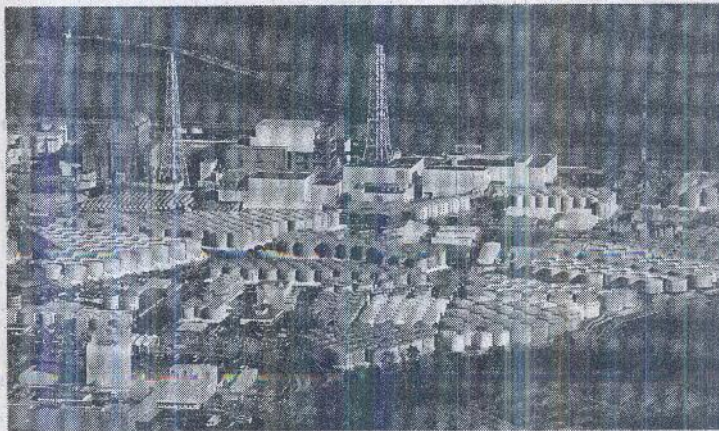
Japan seeks fishermen's understanding on wastewater release

TOKYO: Japanese government officials on Monday sought understanding from fisheries groups for the impending release of treated radioactive wastewater from the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant into the sea and pledged to support their livelihoods throughout the process that will take decades.

Economy and Industry Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura met with Masanobu Sakamoto, the head of the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperatives, and promised that the government was doing everything it could to ensure the safety of the release and prepared measures to protect the fisheries industry's reputation.

Nishimura told Sakamoto that the water release was essential for the plant's decommissioning and Fukushima's recovery, and couldn't be postponed. The government would stand by the industry's concerns and needs until the release ends decades later, he said.

Sakamoto, at the outset, stressed that his organization, as a whole, remains opposed to the release, but said members of the fishing community had gained some confidence about the safety following recognition by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and explanations by government officials in recent weeks, signaling an easing of their position.



ILL-FATED FACILITY Part of the tsunami-wrecked Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant is seen in Okuma town, northeastern Japan on Jan. 19, 2023. KYODO NEWS FILE PHOTO VIA AP

Their meeting paved the way for Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's planned meeting with Sakamoto later, a crucial step in which the premier is expected to convey his government's commitment to carry out the release safely and to support the livelihoods of fishing communities.

The government announced the release plan two years ago and has since faced strong opposition from Japanese fishing organizations, which worry about further damage to the reputation of their seafood as they struggle to recover from the March 11, 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster. Groups in South Korea and China have also raised concerns, turning it into a political

and diplomatic issue.

The date when the water release will start is expected to be decided at a meeting of key Cabinet ministers as early as Tuesday. It is widely expected to start at the end of August.

The government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Co. (Tepco) say the water must be removed to make room for the plant's decommissioning and to prevent accidental leaks from the tanks because much of the water is still contaminated and needs further treatment.

Japan has obtained the United Nations atomic watchdog's support to improve transparency and credibility and to ensure that the plan meets international safety

standards. The government has also stepped up a campaign promoting the plan's safety at home and through diplomatic channels.

In its final report in July, the IAEA concluded that the plan, if conducted strictly as designed, will cause negligible impact on the environment and human health, encouraging Japan to proceed.

While seeking understanding from the fishing community, the government has also worked to explain the plan to neighboring countries, especially South Korea, to keep the issue from interfering with their relationship.

The triple calamity destroyed the facility's cooling systems, causing three reactors to melt and contaminating their cooling water. The water is collected, filtered and stored in about 1,000 tanks, which will reach their capacity in early 2024.

The water is being treated with what's called an Advanced Liquid Processing System, which can reduce the amounts of more than 60 selected radionuclides to government-set releasable levels, except for tritium, which the government and Tepco say is safe for humans if consumed in small amounts.

Scientists generally agree that the environmental impact of the treated wastewater would be negligible, but some call for more attention to dozens of low-dose radionuclides that remain in it. **AP**



Angat Dam's water level decreasing amid El Niño

Maynilad Water Services, Inc. has reported a gradual decline in the water level at Angat Dam due to a persistent dry spell caused by El Niño.

As of 5 a.m. on Monday, Aug. 21, the water level at Angat Dam in Bulacan was recorded at 198.29 meters, more than a meter lower than the previous week's 199.59 meters.

Despite the decrease, the water elevation at Angat remained above its minimum operating level of 180 meters.

In contrast, its downstream Ipo Dam, also in Bulacan, reported a water level of 100.72 meters, slightly higher than the 100.33 meters from a week ago.

However, Ipo Dam's water elevation is marginally below the maintaining level of 101 meters.

Maynilad said the water level at Angat Dam is slowly decreasing due to the lack of significant rainfall in the previous weeks.

"El Niño is still ongoing in our

country, which could potentially lead to a reduction in the rainfall needed to replenish the aforementioned dams," the water concessionaire said.

"Everyone is continuously being urged to actively participate in the responsible use of water to extend the water supply even further," Maynilad added.

Meanwhile, Maynilad has temporarily suspended the scheduled water maintenance activities in Caloocan, Malabon, Manila, Navotas, Quezon City, and Valenzuela.

Separately, Manila Water Co. Inc. has issued a service advisory informing residents in Pasig, Rizal, and Quezon City about service interruptions from Tuesday, Aug. 22, until Friday, Aug. 25.

According to Manila Water, these interruptions are necessary for improvement activities and have been scheduled for late evenings to minimize inconvenience to residents. (Gabriell Christel Galang)



LARGER MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE POSSIBLE

50 tremors recorded in CamSur

BY ARLIE O. CALALO

NEARLY 50 tremors in what the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) described as an earthquake swarm have been recorded in a town in Camarines Sur since Saturday, August 19.

Phivolcs director Teresito "Toto" Bacolcol said the highest magnitude recorded by the agency's seismic network for this earthquake swarm was magnitude 4.4 on August 19 which had an intensity of 5.

Under this intensity, ground shaking is generally felt by most people while indoors, strong shaking is felt throughout the building, hanging objects swing violently, and small, light and unstable objects may fall or overturn.

"Outside, standing vehicles rock noticeably, and shaking of leaves and twigs of trees are observed," Bacolcol said.

Phivolcs said an earthquake swarm is a short-lived sequence of minor to light earthquakes, showing no identifiable large event or main shock.

Bacolcol explained that an earthquake swarm may vary in duration and outcome.

One scenario is a short-duration burst of earthquake activity that may last for a few days, similar to the two earthquake swarms that occurred in the same province on Dec. 13, 1993 and Oct. 14 to 16,

2021, he said.

"Another possible scenario that should not be discounted is that the earthquakes may be a precursor to a larger magnitude earthquake," the Phivolcs chief warned.

With at least seven significant earthquakes with magnitudes ranging from 6.0 to 7.4 that occurred in the Camarines Sur town and its vicinity from 1811 to the present, the most damaging, however, was the magnitude 7.0 on March 17, 1973, Bacolcol said.

Citing data, he said Camarines Sur is a seismically active region in the country because of the pres-

ence of active faults that include the Legaspi Lineament and offshore segments of the Philippine Fault in Ragay Gulf.

Even if a larger magnitude earthquake would occur, Bacolcol said there would be no worry for tsunamis since the epicenters of these earthquakes are situated inland "and tsunamis are typically produced by earthquakes that occur along active trenches, offshore faults with significant vertical movements, or mass movement such as earthquake-induced landslides offshore or near bodies of water."

He also ruled out volcanic activ-

ity out of the earthquake swarm.

"The earthquake swarm is clearly tectonic in origin. The closest volcano, Labo Volcano, is approximately 15 kilometers away, and is considered potentially active. The nearest active volcano is Isarog Volcano, situated around 60 kilometers away," he added.

In case of a strongly felt earthquake, it is recommended that people protect themselves by doing the standard practice of "drop, cover and hold," Phivolcs said.

This practice has been widely recognized for its ability to reduce the risk of injury during earthquakes, Bacolcol said.



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2 Camarines towns sizzle with 47°C heat index

The heat indexes in Daet, Camarines Norte and Pili, Camarines Sur reached 47 degrees Celsius on Sunday, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

Other areas that experienced higher heat indexes on the same day were Casiguran, Aurora with 44 degrees Celsius followed by Baler and Aparri in Cagayan with 43 degrees each.

Dagupan City in Pangasinan, Infanta in Quezon, Calapan in Oriental Mindoro and Catbalogan in Samar recorded a heat index of 42 degrees Celsius.

Heat indexes ranging from 42 to 51 degrees Celsius are classified as danger levels as these can cause cramps and exhaustion, and continued exposure may result in a stroke.

On Saturday, the village of Ambulong in Tanauan, Batangas experienced a 52-degree Celsius heat index.

PAGASA said that heat indexes ranging from 52 degrees Celsius and above could cause heat stroke.

- Bella Cariaso