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**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE**





## ‘Forests give protection vs new, deadly diseases’

By [JONATHAN L. MAYUGA](#)

MARCH 28, 2021



Biak-na-Bato National Park in San Miguel, Bulacan, consists of a cave network and a system of rivers and trails of both historical and ecological importance. It is one of the ecotourism areas nearest to Metro Manila.

The Philippines is developing an “Urban Forest Bathing Project” similar to the concept of forest bathing in Japan.

This was initiated through the partnership of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources’ (DENR) Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) with the private sector last month.

The project that will create green spaces in urban areas in the Philippines is part of BMB’s Urban Biodiversity Program.

The program aims to promote the conservation of the country’s rich biodiversity, develop and maintain green spaces within the cities, and to provide important ecosystem services to Filipinos.

Highlighting the launch of the project as favorable for both the environment and the people, Environment Secretary Roy A. Cimatu noted the many benefits of having healthy forests to the mental and emotional well-being of the people living in urban areas.

“The Urban Forest Bathing Project will not only help the environment, as more trees and land spaces will be used for this if deemed successful; it will also help the people nourish their mental and emotional well-being,” Cimatu said in a recent statement.

### Importance of forests

The importance of protecting and conserving the country’s forests is once again put on the spotlight as the annual International Day of Forests is observed on March 21.

With the theme, “Forest restoration: A path to recovery and well-being,” this year’s global celebration, according to the DENR’s Forest Management Bureau (FMB), highlights the valuable benefits of forest restoration in terms of human health, food security, environmental and climatic condition, provision of green jobs, stakeholder engagement and healing.

Marcial B. Amaro, DENR’s assistant secretary for Policy, Planning and Foreign-Assisted and Special Projects, said that based on the latest data from the FMB and the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority, the Philippines has a total forest cover of 7,014,152 hectares, of which 20.89 percent, or 2,028,000 hectares, is closed forest.

The open forest covers about 66.8 percent of the total or estimated area of 4,683,000, while mangrove forest is about 4.3 percent or 333,000 of the total, Amaro told the BusinessMirror in a telephone interview on March 23.



In the past five years, he said the DENR-FMB's focus is protecting existing forest more than expanding the current forest.

He said this can be gleaned from the budget prioritization of Congress, wherein the budget for the Expanded National Greening Program was slashed by an average of P2 billion in the last five years. "That is approximately [equivalent to] 100,000 hectares of additional forest cover per year," said Amaro, the concurrent director of the DENR-FMB.

## Traditional medicines, wellness

Traditionally, among the earlier civilization, and in the Philippines as well, the link between forest and human health could not be more pronounced than in rural areas, particularly where the indigenous peoples (IP) inhabit.

"We have medicinal plants. That's a direct link to health and wellness," Amaro said.

"For the longest time, our IPs look at the forest not only for food but for medicine. To expand that, wellness, clean water and abundant water supply and clean air, are primary functions of the forests," he added.

## True value of forests

The Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) highlighted the true value of forests as "the backbone of growth and prosperity, and protectors against the impacts of climate change and the emergence of new and deadly diseases"

ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita S. Lim said that considered one of the world's most biologically rich and diverse ecosystems, forests are among the region's natural capital that sustains the region's growth, especially now it aims speed up recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Since the start of this health crisis, the Asean Centre for Biodiversity has been stressing the role of biodiversity in regulating climate and diseases. Today, on International Day of Forests, the ACB highlights the central role of these complex ecological systems in our efforts to build a healthy region, which is aptly resonant with the theme of this year's celebration—Forest restoration: A path to recovery and well-being," said Lim in a statement on March 21 in time for the International Day of Forests 2021.

## Growing recognition

Lim said there is now a growing recognition of forests, along with other types of natural ecosystems, as integral components of a country's total wealth, which provide life support and basic human needs, such as food, fresh and clean water, medicine, shelter and fuel, especially during the time of the pandemic.

"While we have seen a decline of the Asean forest cover in the past decades, the good news is that the overall rate of forestry loss in Asean slowed from 1.2 percent per year from 2000 to 2010, to 0.26 percent per year from 2011 to 2015, according to the 2020 Asean-EU report 'Investing in Sustainable Capital in Asean,'" she said.

"While this is important progress, it is also worthy to note the need to continue improving genetic, species, and habitat diversity in our remaining forests," she added.

"With habitat fragmentation being one of the biggest threats to biodiversity in forest ecosystems, big land mammals like tigers, elephants and rhinoceros are among the species most affected," she pointed out.

## Shrinking Asian forest

Meanwhile, Ricardo L. Calderon, executive director of the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (Afoco), in his message during the United Nations Forum on Forests, highlighted the vital roles forests play in providing a variety of services that billions of people depend upon for their livelihood and subsistence.



“Tropical forests of Southeast Asia play important roles in biodiversity conservation, ecosystems services and global carbon balance. However,” he said. “The region experienced continuous forest loss at a rate of 8 million hectares per year between 2005 and 2015, but significantly registering the highest net gain in forest area in the 2010-2020 Forest Resources Assessment,” he added.

## Reduced capacity

According to Calderon, a forestry expert, forests in Asia are at risk of reduced capacity for climate mitigation, limited provision of ecosystem services and biodiversity loss, and reduced economic growth potential without proactive measures to put in place sustainable Management practices.

He said Afoco as a formal regional body, will continue to provide the bridge in order to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation and broaden cooperation among member-parties, partner institutions and organizations on the management of forests for the sustainable production of goods ecosystems services, biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation.

Calderon said Afoco will continue to provide a platform of exchange of expertise and technical cooperation in areas of forest restoration and rehabilitation through the implementation of its landmark programs and regional projects.

Moreover, he said regional body will work to strengthen forestry institutions and enhance forest governance through capacity development programs for the sector’s policymakers, technical practitioners and researchers, in order to help contribute to the sustainable management of forests.

According to Calderon, with the Covid 19 global pandemic that has affected the global economy and billions of people all over the world, it is an opportune time to ensure that forests will be an integral part of the global discussions and decisions for the world to recover from the pandemic, and build back better in achieving sustainable development goals.

Image credits: [Gregg Yan](#)

## DENR releases 86 olive ridley turtle hatchlings



ZAMBOANGA. Personnel of the Community Environment and Natural Resources Office of Ramon Magsaysay, Zamboanga del Sur, release 86 olive ridley turtle hatchlings at the coast of Bulanit village in Labangan of the same province. A photo handout shows the hatchlings rushing to the shore of Bulanit after their release. (SunStar Zamboanga)

March 28, 2021

PERSONNEL of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) released 86 olive ridley turtle hatchlings to the natural habitat in the province of Zamboanga del Sur, a DENR official announced Sunday, March 28, 2021.

Rosevirico Tan, DENR regional information officer, said the turtle hatchlings were released Monday, March 22, by the Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (Cenro) personnel of Ramon Magsaysay at the coast of Bulanit village in Labangan, Zamboanga del Sur.

Tan said the turtle hatchlings came from a nesting site, which was spotted in January by a local fisherman, Jason Placido, who reported to Cenro-Ramon Magsaysay for proper monitoring and documentation.

He said the Cenro-Ramon Magsaysay in coordination with the village council of Bulanit had since monitored the nesting site until its successful hatching on Monday, March 22.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature has classified olive ridley turtles as vulnerable at a global state due to multiple threats to their population.

The March 22 release of olive ridley turtle hatchlings was the second within one week.

Last week, the Biodiversity and Conservation Unit personnel of the Cenro-Imelda, Zamboanga Sibugay also released 86 Hawksbill turtle hatchlings in the province.

The Hawksbill turtle hatchlings were released on March 17, in Pandilusan Island, Payao, Zamboanga Sibugay. (SunStar Zamboanga)





# DILG to Barangays: Use DENR-MGB geohazard threat advisories to prepare for disasters

By Jerome Carlo R. Paunan Published on March 28, 2021



***DILG Usec. for Barangay Affairs Martin B. Diño keynotes Department of Environment and Natural Resources National Capital Region event dubbed, Manila Bay Stakeholder's Summit (Facebook video grab)***

CALOOCAN CITY, March 28 (PIA) -- The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) is urging all barangays to use the Geohazard Threat Advisories issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Mines and Geosciences Bureau (DENR-MGB) as bases in formulating and updating their contingency plans to enhance operational readiness in responding to disasters even amidst a pandemic.

"Hindi mamaya na kundi ngayon na. Preparation is done in peacetime, not near or during the time of disaster. Bagaman may pandemya, nariyan pa rin ang banta ng sakuna. Let's keep our guards up not only against COVID-19 but also natural disasters," said DILG Undersecretary for Barangay Affairs Martin B. Diño.

In an advisory, Diño enjoins barangay officials to take a proactive stance in disaster risk reduction (DRR) using the geohazard threat advisories which are regularly issued to their Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (DRRMC).

"Past experiences proved that preparing conscientiously for disasters can substantially minimize loss and damages from natural hazards. Hence, in a disaster-prone country like the Philippines, the importance of contingency planning to come up with timely, effective, and appropriate response measures cannot be overemphasized," he said.

The MGB Geohazard Threat Advisories provide critical and up-to-date information on susceptible areas to geohazards and suggests preemptive measures for local government units (LGUs) to carry out.

In the same advisory, Diño prodded barangays to take note of areas declared as highly susceptible to floods, landslides, liquefaction, and other ground instabilities, and perform early preparedness actions.

All barangays are also advised to coordinate with their City or Municipal DRRMC and the local DENR-MGB for any questions and concerns regarding geohazards affecting their areas of jurisdiction.



Meanwhile, DILG Undersecretary and Spokesperson Jonathan Malaya stressed the importance of early disaster preparedness and reminded LGUs to refer to their "Operation LISTO Manuals" for guidance in addition to utilizing the DENR-MGB Geohazard Threat Advisories.

Malaya also urges the public to keep themselves informed by reading said advisories which are available through the DENR-MGB website ([www.mgb.gov.ph](http://www.mgb.gov.ph)) and Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/OfficialMinesAndGeosciencesBureau>).

According to Republic Act No. 7160 or the Local Government Code of 1991, LGUs are mandated to adopt measures and protect their inhabitants from the harmful effects of manmade or natural disasters. Likewise, Republic Act No. 10121, also known as the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010, mandates LGUs to conduct planning activities. (PIA NCR)



# Seeking alternatives to open dumpsites

By: [Ar. John Ian Lee Fulgar](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 10:58 AM March 28, 2021



Capping contaminated lands in general and closed landfills with solar renewable energy systems

Who would've thought that after centuries of producing, reusing and eliminating existing and potential waste materials, a phrase as simple as "throwing away waste" could spark radical interpretations?

## Old ways of waste disposal

In the past, a vast majority of the world's population disposed waste without separation and controlled collection in consideration.

As many of the world's civilizations started as self-sufficient agricultural societies, it is no surprise how dumping waste outside, burning and composting used to work. Since these wastes were completely biodegradable, nothing happened except that they were simply returned to nature.

Although these methods used to be the tried and tested ways of waste disposal, the challenges began in the 20th century when developing countries such as the Philippines participated in industrialization. This is when the fast production of non-biodegradable goods in packaging, electronics, automotive and other industries became inversely proportional with new innovations in waste management.

## No more open dumpsites by end March 2021

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) reported that out of the 233 operating open dumpsites in the country as of January 2021, 169 ceased operations as of March 14 of the same year. Out of these 169 open dumpsites, 107 were closed by local government units, whereas the remaining 62 were issued cease and desist orders.

By the end of March 2021, the agency reported that there are still 125 open dumpsites to be closed in the Mimaropa, Bicol Region, Western and Central Visayas, as well as Northern Mindanao. As simple as they sound, the challenges of closing open dumpsites go way beyond ceasing access to these facilities alone.





## Closing an open dumpsite

Closing an open dumpsite may sound like a simple and direct task. However, behind its simplicity lies the complexities which can be identified with three questions. First, what method of closure will be used? Second, how will this take place and who will pay for it? Third, which among the new waste disposal methods would be the best?

It would be a challenge to close an open dumpsite while the people still use them, which is having a new waste disposal facility in-place immediately is highly vital. This is why the third question holds the most weight among the three.

## From open dumpsites to sanitary landfills

Under Section 37 of the Republic Act No. 9003 also known as the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, it is strictly prohibited to both establish and maintain open dumpsites due to their serious health and environmental hazards.

To compensate for hundreds of open dumpsites, the agency plans to build 300 more sanitary landfills across the country by 2022 through public-private partnerships. This is in addition to the existing 189 sanitary landfills shared by 399 local government units.

## Turning a problem into a solution



Waste-to-energy facilities used alone or in tandem to operate independently or to complement an existing wastewater treatment system

The durability and security of landfill caps are among the most highly considered factors in waste management. Traditionally, landfill caps are made from a geomembrane layer placed atop a compacted soil base, a drainage layer, a protective soil cover, topsoil and grass. However, the same landfill caps can cause the penetration and infiltration of foreign material, defeating their purpose.

Whereas, a solar energy cover is made up of an exposed geomembrane cover directly adhered with laminated solar panels. Not only these are low-maintenance and inexpensive, but can also supply energy while LGUs are still preparing the relocation sites for sanitary landfills.

Thanks to technology, smarter and more eco-friendly forms of waste management are becoming the norm in many parts of the world. Countries such as Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, among others, have resorted to similar practices such as waste-to-energy facilities and Plasma Arc Gasification (PAG) to convert waste to energy.

With waste-to-energy facilities, they work by converting waste to heat and electricity, eventually used to power nearby communities. Whereas, PAG works by converting organic waste into useful gases without burning them. PAG then produces three by-products, namely, Syngas used for electricity generation, slag converted to synthetic bricks and gravel, and residual heat as steam.



## No such thing as ‘throwing away’

Especially if talking about waste, maybe it’s time to think twice when we say throwing them away. Instead of regarding them as waste, maximizing their use beyond what meets the eye creates a positive turn. By ending a specific object’s physical use, its journey towards becoming something as wide encompassing as energy starts.



### The author

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# Address air pollution to help PH recovery

By: [Khevin Yu](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:01 AM March 28, 2021

Communities around the world are getting much-needed hope with the rollout of vaccines one year after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic.

We hate to be the bearer of bad news, but unfortunately, the Philippine government must not let its guard down in terms of ensuring people's health, particularly since another hazard remains unsolved: air pollution.

During the onset of the first enhanced community quarantine (ECQ), the metro temporarily experienced better air quality. Metro Manila citizens enjoyed a view of clear skies, so much so that people were in awe of the view of the Sierra Madre mountain ranges from the capital. The Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (DENR) issued a statement affirming lower levels of dangerous pollutants, such as particulate matter 10 (PM10) and particulate matter 2.5 (PM2.5), in areas such as Marikina, Las Piñas, Parañaque, and Muntinlupa.

But as the quarantine was eased, gas-powered vehicles slowly returned to the roads, and with them, dirty and unhealthy air quality. In June 2020, when Metro Manila eased into modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ), Greenpeace reported that the air pollution levels in the city, particularly that of PM2.5 pollutants, had steadily crept back up.

The clear skies and the view of the mountain range from Manila were only glimpses of a better normal. It was an indirect result of the government's response to the pandemic, not a response to the worsening air pollution in the country.

Prior to the pandemic, our health was already being threatened by air pollution. According to a report published by Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air, bad air quality caused by pollutants from the burning of fossil fuels in the transport and energy sector in the Philippines is responsible for an estimated 27,000 premature deaths, 1.9 percent GDP loss, and 4.4 million work absences annually.

The government's efforts to address air pollution is lacking. It is made worse by the fact that we have been breathing blindly: There aren't enough monitoring stations, especially in provinces that host polluting coal-fired power plants such as Bataan, Zambales, and Batangas.

To protect Filipinos from being further affected by air pollution, the country needs to increase air pollution monitoring capabilities in major highways, hospitals, schools, and transport terminals, as well as near heavily polluting fossil fuel power plants. Air quality monitoring by the DENR should be improved. The department currently operates only around 80 PM10 monitors and 55 PM2.5 monitors across the country. Bataan, which houses major megawatt-coal plants, has only one PM2.5 monitor for the whole province.

Air quality standards set by the Clean Air Act of 1999 should be immediately updated. Since the law was instituted 22 years ago, these standards were never updated despite provisions in the law that mandate a review of the standards every two years. This means we are using an outdated set of standards that have allowed the operation of unhealthy coal power plants and other air polluting facilities. It is imperative that the DENR accelerate its efforts to update air pollution standards, given that exposure to air pollution is a major risk factor in respiratory diseases such as COVID-19.





More importantly, reducing air pollution will not only help address the ongoing health and COVID-19 crisis, but also the ongoing climate crisis. Aside from being major sources of air pollution, the transport and energy sectors are the main contributors to greenhouse gas emissions in the Philippines and globally.

Addressing air pollution must be part of our economic recovery programs. Better air quality for Filipinos will mean a better normal for current and future generations—freedom from air pollution, and better health resilience against future pandemics and the climate crisis.

\* \* \*

*Khevin Yu (khevin.yu@greenpeace.org) is the energy transition campaigner at Greenpeace Southeast Asia-Philippines.*

## NexCities recognized at the World Water Day Awards

By ... -March 29, 2021



The Davao City Water District (DCWD) and the Newton Prize-winning NexCities Project Team were honored along with 17 other 'New Water Champions' during the World Water Day Awards held last March 22.

The awards were presented during a virtual ceremony after a weeklong observance of World Water Day carrying the theme "Valuing Water."

The annual event was organized by the National Water Resources Board and Maynilad in collaboration with other water agencies and companies including Aboitiz InfraCapital and its water business units, Apo Agua Infraestructura, Inc. (Apo Agua) and Lima Water Corp. (LWC).

Apo Agua conferred the 'Kavontog do't Aweg' (Obu-Manuvu term for Hero of the Water) Award to DCWD's Adopt-a-Site Project for its role in ensuring the protection and conservation of the Tipolog-Tamugan Watershed- Davao City's next water source.

"The 'Kavontog do't Aweg' Award recognizes and celebrates outstanding individuals and organizations that advocate for protecting and preserving the environment. We wanted to acknowledge the Adopt-a-Site Project of DCWD because much like Apo Agua and the Davao City Bulk Water Supply Project (DCBWSP), it proactively looks and takes action for sustainable solutions to environmental problems, so that Davao City may continue to grow and thrive for generations to come," said Shake Tuason, Apo Agua operations head.

The Adopt-a-Site Project is an intensified and multi-sectoral move for the rehabilitation of Mt. Talomo-Lipadas, Malagos and Mt. Tipolog-Tamugan watersheds in Davao City. The project enables various sectors to donate a counterpart share to plant and maintain trees and other rehabilitation activities for a minimum period of five years.

DCWD was also named the Huwarang Lingkod Tubig Awardee for Mindanao by the Local Water Utilities Administration.

Meanwhile, Lima Water Corporation conferred the 'Agos ng Pag-asa' Award to the NexCities Project which builds on the 2019 Newton Prize-winning research on converting human wastewater into nutrient-rich fertilizer. The study was conducted by researchers from the University of Surrey in the UK and De La Salle University (DLSU) in the Philippines.

The NexCities Project primarily aims to demonstrate how fertilizer can be produced from septic tank wastewater and be used in agriculture. The project is in collaboration with the Salikneta Farm of the De La Salle Araneta University and the Society for the Conservation of Philippine Wetlands Inc.

Source: [https://malaya.com.ph/index.php/news\\_special\\_feature/nexcities-recognized-at-the-world-water-day-awards/](https://malaya.com.ph/index.php/news_special_feature/nexcities-recognized-at-the-world-water-day-awards/)



## USAID launches 2 partnerships for PHL water security

By [BUSINESSMIRROR](#)  
MARCH 28, 2021



(From top left) Palawan Gov. Jose Alvarez, USAID Mission Director Lawrence Hardy II, MUAD Negros Executive Director Reynic Alo, Coca-Cola Philippines President Antonio del Rosario, and Coca-Cola Foundation Philippines Inc. President Ma. Cecilia Alcantara during the launch of new partnerships to support water security in the Philippines.

In celebration of World Water Day, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) launched on March 23 two partnerships to increase access to clean, safe, water and sanitation services in the Philippines.

The first partnership, with Coca-Cola Foundation Philippines Inc. and the Multi-sectoral Alliance for Development (MUAD)-Negros, will help conserve 12 watersheds and create sustainable livelihoods in Negros Occidental, a USAID news release said.

The second partnership, with the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD), will protect water resources in Palawan by improving watershed management.

Through these partnerships, USAID's Safe Water project will leverage its science-backed studies, analyses and expertise with partners' human and capital resources to expand watershed protection that will help guarantee sustainable livelihoods.

USAID Philippines Mission Director Lawrence Hardy II led the signing of the memorandum of understanding with Coca-Cola Philippines President Antonio del Rosario and Palawan Governor and PCSD Chairman Jose Alvarez.

"Watersheds play an important role in supplying clean water to communities. It is our global commitment in Coca-Cola to replenish and to protect our water resources. That's why we are one with USAID and MUAD-Negros to protect these sanctuaries and to empower the lives of the people living near the watersheds," del Rosario said.

"I am confident that our collaboration will empower communities to become better environmental stewards, uplift lives, and safeguard forests and watersheds through our collective efforts and partnerships to bring a water secure future for Filipinos," Hardy pointed out.

About 12 million Filipinos do not have access to safe drinking water, and 80 percent of the population is not connected to wastewater treatment services.

USAID promotes water security by working with governments, the private sector and non-government organizations to increase access to water and sanitation services for vulnerable and underserved communities.





It also supports improved water resource management to promote clean drinking water, food security, and economic growth.

Since 2013 alone, USAID has invested P1.5 billion (\$30 million) to increase access to water supply and sanitation services for underserved communities, the news release said.



## Church's clean water program reaches millions of Filipinos

By [BUSINESSMIRROR](#)

MARCH 28, 2021



Girls drink water from the water project of the Latter-day Saint Charities.

The World Health Organization reported that more than 1 billion people lack access to clean water. Lack of clean water could lead to diseases, such as cholera, diarrhea and typhoid.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church) believes all communities should have fresh drinking water free from contamination, which is why it helps fund clean water initiatives around the world.

In 2006, clean water projects were conducted in 32 countries benefiting over 1.1 million people in over 1,000 communities through its humanitarian arm, the Latter-day Saint Charities, the Church's news release said.

In the Philippines, over 13 projects for A Single Drop for Safe Water and the Department of Education have been implemented since 2009, blessing the lives of more than 80,000 of Filipinos.

Six projects are currently being carried out to reach out to more communities in the near future, the news release added.

Water sources depend on the area and needs of the communities but may include wells, water storage, delivery systems, or water purification systems.

Community members are involved in the planning and implementation of each project and provide most of the labor for the project. Community representatives are then trained on the maintenance of the system installed.

Image credits: [newsph.churchofjesuschrist.org](https://newsph.churchofjesuschrist.org)

Source: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2021/03/28/churchs-clean-water-program-reaches-millions-of-filipinos/>



# Philippine Consumer and Environmental Groups Urge Government To Tackle Plastic Pollution at Source: Ban Single-Use Plastics

“We need a strong policy in the form of a Republic Act that will provide a general framework, direction and timeline toward phasing out SUPs on a national scale within a reasonable period.”

March 27, 2021 by [Pressenza](#) [Leave a Comment](#)



By [EcoWaste Coalition](#)

12 March 2021. Consumer advocacy group Laban Konysumer Inc. and environmental health group EcoWaste Coalition have jointly urged the government to tackle plastic pollution at source such as by banning single-use plastics (SUPs).

Through a joint statement to mark this year’s World Consumer Rights Day (WCRD) on March 15 that has for its theme “Tackling Plastic Pollution,” the non-profit groups highlighted two policy opportunities that can catalyze the beneficial shift to sustainable packaging and product delivery systems in the Philippines.

First is through the enactment of a national legislation banning SUPs by the 18th Congress, and second is via the issuance of the list of non-environmentally acceptable products and packaging (NEAP) in accordance with R.A. 9003, or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act.

“We need a strong policy in the form of a Republic Act that will provide a general framework, direction and timeline toward phasing out SUPs on a national scale within a reasonable period,” said Atty. Vic Dimagiba, President of Laban Konysumer Inc., a full-term active member of Consumers International, which organizes the annual WCRD to highlight “the power of consumers and their rights for a fair, safe and sustainable marketplace for everyone.”

“The adoption of such a law will support and strengthen the efforts by national government agencies, local government units, industries and businesses, civil society groups and consumers to address plastic pollution in an effective and united manner,” he added.

Among the local government units that have adopted ordinances banning or regulating plastic bags and other SUPs include the cities of Antipolo, Cagayan de Oro, Caloocan, Bacolod, Baguio, Batangas, Iriga, Lapu-Lapu, Las Piñas, Makati, Mandaluyong, Manila, Muntinlupa, Parañaque, Pasay, Pasig, Puerto Princesa, Quezon, San Carlos, San Fernando, Santa Rosa, Trece Martires and many other cities and municipalities across the archipelago.

For his part, Thony Dizon, Chemical Safety Campaigner of the EcoWaste Coalition, pointed to the importance of releasing the long-overdue NEAP list, which the National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC) is required to do one year after R.A. 9003 took effect in 2001.





“The 20-year delay in identifying and consequently banning products and packaging materials that are not environmentally acceptable has sadly led to the massive production of throw-away SUPs that are barely reused or recycled,” said Dizon, noting the mind-boggling amounts of plastic waste and their chemical additives that get dumped, incinerated or disposed of in the oceans.

According to the report “Plastic Waste Inputs from Land into the Ocean,” the Philippines wastes 6,237,653 kilos of plastic per day, of which 81 percent is mismanaged.

As noted by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), “plastic packaging accounts for nearly half of all plastic waste globally, and much of it is thrown away within just a few minutes of its first use,” noting that “our oceans have been used as a dumping ground, choking marine life and transforming some marine areas into a plastic soup.”

As stated by Helena Leurent, Director General of Consumers International: “Plastic pollution is one of the most pressing issues facing our planet. Consumer awareness of the plastics crisis is growing around the world. Consumers have a crucial role to shape the marketplace, and we must support them to mobilize businesses and governments, to ensure sustainable consumption is accessible to all.”

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Source: <https://goodmenproject.com/politics-2/philippine-consumer-and-environmental-groups-urge-government-to-tackle-plastic-pollution-at-source-ban-single-use-plastics/>



# DAR set to distribute all public lands to Bangsamoro people

By DARPublished on March 28, 2021

QUEZON CITY, Mar. 28 -- The Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) will hold a consultative meeting with concerned government offices in Cagayan de Oro City, on March 29-30, 2021, to immediately fulfill President Rodrigo Duterte's directive to implement land reform in Marawi City.

The invited government agencies include the Department of National Defense (DND), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Agrarian Reform-Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (MAFAR-BARMM), Philippine National Police, local government of Lanao del Sur, Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM), and Marawi State University, among others.

DAR Secretary Brother John Castriciones said the consultation will discuss activities, projects and linkages to execute land survey and land reform in the said city.

"Our President believes that there were historical injustices inflicted against the Bangsamoro people, jeopardizing their legitimate birthright over their ancestral lands. And it is just right to indemnify them by distributing all government owned-lands (GOLs) to the rightful claimant in order to correct the historical offenses," Brother John said.

The basis for distributing GOLs is Executive Order (EO) No. 75, Series of 2019, which was signed by the President on February 1, 2019, subjecting all public lands under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

Brother John tasked the department's Special Concerns Office (SCO) to be the lead convenor of the consultation.

SCO Undersecretary Carim Panumpang said they would gather data and information from TFBM pertaining to the land status within Marawi City and coordinate with MAFAR-BARMM for the appropriate fieldwork within the territory of the autonomous region.

"We will formulate strategic planning and workshop with concerned offices and discuss and explore other related issues so that we can effectively implement the President's order at once," Panumpang said.

The President's order to implement land reform was prompted by the thwarted "Marawi Siege" in 2017, which lasted for five months. (DAR)



# Plant trees for your marriage license in this Cagayan town

Published March 28, 2021, 4:53 PM

by [Liezle Basa Iñigo](#)

ALLACAPAN, Cagayan – Want to marry here? Make sure you have planted five seedlings to be able to obtain a marriage license.

This town has an ordinance mandating that couples getting married must first undertake a tree-planting or tree-growing activity before they are allowed to join a pre-marriage orientation and counseling (PMOC) and sign their marriage license.

Emmanuel Reynoso, municipal planning officer and Population Commission Focal Person on Family Planning, said that the planting of trees by couples who intend to get married is under an ordinance and also part of their PMOC program.

Jhomar Salem, Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Officer (MENRO), said that due to the ordinance, seven couples recently planted five seedlings before they were issued a marriage license by the Local Civil Registrar (LCR). He said the couples planted various seedlings in Sitio Kasisiitan, Barangay Daan-Ili.

The Allacapan local government unit provided the seedlings and equipment for the couples.

“Kaya naman para sa lahat ng mga nagbabalak na magpakasal kinakailangan munang magtanim ng mga seedlings bago kayo sumailalim sa counselling at tuluyang maikasal (Couples who want to get married in Allacapan must plant trees first before they can undergo counseling and get married,” the Public Information Office here advised.





# PNP, households observe Earth Hour 2021 in Romblon

By Paul Jaysent FosPublished on March 28, 2021



Romblomanons on Saturday night joined the rest of the world in observing "Earth Hour" to put the spotlight on protecting the environment. (Photo Courtesy: Romblon Police Provincial Office)

ODIONGAN, Romblon, Mar. 28 (PIA) -- Romblomanons on Saturday night joined the rest of the world in observing "Earth Hour" to put the spotlight on protecting the environment.

Some households, business establishments, and public places switched off their lights for an hour to participate in the event.

Different police stations including the Provincial Office of the Philippine National Police in Romblon joined the event.

On a Facebook post, the Romblon PPO said that "they turned off 'non-essential lights and other electrical equipment and united to do our share for #motherearth".

This year's observance aims to intensify global action that will help nature recover faster than it is declining.

In a statement by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) said that such observance is an opportunity that people worldwide must grab to speak up for nature and demand world leaders' action on such decline.

WWF said that nature is a vital life on Earth but the rate of this resource's loss in the last 50 years is already unprecedented in human history as global trade, consumption and human population growth as well as continuing urbanization are fueling such decline.

"We are losing nature faster than it can restore itself and without urgent action, significant harm to people and planet is inevitable: inadequate food and water for our growing global population, significant harm to our economies, and the mass extinction of an estimated one million species," WWF said. (PJF/PIA-Mimaropa)



## 'Fun bicycle ride' kicks off Earth Hour in Mandaue



**CYCLING FOR A CAUSE.** The Mandaue City Government organized the Cycling for Climate Change at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 27, 2021, as part of its celebration of Earth Hour. Over 200 cyclists participated in the event. (ALEX BADAYOS)

March 28, 2021

OVER 200 cyclists participated in the Cycling for Climate Change in Mandaue City at 7:30 p.m on Saturday, March 27, 2021.

Edwin Anthony Jumao-as, executive director of the Traffic Enforcement Agency of Mandaue (Team), said the activity was part of the celebration of Earth Hour, which promotes energy conservation.

Jumao-as said that they did not encounter any problems during the event.

He said the cyclists did not cause traffic because they occupied bike lanes that are separated from the road by plastic bollards.

He also deployed traffic enforcers to assist participants.

Since most of the lights were off at the start of the activity, Jumao-as said each biker brought a light, which was attached to his or her bike or head gear.

Jumao-as said the activity was for fun and not a race.

He said most of the participants were from bikers' organizations in the cities of Mandaue, Cebu, Lapu-Lapu and Talisay.

Twenty Team traffic enforcers also joined the activity, Jumao-as said.

The cyclists started and ended at Parkmall.

Jumao-as said the activity lasted for an hour after which the City Government initiated the turning off of non-essential lights for one hour, from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m., "as a symbol of commitment to the planet."

Residents who knew about the event also took part and turned off all non-essential lights. **(KFD)**

Source: <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/1890210/Cebu/Local-News/Fun-bicycle-ride-kicks-off-Earth-Hour-in-Mandaue>



# Alminaza: Earth Hour 2021: Switch coal off, for good



## [BISHOP GERARDO ALMINAZA](#)

March 28, 2021

THIS weekend, millions around the world once again participated in the annual Earth Hour, in which we were invited to switch our lights and appliances off for an hour. As much of the energy used by humanity is still sourced from fossil fuels, turning our lights off together encourages a decrease in our consumption of dirty energy and our carbon footprint. Each year, Earth Hour provides us with an opportunity to unite in action and reflection for our Common Home. It, too, brings to light an important question: why is our energy dirty in the first place?

Despite its immense renewable energy potential, the Philippines is heavily reliant on fossil fuels for its energy needs. A major part of our power mix is still occupied by coal, the dirtiest fossil fuel. This has caused many grievances to Filipinos, coal being costly to our people and nature in many different ways. Sadly, policy directions in our country have yet to mark an end to the reign of dirty energy. While the Department of Energy (DOE) has issued a moratorium on coal, it provided ways to keep many projects from being shelved, and leaves existing coal plants untouched and able to keep polluting.

It does not help that top Philippine banks are keeping coal plants running thanks to their financial support to the industry, even when they have the ability to switch coal off for good by restricting their funding for it. In particular, the Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) and Banco De Oro (BDO) combined have invested over US\$6 billion to support coal projects from 2009-2019. Despite claims that they are seeking to pursue sustainability and align to the changes required by the climate crisis, these banks and many others still have not publicly set limits on the financial support they provide to coal. Indeed it is concerning that the banks in whom we place our trust in the form of our financial resources, may be using that to fuel catastrophes we suffer.

Moreover, even while we strive to phase out coal in the country, corporations are already executing plans to make our energy sector reliant on other polluting sources, especially fossil gas. Instead of pushing for a transition to clean, affordable, and renewable energy, we find our government, banks, and energy companies furthering the destruction of our planet by tying us down to the use of more fossil fuels.

Our carbon-intensive ways are especially troublesome given our country's climate-vulnerability. We can see physical manifestations of this in the increasing frequency of devastating storms and sweltering high temperatures plaguing our nation today. No one is more affected by these changes than the poor who are also being robbed by high electricity prices caused by the inability of coal costs to keep stable amid fluctuations, and coal-affected communities who are slowly being poisoned to death by coal pollution.



Earth Hour reminds us of these issues at hand and prompts us to hold our authorities and local banks accountable for their role in aggravating climate change. Seeing that the path to a future that is cleaner seems to be blocked by the very leaders who must be taking us there, we may easily feel discouraged. But it is important to not lose hope in this fight. Our faith teaches us courage through the victorious stories of the small over the mighty. Through faith and hope, Noah survived the flood, David defeated Goliath, and Jesus triumphed over death. We too can rise from ever-growing climate problems and move the behemoths supporting fossil fuels.

For those of us who switched off our lights for Earth Hour, may we be reminded of the bigger reason behind our action. In the same way that we turned our lights off for our planet's future, our government and our banks must permanently switch coal off through concrete policies to divest and facilitate a complete transition to renewable energy. As stewards of Creation, we hope for a time when Earth Hour would no longer be necessary, when the use of fossil fuels has been eradicated, and clean energy from renewables would be the norm across the globe.





Shoppers pedal charge their gadgets at the Bike and Dine section of the SM City Marikina on March 26, 2021. The newly opened al fresco dining area of the mall is part of their commitment to a safe dining experience in accordance with the guidelines of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases.

The STAR/Miguel de Guzman

## Philippines sees 9,595 new COVID-19 infections; active cases at 118,122

(Philstar.com) - March 27, 2021 - 4:00pm

MANILA, Philippines — **(Updated 4:19 p.m.)** The Philippines on Saturday recorded 9,595 additional COVID-19 cases, bringing the total number of infections to 712,442.

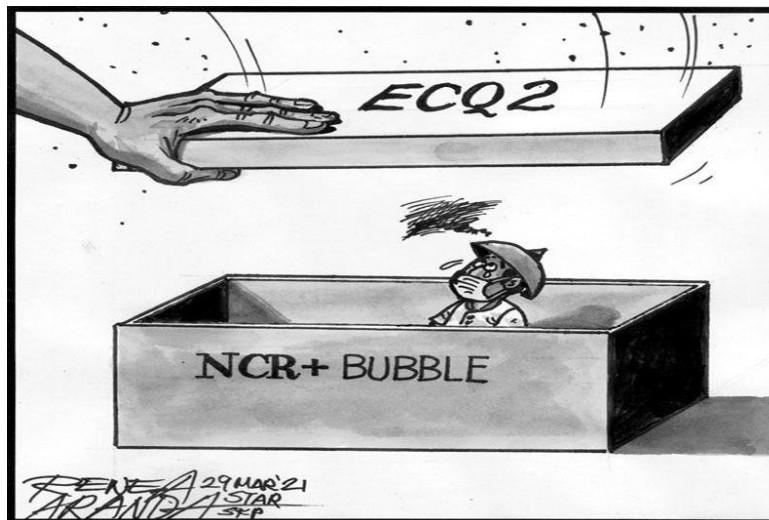
- Active cases: 118,122 or 16.6% of the total
- Recoveries: 481, pushing total to 581,161
- Deaths: 10, bringing total to 13,159

What's new today?

- This is the second day in a row that cases breached the 9,000-mark. Yesterday's 9,838 infections mark were the highest daily rise seen since since the onset of the pandemic.
- Active cases also reached new heights at 118,122 — now more than enough to fill the Philippine Arena — the world's largest indoor arena — twice. The positivity rate is at 16.2%
- St. Luke's Medical Center is [requiring](#) all patients and their companions to get tested for COVID-19 before admission starting Monday, March 29, due to the surge of coronavirus cases in the country.
- The Jesuit Residence in Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, was [placed on lockdown](#) after a priest who died Wednesday tested positive for COVID-19.
- The World Health Organization on Friday [called](#) on countries who are able to donate 10 million COVID-19 vaccine doses so that every country can start immunizing within the first 100 days of 2021, as cases rise worldwide.
- Acting Chief Justice Estela Perlas-Bernabe [extended](#) the physical closure of all courts in the NCR Plus bubble throughout the holy week. She added that all hearings in the same courts are temporarily suspended save for those which pertain to "urgent matters."

— **Bella Perez-Rubio with a report from Xave Gregorio**

Source: <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2021/03/27/2087393/philippines-sees-9595-new-covid-19-infections-active-cases-118122>



## EDITORIAL - Back to ECQ

(The Philippine Star) - March 29, 2021 - 12:00am

After rejecting proposals for a “circuit breaker lockdown” or a “one-time, big-time” two-week lockdown coinciding with the Holy Week break to stop the COVID surge, the government has reverted the National Capital Region and four adjacent provinces to the strictest enhanced community quarantine.

ECQ in the so-called “NCR-Plus bubble” begins today, dampening for the second straight year the observance of the traditional Holy Week rituals as all religious gatherings are completely banned. The ECQ, although slightly more relaxed than the original last year, dashed hopes of the battered travel industry and related enterprises in the hospitality sector for the start of business revival coinciding with the Holy Week break.

In imposing ECQ, the government is reportedly aiming for a 25 percent reduction in daily COVID cases, which stood at 9,586 last Saturday, bringing the total infections to 712,000 – the highest in the Western Pacific. There is a possibility that if the surge continues, the ECQ may be extended, with further tightening of restrictions.

This return to ECQ must prompt a review of the initial response to the spread of more infectious COVID variants. Even as several NCR mayors were calling it a surge and pointing out at the start of the month that the speed of infection was unusually rapid, the government insisted that the culprit was mainly lax compliance with the minimum health protocols, fueled in part by the arrival of COVID vaccines.

With the agonizingly slow vaccine rollout, it could take a year before inoculation targets are achieved for herd immunity. Meanwhile, the virus keeps mutating, with the variants showing varying degrees of virulence. Protocols need to be refined to contain highly infectious variants. Or else the country will find itself reverting over and over to the strictest ECQ.



## Taal records highest volcanic quakes at 302, on ‘elevated unrest’ – Phivolcs

By Arlie O. Calalo

March 28, 2021

SOME 302 volcanic earthquakes were recorded at Taal Volcano in the past 24 hours, the highest so far after it was placed at “elevated unrest,” following a series of tremor episodes more than a week ago.

Renato Solidum, chief of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs), confirmed with The Manila Times in a Viber message the current “persistent” activity of the volcano in Batangas province.

“Taal Volcano is at Alert Level 2, and if current activity would persist, this can lead to an eruption,” Solidum said.

In the past 24-hour period, the Taal Volcano Network (TVN) recorded 302 volcanic earthquakes, including 184 episodes of volcanic tremor, having the duration of one to 12 minutes and 118 low-frequency volcanic earthquakes.

“Although the energy associated with the events is lower than previous days, [seismicity] is not continuous and there is lull, there is a possibility of a magmatic eruption,” he added.

The TVN said the volcano is emitting at least 925 tons/day of volcanic gases, specifically sulfur dioxide.

Ground deformation parameters from electronic tilt and data analysis indicated a very slow and steady inflation and expansion of the Taal region ever since the January 2020 eruption, Phivolcs said.

These parameters may indicate increased magmatic activity at shallow depths beneath the edifice, the institute said.

When asked if another Big One is possible at Taal Volcano since it only erupted in January last year, the Phivolcs chief replied in the affirmative.

“It is possible to have eruptions after a year in Taal, and this was manifested after the 1965 eruption [in] Taal’s eruption history where there were eruptions in 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969 and 1970,” Solidum explained.

“Alert Level 2 is currently maintained over Taal Volcano, but that unrest has been elevating and is under constant evaluation,” he concluded.

Source: <https://www.manilatimes.net/2021/03/28/news/regions/taal-records-highest-volcanic-quakes-at-302-on-elevated-unrest-phivolcs/856308/>



# PH ready to defend sovereignty, marine resources: Lorenzana

By Priam Nepomuceno [March 28, 2021, 11:45 am](#)



Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana (File photo)

MANILA – Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Delfin Lorenzana assured the public that the government is ready to defend the sovereignty and protect the marine resources of the country.

"We are ready to defend our national sovereignty and protect the marine resources of the Philippines. There will be an increased presence of the Philippine Navy and Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) ships to conduct sovereignty patrols and protect our fishermen in the West Philippine Sea," he said in a statement late Saturday night.

Lorenzana also reiterated the country's call for the immediate withdrawal of Chinese vessels in the Julian Felipe Reef (Union Reefs) in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

"A Philippine Navy ship and a Philippine Coast Guard are currently in the area monitoring the actual situation there. The PAF (Philippine Air Force) deploys an element of AS-211 jet aircraft every day with the same mission. Our air and sea assets are ready to protect our sovereignty and sovereign rights in the WPS and KIG (Kalayaan Island Group)," he added.

He also said the DND is coordinating with other government agencies like the PCG and the Bureau of Aquatic and Fisheries Resources to coordinate its efforts in the WPS and the Kalayaan Island Group (municipality of Pag-asa).

"By securing the West Philippine Sea and its islands in the Kalayaan area, the Philippines reinforces its commitment to keeping the freedom of navigation and maintaining regional peace and stability," he added.

Last Thursday, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian has paid a "social call" on President Rodrigo Duterte and assured that the Philippines need not worry over the presence of Chinese vessels in the Julian Felipe reef that is within the country's exclusive economic zone.

During his meeting with Huang, Duterte raised concern over the reported sighting of Chinese ships, Roque said.

Roque added that Duterte had made it clear that he would protect the Philippines' sovereign rights in its maritime domain and uphold the country's historic win over the contested WPS.

"*Naging malinaw ang Presidente na siya ay Presidente at puprotektahan ang teritoryo ng Pilipinas* (The President has taken a firm stance that he is the President and he will protect the Philippine territory)," Roque said.

Huang, Roque said, echoed China's stance that the spotted Chinese boats off the Julian Felipe Reef in the WPS were merely taking shelter due to rough sea conditions.





The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on March 21 lodged a note verbale to protest the “unauthorized and lingering” presence of Chinese ships in and around Julian Felipe Reef.

The Philippine Coast Guard initially reported that around 220 Chinese fishing vessels, believed to be manned by Chinese maritime militia personnel, were sighted moored in line formation at the Julian Felipe Reef as early as March 7.

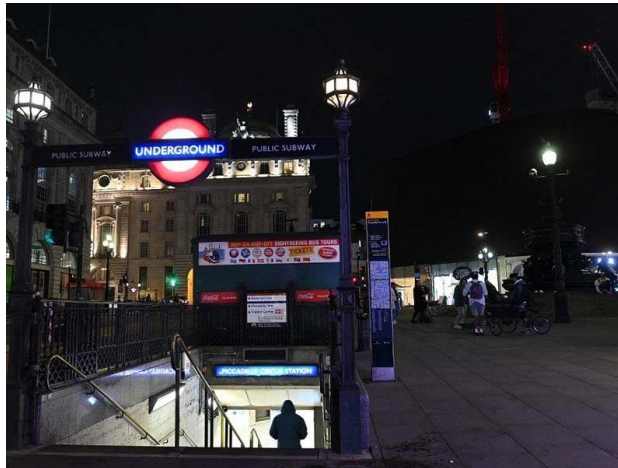
The Armed Forces of the Philippines confirmed on March 22 that around 183 Chinese vessels were sighted by a Philippine maritime air patrol in the area.

Julian Felipe Reef is a large boomerang-shaped, shallow coral reef at the northeast of Pagkakaisa Banks and Reefs (Union Reefs) located approximately 175 nautical miles west of Bataraza, Palawan.

China has overlapping claims with the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

On July 12, 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Netherlands ruled in favor of the Philippines’ petition against China’s supposedly historic rights over almost the entire disputed South China Sea.

China, however, has repeatedly refused to acknowledge the arbitral ruling. (PNA)



A picture taken on March 27, 2021 in central London shows London landmark the Piccadilly Circus advertising lights before being submerged into darkness for the Earth Hour environmental campaign.

JUSTIN TALLIS / AFP

## Cities worldwide dim lights to mark Earth Hour

(Agence France-Presse) - March 28, 2021 - 9:45am

PARIS — Cities around the world were turning off their lights Saturday for Earth Hour, with this year's event highlighting the link between the destruction of nature and increasing outbreaks of diseases like COVID-19.

In London, the Houses of Parliament, London Eye ferris wheel, Shard skyscraper and neon signs of Piccadilly Circus were among the landmarks flicking the switches.

"It's fantastic news that parliament once again is taking part in Earth Hour, joining landmarks across the country and the world to raise awareness of climate change," said Lindsay Hoyle, Speaker of the House of Commons.

"It shows our commitment to improving sustainability... and that we're playing our part in reducing energy consumption," he said.

In Paris, the three stages of the Eiffel Tower progressively went dark but there were few people to watch with the whole country under a 7 p.m. COVID-19 curfew.

The giant metal tower has been shut to the public since October 30, due to the pandemic.

In Rome, the lights went out at Rome's 2,000-year-old Colosseum, while police enforcing Italy's coronavirus movement restrictions checked the papers of a small crowd of onlookers.

### Harmful human activity

Asia had kicked off the event after night fell with the skylines of metropolises from Singapore to Hong Kong going dark, as did landmarks including Sydney Opera House.

The Brandenburg Gate in Berlin and Moscow's Kremlin on Red Square also joined the annual initiative that calls for action on climate change and the environment.

After Europe, Earth Hour moves west to the Americas with the Empire State Building in New York, the Obelisk of Buenos Aires and the Rio's Museum of Tomorrow among venues dimming the lights.

For this year organisers said they want to highlight the link between the destruction of the natural world and the increasing incidence of diseases — such as COVID-19 — making the leap from animals to humans.



Experts believe human activity such as widespread deforestation, destruction of animals' habitats and climate change are spurring this increase, and warn more pandemics could occur if nothing is done.

"Whether it is a decline in pollinators, fewer fish in the ocean and rivers, disappearing forests or the wider loss of biodiversity, the evidence is mounting that nature is in free fall," said Marco Lambertini, director general of the WWF, which organises Earth Hour.

"And this is because of the way we live our lives and run our economies.

"Protecting nature is our moral responsibility but losing it also increases our vulnerability to pandemics, accelerates climate change, and threatens our food security."

In Singapore, people at the waterfront watched as skyscrapers went dark and in a nearby park, Gardens by the Bay, a group of futuristic-looking tree sculptures had their lights turned off.

'Impact on environment'

Earth Hour is about "more than just saving energy, it's more like remembering our impact on the environment," Ian Tan, 18, told AFP at the park.

But he was not convinced the event, which has been running since 2007, made much of a difference.

"One hour is not enough for us to remember that climate change is actually a problem — I don't really see (Earth Hour) as very significant," he said.

In Hong Kong, people at viewing points above the city watched as lights were dimmed on hordes of closely packed skyscrapers, while in the South Korean capital Seoul, the historic Namdaemun gate went dark.

In Thailand, Bangkok's ultra-popular CentralWorld mall counted down to 8:30 pm before its exterior glass displays went dark for an hour — though inside, the shopping centre appeared to operate as usual.



## Cities dim lights to mark Earth Hour

By [Agence France-Presse](#)

March 29, 2021

**BUENOS AIRES:** From Singapore to Buenos Aires, cities around the world turned off their lights Saturday to mark Earth Hour, with this year's event highlighting the link between the destruction of nature and increasing outbreaks of diseases like Covid-19.

After starting in Asia, the call to action on climate change made its way around a planet reeling from the coronavirus pandemic.

As the day came to an end, it was the turn of the Americas, where the lights dimmed at the Obelisk in Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro's Museum of Tomorrow and the BBVA tower in Mexico City.

In London, the Houses of Parliament, London Eye Ferris wheel, Shard skyscraper and neon signs of Piccadilly Circus were among the landmarks flicking the switches.

"It's fantastic news that parliament once again is taking part in Earth Hour, joining landmarks across the country and the world to raise awareness of climate change," said Lindsay Hoyle, Speaker of the House of Commons.

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### Harmful human activity

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As the event crisscrossed time zones and continents, the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin and Moscow's Kremlin also joined the annual initiative.

This year, organizers said they wanted to highlight the link between the destruction of the natural world and the increasing incidence of diseases — such as Covid-19 — making the leap from animals to humans.

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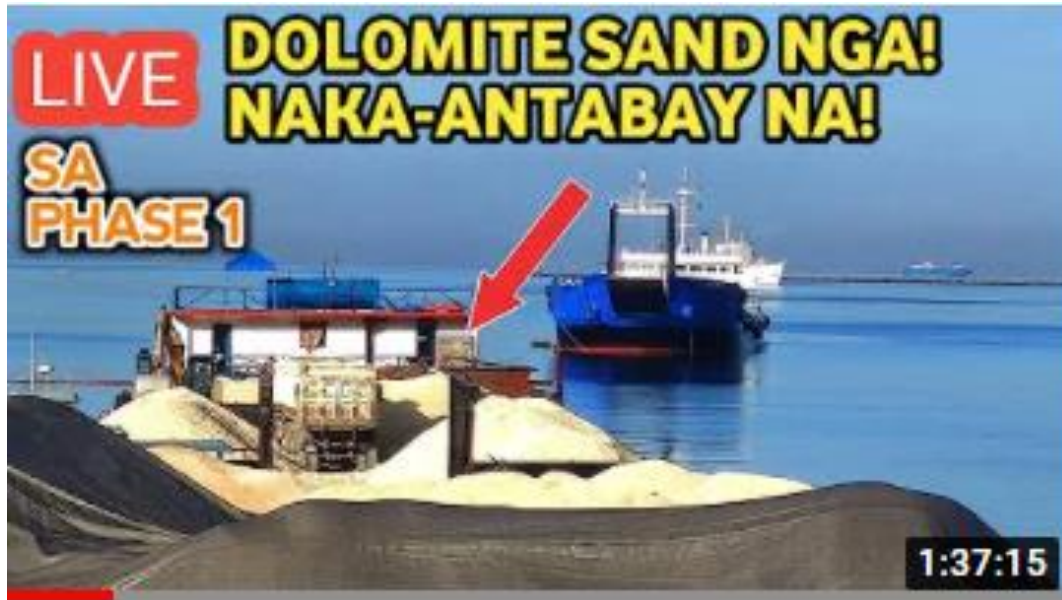
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
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 LAS PIÑAS-PARAÑAQUE CRITICAL HABITAT

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