



Earth Day marks need for collective efforts on solving crises

By Ma. Cristina Arayata **April 22, 2020, 7:18 pm**
<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1100699>



Image grabbed from DENR's Facebook page

MANILA – Every April 22, Earth Day is being observed to demonstrate support for environmental protection.

But with the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic plaguing millions of people around the world, collective action among countries and stakeholders is of paramount importance.

For the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Roy Cimatu, comprehensive and concerted action is a must.

In his Earth Day message shared on DENR's Facebook page, he said survival is at stake in both Covid-19 and climate change.

"The urgency of the need for concerted and comprehensive action, without waiting for the problem to peak or to impact millions more of people, is the same," he added.

With the Covid-19 pandemic, Cimatu said now is the perfect time for people to ponder the need for collective action.

"The damage from Covid-19 and climate change bring about destruction and chaos to any nation. On the one hand, with Covid-19, we are faced with an immediate gripping fear of losing more lives; on the other hand, with climate change, we are faced with rising sea levels, saline intrusion into aquifers, droughts, floods, and the results will impact billions of people, as well as biodiversity. However, with climate change, adaptation and mitigation responses are not as immediate because its impacts appear to be just merely creeping," his message read.

Cimatu noted that since the pandemic caused countries to implement lockdowns, the move resulted in clearer skies, more breathable air, cleaner seas, and more vibrant wildlife.

"For climate change mitigation and adaptation, our responses may be less drastic, as they generally require only lifestyle changes. But we must invest in and institute the necessary concerted reforms speedily and extensively before it becomes too late," he said.

Meanwhile, in an online correspondence with the Philippine News Agency (PNA), Greenpeace Philippines campaigner Virginia Benosa-Llorin said this year seems to be "doubly challenging" since people are not only facing an environmental crisis but are also confronted with the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We feel the impact of the pandemic, and we panic. I showed how our system is not prepared to deal with it. Climate change also poses a major threat to our health and survival, especially among the poor and the marginalized," she said.

Individually, she said, one may contribute by growing his/her own food, buying local produce, eating less meat and more vegetables, as well as by avoiding single-use plastics.

Benosa-Llorin added that the government should also prioritize renewable energy projects instead of focusing more on powerplants.

Burning fossil fuels, she said, is among the main drivers of climate change.

She said there is a need to make companies producing crude oil, natural gas, coal, cement, accountable for contributing to GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions, and climate change.

"We need to act together because taking action together brings more power. We need to talk more about climate change and help people understand it. More importantly, we need to take a bolder action as a community," she said. **(PNA)**



Air quality improves in Metro Cebu during ECQ

By: Futch Anthony Inso - CDN Digital Correspondent | April 24,2020 - 05:35 PM

<https://cebudailynews.inquirer.net/305092/air-quality-improves-in-metro-cebu-during-ecq>

CEBU CITY, Philippines – Amidst the implementation of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), the air quality in Metro Cebu area has improved based on the monitoring of the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB)-7.

The implementation of the ECQ has suspended public transport and limited the number of private vehicles plying the streets, reducing the number of air pollutants.

These are the reasons, the EMB-7 said, why the air quality in Metro Cebu has vastly improved.

Engr. Cindylyn Pepito, chief of EMB-7 Environmental Education and Information Unit, said that the Particulate Matter (PM)10 guideline value of air quality is at 150 micrograms per normal cubic meter.

PM10 describes inhalable particles, with diameters that are generally 10 micrometers and smaller.

Based on the agency's monitoring at their PMS Automatic Monitoring Station situated in Talisay City Hall, in the first quarter of this year, the pollutants in the air have been recorded at an average of 37.94 micrograms per normal cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$).

This is lower compared to 45.41 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in the same period of 2019 and 53.01 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2018. Further, the results at Talisay City station recorded a 31.29% drop in its results compared to the 37 reading before ECQ or equivalent to 25.42 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ during the ECQ implementation.

The agency's Total Suspended Particulates (TSP) Monitoring Station situated in I.T. Park, Cebu City, and Cordova Municipal Hall, also recorded a reduction of pollutants in the air during the ECQ.

Pepito explained that TSP is larger-sized dust particles compared to PM10, and are visible to the naked eye. From March 25 to April 19, the TSP monitoring station in I.T. Park has recorded a 72% drop in air pollutants while the station in Cordova recorded a 26% decrease. /rcg

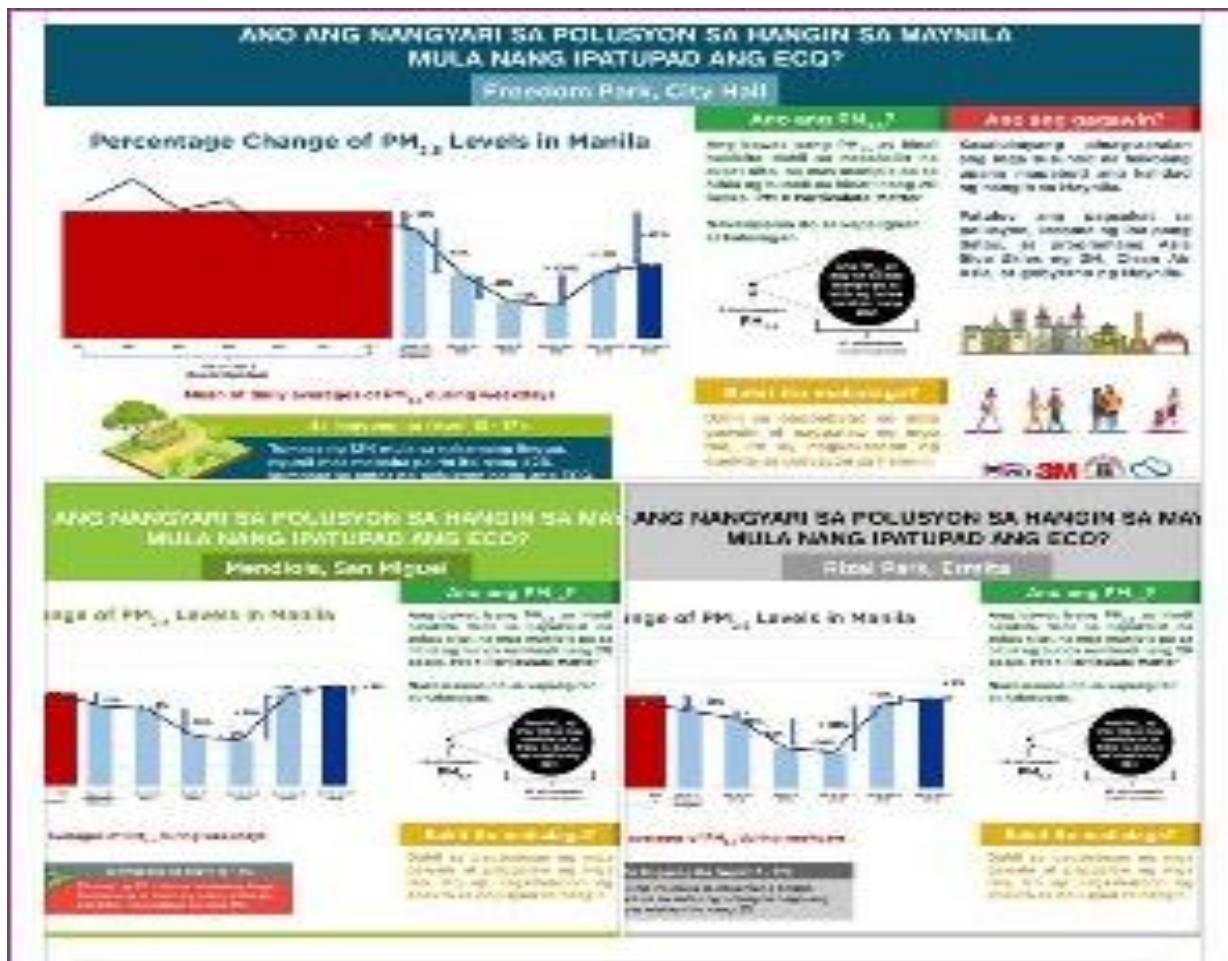


Air pollution levels in Manila's Freedom Park drop by 42% after ECQ

Published April 24, 2020 11:26pm

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/metro/735517/air-pollution-levels-in-manila-s-freedom-park-drop-by-42-after-ecq/story/>

The air pollution level at Freedom Park, Manila City Hall has dropped by more than 40 percent in comparison to levels before the implementation of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ).



According to the Manila PIO, based on the air quality monitoring performed under the Asia Blue Skies Program, officials found that PM2.5 (atmospheric particulate matter) levels dropped by 42 percent.

This week's data, however, is reportedly 12 percent higher compared to last week's data.

PM2.5 is a particulate matter, with an average size of 2.5 micrometers, which is bad for the environment and health.



Filipino team in Ethiopia develops pedal-operated hand-washer –DFA

Published April 24, 2020 10:36pm

By JOAHNA LEI CASILAO, GMA News

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/pinoyabroad/news/735510/filipino-team-in-ethiopia-develops-pedal-operated-hand-washer-dfa/story/>

A team of Filipino engineers and teachers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia developed a pedal-operated hand-washer that will help in preventing the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) announced Friday.

According to the DFA, the technology was widely praised in social media, with several city mayors ordering the device and having it installed in regional offices.



“We thank the Filipinos for this very good innovation. You don’t need to touch the water tap or soap dispenser, hence avoiding further contamination,” a user said.

The team developed two prototypes of the hand-washer, the first of which was used as the model for the production of 300 units which were installed around the capital.



Water firms told: No supply cut during ECQ

By Jordeene B. Lagare

April 25, 2020

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/04/25/news/top-stories/water-firms-told-no-supply-cut-during-ecq/718446/>

THE Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System-Regulatory Office (MWSS-RO) ordered the country's two water concessionaires not to disconnect supply to their customers for the duration of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ).

MWSS-RO chief regulator Patrick Lester Ty told The Manila Times that letters were sent on Friday to the Manila Water Co. Inc. and Maynilad Water Services Inc., telling them that there should be "no disconnections during the entire ECQ, so if the ECQ will last until June, no disconnections up to that period because of public health."

"[Our] priority is the public health that there should be water, so, people could wash their hands and disinfect or clean their surroundings to prevent the spread," he said.

The World Health Organization and the country's Department of Health said one of the best ways to protect oneself against the coronavirus was the frequent washing of hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Manila Water and Maynilad suspended disconnection activities to ensure access to uninterrupted water supply, as well as keep their customers safe and protected through proper hygiene. Meter reading and bill delivery were also deferred.

Both concessionaires announced last month a 30-day extension for payment of water bills whose due dates fell within the Luzon-wide lockdown, but said customers who intend to settle their accounts could do so through online payment channels.

The National Water Resources Board (NWRB), this week, maintained the raw water allocation to the MWSS at 46 cubic meters per second until June to support the ongoing fight against the pandemic.

The NWRB assured that water in Angat Dam was sustainable until the rainy season.

"With Pagasa (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration) rainfall projection indicating near normal rainfall condition until September, the water level in Angat Dam is projected not to reach below the minimum operating level of 180 meters despite the full allocation to MWSS and the releases for irrigation in its wet cropping season come June," it said.

Manila Water and Maynilad had a 60-40 water sharing agreement before it was scrapped. The MWSS-RO directed Manila Water to share its supply with Maynilad to ease the West Zone concessionaire's shortage problem.

"Some of it (Manila Water's share) were diverted to Maynilad in order to reduce the water interruptions in Maynilad because Manila Water right now is providing 24/7 water already," Ty said.

He added that Maynilad's water rotation was significantly reduced since the reallocation, which started last week.

In a message, Maynilad corporate communications head Jennifer Rufo said both Manila Water and Maynilad forged an agreement wherein they would receive a daily raw water supply of 2,280 million liters per day (MLD), lower than its normal share of 2,350 MLD.

"Maynilad's normal share is 2,350 MLD, so the 2,280 MLD we're asking for is still less than normal. Nevertheless, because of our other internal interventions (e.g., additional water from Laguna Lake, pressure management, etc.), the 2,280 MLD is enough for us to bring water supply to our customers back to normal levels," she added.



BINAGONG MGA PATAKARAN VS COVID-19 ALAMIN

Ni BENNY ANTIPODA

April 24, 2020 @ 3:10 PM 15 hours ago

<https://remate.ph/binagong-mga-patakarang-vs-covid-19-alamina/>

NAGKAROON na ng pagbabago ukol sa mga patakarang laban sa Coronavirus Disease-19.

Halimbawa, para sa buong Pilipinas, dalawang uri na ang community quarantine.

Isa ang Enhanced Community Quarantine, at iba ang General Community Quarantine.

Ang ECQ ay umiiral ngayon habang magsisimulang pairalin ang GCQ sa Mayo 1, 2020.

KARAMPATANG AKSYON

Hindi tatanggalin kundi palalawigin pa ang ECQ hanggang Mayo 15, 2020 sa mga lugar na high risk o matindi ang pagsalakay ng COVID-19 at sakop nito ang buong Metro Manila, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Benguet at iba pa.

Sa ECQ, nariryan ang stay at home, lockdown, travel ban sa pribado at pampublikong sasakyan, curfew na 24 oras o 8pm hanggang 5am.

Sa GCQ, luluwag ang pagbubukas ng mga tindahan, pangingsda, pagsasaka, pagtatrabaho sa konstruksyon at iba pa.

Mas mahirap mapailalim sa ECQ at dito nangangailangan ang mga mamamayan ng ayuda sa pagkain at iba pang batayang pangangailangan.

Sa GCQ, makapaghahanapbuhay na kahit papaano ang maraming mamamayan at may lugar nang pupwedeng payagan ang pagbiyahe ng mga pampublikong sasakyan.

Pero may mga istriktong ipatutupad pa rin gaya ng paggamit ng face mask sa mga pampublikong lugar, social distancing maging sa loob ng mga sasakyan at iba pa.

MAKIBALITA

Para maging malinaw sa lahat ang ukol dito, may hawak ng dokumento ang mga rehiyon at lokal na pamahalaan ukol sa mga bagong patakarang.

Isa nga sa nilalaman ang awtomatik na pagbaba sa kalagayang GCQ ang wala sa listahan ng ECQ ang isang lugar.

Halimbawa, may nagsasabing pupwede nang isalilalim sa GCQ ang La Union, Ilocos Sur at Ilocos Norte.

Gayunding ang mga lalawigan sa Cagayan Valley.

Bahala nang magpaliwanag ang mga panrehiyon o lokal na awtoridad dito.

Makibalita na lamang po tayong mga nasa barangay mula kina kapitan, mayor at iba pang lokal na opisyal.

TUNGKULIN NATIN

Maaaring may mga mamamayan na magwala pagdating ng panahon na ilalatag ang GCQ.

Sa GCQ kasi, hindi katulad sa ECQ, pupwede nang lumabas ng bahay at lalayo ang mga mamamayang may edad na 21 pataas at bago mag-60.

'Yun bang === bawal ang mas mababa ang edad sa 21 at nakaabot na sa edad ng senior citizen.

Hindi tayong magwala dahil kailangan pa ring mantinihin ang minimum na pag-iingat laban sa sakit.



BINAGONG MGA PATAKARAN VS COVID-19 ALAMIN

Magsuot pa rin lagi ng face mask, pairalin ang social distancing, laging maghugas ng kamay, magbantay sa sintomas ng COVID-19 at iba pa.

Ibig sabihin natin, mga Bro, may tungkulin pa rin tayong gagampanan para sa ating mga sarili para rin sa proteksyon ng iba pa.

Kung ano ang disiplina sa kalusugan sa ilalim ng ECQ, gayundin sa GCQ.

PANGALAWANG ATAKE

Ang inihiwasan nating lahat sa GCQ ay ang pupwedeng pagbalik ng COVID-19.

Dahil marami na ang pupwedeng lumabas, posible na darami rin ang mahawa na sana'y hindi mangyari.

Nagaganap ang muling pagsalakay ng Covid-19 sa mga bansang nagrelaks ng kanilang lalban gaya ng Singapore, Japan at China.

Ayaw nating mangyari ito.

Kaya nga, tungkulin nating magtulungan lahat laban sa sakit na ito.

Ang pagpapairal ng minimum na pag-iingat ay labis na pairalin ng lahat.

Kung nasa ilalim tayo ng ECQ at GCQ, pare-pareho ang tungkulin nating mag-ingat at sumama sa lahat ng programa ng pamahalaan laban sa sakit.



ECQ in Metro until May 15

[Christina Mendez](#) (The Philippine Star

) - April 25, 2020 - 12:00am

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/04/25/2009671/ecq-metro-until-may-15>

Metro Manila and several other regions in Luzon and the Visayas deemed “high risk” for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) contagion will remain under enhanced community quarantine until May 15 as Malacañang has decided to extend the original April 30 deadline of the ECQ, citing the need to protect lives.

President Duterte announced the extension in a taped address aired over state-run PTV-4 yesterday morning, as the Luzon-wide ECQ entered its 40th day.

He said his decision was based on the recommendation of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases under Resolution No. 28. The IATF came up with the recommendation after discussions with experts from the health and economic sectors.

“I cannot guarantee – or anybody else for that matter at this table – na hindi tatamaan (that they will not contract the disease). We are all at risk. But do not increase the odds or the chances of getting it,” Duterte said.

He said areas considered “high-risk” will remain under ECQ after April 30, while those deemed “moderate to low risk” by the health and economic authorities may resume operations provided they maintain minimum health standards.

Aside from the National Capital Region (NCR) or Metro Manila, provinces that will remain under ECQ are Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon or Calabarzon; Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Oriental Mindoro, Occidental Mindoro, Albay, Catanduanes, Aklan and Capiz.

Provinces classified under extension, but still subject to further review, are Benguet, Pangasinan, Tarlac, Zambales, Antique, Iloilo, Cebu including Cebu City, Davao del Norte and Davao de Oro as well as Davao City.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque Jr. said the government will review the situation in the ECQ areas by May 16 to determine if there will be a need for re-classification or retention of current quarantine procedures.

“All other provinces not included in the list and where ECQ is not extended will be placed under the new normal, dubbed as general community quarantine,” said Roque, who was with Duterte when the latter made his public address.

The IATF has classified areas in the country as under either ECQ or general community quarantine (GCQ). The IATF based the classification on the levels of infection, fast doubling time of cases and medical response capabilities.

High-risk areas will be under ECQ until May 15, subject to further evaluation. Moderate-risk areas, meanwhile, will be under GCQ starting May 1, also subject to further evaluation. Low-risk areas will fall under GCQ starting May 1 – and if there is no deterioration – their status will be relaxed to normalization starting May 16.

Duterte also approved the task force’s recommendation for the implementation of a set of minimum health standards starting April 27 or what is described as the “new normal.”

The departments of Health (DOH), Transportation, Trade and Industry, Labor and Employment, and Public Works and Highways (DPWH) will come out with guidelines for new quarantine setup by April 25.

Areas that shift from ECQ to GCQ starting May 1 will allow workers to go out and work in phases. Young people, senior citizens and those with high health risk would have to stay home.

For GCQ areas, restricted mall opening covering non-leisure shops would be allowed. There will be mandatory temperature check, mandatory wearing of face masks and mandatory alcohol use. Limited number of people, particularly those aged 21 to 59, with ID and not looking sickly, would be allowed to go inside establishments.

Interior Secretary and IATF vice chairman Eduardo Año warned local officials against unilaterally declaring their areas as under ECQ, saying doing so without getting cleared by the task force would complicate or compromise the distribution of social amelioration programs for the most affected sectors.

“Since this is the new normal, the LGUs will really be at the forefront in the fight against the disease,” he said.

Año also stressed LGUs should be prepared for reintegration of patients to communities after getting treatment.



ECQ in Metro until May 15

In his address, the President ordered the gradual resumption of commercial and industrial activities in areas classified under GCQ or those with moderate-to-low risk threat of COVID-19.

Industries that may fully operate are agriculture, fishery, forestry, food manufacturing and its entire supply chain (including ink, packaging, raw materials); food retail (supermarket, market restaurant for takeout and delivery only); health care (hospitals, clinics, drugstores); logistics, water, energy, internet, telecoms and media.

Fifty percent to 100 percent resumption of work under GCQ would be allowed for manufacturing, like electronics and exports; e-commerce and delivery services for essential and non-essential items; repair and maintenance services; housing and office services.

Those considered for 50 percent on-site work and 50 percent operations from home include financial services, BPO, selected non-leisure wholesale and retail trade; and other non-leisure services.

According to officials, schools, leisure, gaming, amusement, fitness, 'kid' industry, tourism, as well as all gatherings, including religious and business conferences, will remain prohibited under the GCQ.

Malls catering to essential services will be allowed operation on a limited basis. Construction projects will also be subject to limitations.

Regular commercial flights of Philippine Airlines and Cebu Pacific will remain suspended after April 30, their spokespersons said.

IATF chief implementor Carlito Galvez Jr. said there is a need to continue the ECQ in Metro Manila, it being the epicenter of COVID-19 in the country.

"The epicenter of COVID-19 is really in MM. I hope the trend will improve in the near future, that is why we are working to improve the testing and the capacity of Metro Manila," Galvez said.

The classification was based on the recorded high level of infection and the fast doubling time of cases in NCR, as well as in Regions 3 and 4.

New cases, high rate of death, capacity of hospital to cope with the increasing cases of COVID-19 were among the major reasons why the ECQ is extended in the areas, Galvez said.

COVID-free

Health Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire reported that 26 provinces have not yet been penetrated by COVID-19.

"Based on our latest data, there are 26 provinces that have not reported COVID-19. We are still studying the reasons for this but you will observe that many of them are geographically isolated," she noted.

Vergeire added that some of the provinces in the list are islands or in an island like Siquijor, Dinagat, Batanes, Basilan and Sulu.

The other provinces are Agusan del Sur, Apayao, Aurora, Billiran, Camarines Norte, Camarines Norte, Davao Occidental, Eastern Samar, Guimaras, Ifugao, Kalinga, Masbate, Mountain Province, Quirino, Sarangani, Sorsogon, Southern Leyte, Surigao del Norte, Surigao del Sur, Tawi-Tawi, Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga Sibugay.

She also said the "doubling time" of cases and the critical care utilization rate in NCR are still "in the red."

Data from the DOH showed that the "doubling time" of cases has risen to 14 days or from 3,000 cases in April 5 to April 19 – instead of April 9. However, this is still lower than the ideal rate.

According to Vergeire, critical care utilization rate of ICU rooms in NCR is "nearing the maximum."

She added when more people get infected with COVID-19, the health system may be "overwhelmed."

The official gave assurance that while the government can no longer construct new hospitals, there will be "rational processes" wherein some healthcare facilities will be designated for COVID-19 patients, especially those critically ill.

Vergeire said that to augment the workforce, the government has implemented emergency hiring of health personnel now set for deployment to COVID-19 centers in NCR.

Meanwhile, the Philippine National Police said there will be more work ahead despite the easing of quarantine in some areas in Luzon by the end of the month.

"Work will be harder for us in the security sector because there will be more exemptions – and once transport and establishments reopen, there will be more people to check," Lt. Gen. Guillermo Eleazar, commander of the Joint Task Force COVID Shield, said in an interview with radio dzBB.- Sheila Crisostomo, Romina Cabrera, Richmond Mercurio, Rudy Santos



President backs Go's Balik-Probinsya program

April 24, 2020 10:30 AM

By **Keith A. Calayag**

<https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/04/24/president-backs-gos-balik-probinsya-program/>



SENATOR Christopher Lawrence "Bong" Go's proposal aims to unclog population centers by enticing people to the countryside.

President Rodrigo Duterte is backing the "Balik-Probinsya" proposal of Senator Christopher "Bong" Go for the government to provide incentives and livelihood assistance to those in Metro Manila who may want to go back to their provinces once the community quarantine is lifted.

During a televised meeting of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases on Friday, the President lauded the proposal which Go himself delivered during the meeting.

"What you would give them is hope. *Importante yan e — yung* that if they go there some of them might really leave the city of Manila with a heavy heart but we have to provide the transportation *at sabihin natin* if you go back *ganito ganito*."

"What is really very important is we give them hope," the President said.

Go's proposal aims to decongest Metro Manila as he said that the lack of urban planning and rural development is one of the factors why COVID-19 cases is spreading fast in the capital.

"As soon as the ECQ is lifted and travel is gradually normalize, the government must encourage Filipino families to move out of Manila and other metropolitan areas."

"LGUs (Local Government Units) must also ensure that necessary quarantine measures and mass testing for COVID-19 are in place to prevent those possibly infected from spreading the disease," Go said.

Under Go's proposal, the government will shoulder the transportation of families who would want to be relocated to provinces. They should also be livelihood assistance.

The Senator, who is from Mindanao believes the implementation of the program would result to a more efficient delivery of public goods and services that can benefit all regions.

Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez also expressed his support to the program. He suggested that the government provide starting fund for those who would want to start small businesses outside of Metro Manila.



Solon pushes for creation of epidemic management body

By Filane Mikee Cervantes April 24, 2020, 6:17 pm

<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1100939>



Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Alfredo Garbin

MANILA – A party-list lawmaker on Friday proposed the creation of an Epidemic Management Commission (EMC) to primarily deal with the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic and epidemic-preparedness in the future.

In a statement, Ako Bicol Party-list Rep. Alfredo Garbin said the country needs a permanent body that will not only serve as the “institutional memory of our collective experience on the coronavirus”, but shall also have the mission to provide better defenses and countermeasures against lingering Covid-19 effects and future epidemics.

“As early as now, we need an exit strategy. The IATF (Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases) is an ad hoc body, busy with day-to-day matters. For the years ahead, we need this commission as a permanent structure,” Garbin said.

Garbin said the EMC can be initially created through an executive order, and Congress can institutionalize it with a bill containing its formal charter.

He noted that the EMC should have its own epidemiology and quarantine unit, a governing body like the IATF, and coordination authority over the network of molecular and microbiology laboratories nationwide.

“What I also have in mind for future epidemics are molecular laboratories that are mobile quick deploy units, perhaps in the form of a small fleet of hospital ships manned by a corps of highly-trained health professionals,” he said.

“These ships can be built at the shipyard in Bataan. With these hospital ships, we can respond to outbreaks and epidemics in the most remote areas of our country,” he added.

He said the EMC could be temporarily attached to the Office of the President for administrative and budget purposes, noting that it can be transferred to the Department of Disaster Resilience once the latter is operational.

As of Friday, the confirmed Covid-19 cases in the country breached the 7,000th-mark with a total of 7,192.

(PNA)



PH joins Asean-US Special Foreign Ministers meet on Covid-19

April 24, 2020, 7:52 am

<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1100834>



ASEAN-US SPECIAL FOREIGN MINISTER'S MEETING. Department of Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. delivers his intervention at the Asean-US Special Foreign Minister's Meeting on Covid-19, held via videoconference, on April 23, 2020. The meeting discussed harnessing the strategic partnership between Asean and the US to fight the pandemic and start envisioning plans for a post-pandemic recovery. (Photo courtesy of DFA)

MANILA – Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr., along with his fellow foreign ministers in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and United States Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, convened Thursday an Asean-US Special Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) by videoconference.

At the meeting, Pompeo reaffirmed the US' commitment to the region by using all available tools to minimize the economic and social damage from the pandemic and to restore global growth.

He announced the release of more than USD35.3 million (approximately PHP1.78 billion) in emergency health funding to help Asean, on top of the USD3.5 billion (approximately PHP177.25 billion) in public health assistance given to Asean over the last 20 years.

He also introduced the new US-Asean Health Futures initiative to enhance joint efforts in health security. A major focus of the initiative will be the training of the next generation of Asean medical professionals.

With many of their countries enforcing community quarantine policies, the foreign ministers discussed the expansion of Asean-US cooperation to manage the socio-economic impact of the pandemic and to plan for future recovery.

They also reaffirmed their collective resolve to prioritize strengthening their public health systems to provide ample care for their peoples, ensuring the stable supply and reliable flow of essential goods and services, and cooperating in research and development of vaccine and therapeutics.

Locsin spoke on the importance to the Philippines of strengthening its healthcare system through increased production and supply of medicines, medical equipment, and other medical supplies; ensuring food security by keeping Asean markets open; and safeguarding supply chain connectivity for staples such as rice; and the speedy research and development of vaccines and cures without which the world cannot prevail over the virus.

Locsin underscored Filipino health care workers as the core of health care systems, including Filipino-American front-liners risking their lives in the US.

He conveyed his hope for the US to continue protecting them and remember their contributions as the US crafts its immigration policy in light of Covid-19.

The foreign ministers also noted concerns expressed over recent developments in the South China Sea that increased tensions at a time when all efforts and resources are focused on battling the pandemic. They recognized the importance of contributing to the maintenance of peace, security, stability, and the rule of law in the region amid the fight against Covid-19.

"This is essential at a time when countries must not only navigate the Covid crisis but must also prepare a post-pandemic plan of social and economic recovery," Locsin said.

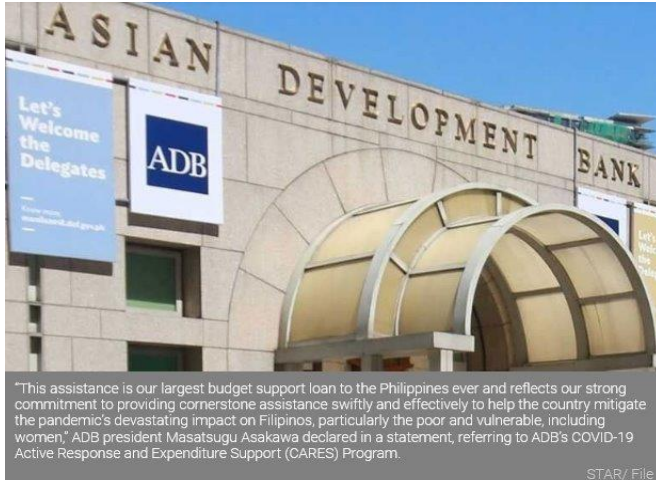
"In Asia, that recovery hinges on China's recovery from the ravages of the pandemic; but it can never be at the price of our honor and sovereignty," he added.

The videoconference forms part of a series of meetings aimed at strengthening Asean-US international cooperation in addressing Covid-19. **(DFA PR)**



Philippines, ADB sign \$1.5 billion loan vs COVID

[Czeriza Valencia](#) (The Philippine Star)
) - April 25, 2020 - 12:00am



"This assistance is our largest budget support loan to the Philippines ever and reflects our strong commitment to providing cornerstone assistance swiftly and effectively to help the country mitigate the pandemic's devastating impact on Filipinos, particularly the poor and vulnerable, including women," ADB president Masatsugu Asakawa declared in a statement, referring to ADB's COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support (CARES) Program.

STAR/ File

MANILA, Philippines — The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has announced its approval of a \$1.5-billion loan to help the Philippines fund its coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) response program and strengthen the country's healthcare system.

"This assistance is our largest budget support loan to the Philippines ever and reflects our strong commitment to providing cornerstone assistance swiftly and effectively to help the country mitigate the pandemic's devastating impact on Filipinos, particularly the poor and vulnerable, including women," ADB president Masatsugu Asakawa declared in a statement, referring to ADB's COVID-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support (CARES) Program.

"Amid a global pandemic, the most vulnerable are developing countries, especially those with densely populated cities such as the Philippines," Asakawa said.

"We commend the government for its leadership and clear actions in containing the spread of COVID-19, including scaling up its health response, enforcing an enhanced community quarantine in Luzon to save lives, and rolling out subsidy programs to affected segments of the population."

ADB noted that Philippines was among the first batch of countries to implement strict social distancing measures through its Luzon-wide enhanced community quarantine when it temporarily shuttered schools, government and private businesses in the country's main island.

"We thank the ADB under the leadership of president Masatsugu Asakawa for swiftly responding to the Philippines' call for funding support in this time of crisis. We thank the Bank as well for streamlining its operations to quickly deliver its assistance and for tripling the size of its response package from \$6.5 billion to \$20 billion to help developing member countries combat COVID-19," Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez said.

The new financing is part of ADB's \$20 billion expanded assistance for developing member countries' COVID-19 response, which was announced on April 13.

It also builds on the \$5-million grant approved for the Philippines on March 18 to deliver nutritious food baskets to up to 140,000 vulnerable households in Metro Manila and neighboring areas, in collaboration with the government and private sector.

— With Mary Grace Padin

On March 13, ADB also approved a \$3-million grant to help the Philippine government purchase emergency medical supplies and set up a new laboratory that will increase the country's COVID-19 testing capacity by 3,000 tests per day.

The new laboratory is expected to be fully functional by mid-May.

The new laboratory, to be set up inside the Jose B. Lingad Memorial Regional Hospital in San Fernando City, Pampanga, is expected to increase the country's testing capacity by 3,000 tests per day.

In a virtual media conference yesterday, ADB country director Kelly Bird said ADB and the Department of Health contracted China-based BGI to supply the equipment. This firm also provided supplies and equipment to the Chinese government during the lockdown in Wuhan.



Gov't assures consumers of enough food supply

By: [Karl R. Ocampo](#) - [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 04:24 AM April 25, 2020

<https://business.inquirer.net/295683/govt-assures-consumers-of-enough-food-supply>

The country's agriculture chief has assured consumers that the extension of the lockdown in the country would not affect food supply, noting that current inventories of basic food items were more than enough to cover demand the remainder of this year.

The problem is how to bring these commodities to areas that need them the most as food positioning must keep up with the mounting supplies of items such as poultry and vegetables before prices slump.

Except for the supply of pork that is enough to last until the middle of November this year, Agriculture Secretary William Dar reported that the excess rice supply for this year can still cover demand for 94 days into 2021; corn, up to 234 days; fish, for two days; vegetables, for six days, and chicken, up to 253 days.

Commercial hog raisers said there is an oversupply of pork in Visayas and Mindanao where cold-storage facilities were brimming with pork, which needed to be repositioned to meet demand in Metro Manila and other parts of Luzon.

For now, Dar said importation remained out of the question except for rice, which is also the only commodity with prices rising steadily.

The secretary added that the agency was working hard to sustain food security under the "new normal" in agriculture, wherein demand has been slowed down by the temporary closures and limited operations of industries that offer a ready market to local farmers and fisherfolk.

To address the glut in poultry, Dar said they have given grants to cooperatives that would like to engage in agribusiness so that they may directly sell their produce to consumers.

Agriculture Assistant Secretary Kristine Evangelista, who also heads the agency's Kadiwa program, said that the challenge now was to boost local consumption of local produce so that surplus projections would not bring prices of agricultural commodities downward.

In remote areas, prices of fish have already gone down by more than half, while the average price of live broilers—or chickens raised for meat—was still below production cost.

Agricultural operations are expected to ease further following the Inter-Agency Task Force's approval to fully reopen the sector as recommended by the DA.

Dar said this could finally jumpstart the Plant, Plant, Plant program, which would provide stakeholders logistics and technical support by offering free seeds and fertilizers, among others.



R&D on virgin coconut oil as anti-virus gets approval

April 25, 2020 - 12:00am

[Ranier Allan Ronda](#)

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/04/25/2009640/rd-virgin-coconut-oil-anti-virus-gets-approval>



MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Science and Technology (DOST) has gotten an ethics committee approval for a study on the efficacy of virgin coconut oil (VCO) as a food supplement to help fight coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Science Secretary Fortunato dela Peña said the approval given by the ethics committee convened by the DOST Food and Nutrition Research Institute (FNRI) paved the way for the first stage to conduct three parallel VCO studies by the agency.

“We can now proceed with the organizational aspects, including the randomized selection of patients who are willing to participate in the trials. We hope to get results at the fastest in 28 days,” Dela Peña told The STAR.

“This is an important study as far as we are concerned because VCO is something available locally. It can also be the start of similar studies involving other therapies,” Dela Peña said.

An ethics committee review is required for clinical trials, he said.

“All researches which involve living subjects require ethics clearance. Even for animal trials. More so for humans,” the DOST chief said.

The VCO study that has gotten the ethics committee clearance is that of the FNRI research and development on VCO as a food supplement, done in collaboration with the DOST-Calabarzon and Mayor Arlene Arcillas-Nazareno of Santa Rosa, Laguna.

Alexander Madrigal, DOST-Calabarzon regional director, said the ethics committee review and approval had outlined all the ethical requirements and health issues to be addressed during the conduct of the nutritional study on VCO.

“This is a modified clinical study, nearly like a regular clinical trial, but this one leads toward approval as a food supplement,” Madrigal told The STAR.

If it clears the modified clinical trial, Madrigal explained that there can be therapeutic claims made for VCO.

Madrigal said the FNRI, DOST-Calabarzon, Santa Rosa, Laguna government and Medical City South Luzon collaboration for the VCO study will involve 90 persons under investigation for COVID-19 infection who exhibit symptoms of the virus.

The DOST has provided P5 million for the VCO study.

The DOST is also funding other R&D on VCO as a COVID-19 cure being pursued by other groups such as that of professor Fabian Antonio Dayrit of Ateneo de Manila University.

Dayrit in partnership with Duke University-National University of Singapore is testing coconut oil’s ability to diminish or prevent infection of SARS-CoV2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

The other DOST-supported study on VCO is the hospital-based study by the University of the Philippines-Philippine General Hospital titled “Virgin Coconut Oil and Omega-3a Adjunctive Therapy for Hospitalized Patients with COVID 19” that will be headed by Dr. Marissa Alejandria, president of the Philippine Society for Microbiology and Infectious Diseases.

This study will involve the serving of VCO as a supplement to the daily treatment regimen of COVID-19 positive patients at PGH.

The study aims to assess the possible benefits of VCO if given to patients with moderate to severe COVID-19 in addition to the drugs being assessed in clinical trials.



Pandemic delays off-grid solar project

By Jordeene B. Lagare

April 25, 2020

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/04/25/business/green-business/pandemic-delays-off-grid-solar-project/718535/>

THE P153-million solar project in rural areas supposedly to be completed within this year, has hit a snag as the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic stalled the delivery of solar panels from China, the National Electrification Administration (NEA) said on Wednesday.

In a statement, the NEA Total Electrification and Renewable Energy Development Department (TEREDD) said the solar photovoltaic (PV) mainstreaming project suffered a setback due to the delay in the delivery of solar panels.

“The competitive bidding process and the awarding of contracts to the successful bidders have already been completed. We are just awaiting delivery of solar panels, which will be coming from China,” Ernesto Silvano Jr., acting manager of the NEA-TEREDD, said.

Silvano explained the off-grid solar project, under the agency’s Expanded Household Electrification Program, aims to provide electricity “to most dispersed and isolated households that are deemed unviable for grid connection in the next five years.”

The NEA has allotted P153 million to undertake the PV mainstreaming project which would benefit 5,000 households within the coverage areas of five electric cooperatives.

These are Busuanga Island Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Biselco); Camarines Sur IV Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Casureco IV); Iloilo III Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Ileco III); Cotabato Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Cotelco); and Zamboanga del Norte Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Zaneco).

Some 5,039 solar home system (SHD) units are to be distributed and installed in rural communities.

Of the total number, Biselco will receive 1,200 SHS units; Cotelco, 1,063 units; Zaneco, 967 units; Ileco III, 931 units; and Casureco IV, 878 SHS units.

Since March 17, the entire Luzon has been placed under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) as part of efforts to fight Covid-19 that first emerged in Wuhan in China’s central Hubei province last December.

To alleviate the impact of the ECQ and lockdowns, power co-ops will provide subsidy for electricity consumers with consumption of less than 50 kilowatts per hour, meaning they would no longer pay their March and April bills, under the Pantawid Liwanag program.

The agency has allowed all 121 ECs nationwide to secure short-term loans from banks to mitigate the economic repercussions from Covid-19.



Climate activists take global protest online during pandemic

08:23 PM April 24, 2020

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1264344/climate-activists-take-global-protest-online-during-pandemic>



Luisa Neubauer of Fridays for Future movement lays out protest posters for climate protection in front of the German parliament building the Reichstag in Berlin, Germany, Friday, April 24, 2020. Because of the continuing spread of the coronavirus, the climate strike will be digitally distributed on the Internet. (Kay Nietfeld/dpa via AP)

BERLIN — Youth groups staged Friday a long-planned global climate demonstration online because of restrictions on public protests during the coronavirus pandemic.

The student group Fridays for Future, whose past rallies have drawn hundreds of thousands onto the streets worldwide, is using a live stream to call on world leaders to act against global warming.

Some groups have found creative ways to stage very limited demonstrations despite the lockdown. In Berlin, activists placed thousands of protest placards in front of the German parliament.

Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, 17, the most prominent face of the youth climate movement, said Wednesday during an online Earth Day event that the climate crisis “may not be as immediate as the corona crisis but we need to tackle this now, otherwise, it will be irreversible.”



Falling carbon emissions won't halt climate change

April 25, 2020 03:00 AM

By **TDT**

<https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/04/25/falling-carbon-emissions-wont-halt-climate-change/>



The World Meteorological Organization says above average temperatures are expected in many parts of the world in the first months of 2020.

An expected drop in greenhouse gas emissions linked to the global economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is only “short-term good news,” the head of the United Nations (UN) weather agency said.

“This drop of emissions of six percent, that’s unfortunately (only) short-term good news,” said Professor Petteri Taalas, World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Secretary-General, in reference to a 5.5 to 5.7 percent fall in levels of carbon dioxide due to the pandemic, that have been flagged by leading climate experts, including the Center for International Climate Research.

Once the global economy begins to recover from the new coronavirus, WMO expects emissions to return to normal.

“There might even be a boost in emissions because some of the industries have been stopped,” the WMO head cautioned.

Latest data from WMO published to coincide with the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, on 22 April, indicates that carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere rose to new records last year.

Levels of carbon dioxide were 18 percent higher from 2015 to 2019 than the previous five years, according to WMO’s Global Climate 2015-2019 report.

The gas “remains in the atmosphere and oceans for centuries. This means that the world is committed to continued climate change regardless of any temporary fall in emissions due to the Coronavirus epidemic,” the report states, with data indicating that CO₂ concentrations are on track “to reach or even exceed 410 ppm by the end of 2019.”



Sunlight destroys coronavirus quickly, says US agency

April 24, 2020 08:57 AM

By Agence France-Presse

<https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/04/24/sunlight-destroys-coronavirus-quickly-says-us-agency/>

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1264134/sunlight-destroys-coronavirus-quickly-says-us-agency>

<https://manilastandard.net/mobile/article/322324>

<https://news.abs-cbn.com/overseas/04/24/20/sunlight-destroys-coronavirus-quickly-says-us-agency>

The new coronavirus is quickly destroyed by sunlight, according to a new study announced by a senior US official on Thursday, offering hope that its spread may ease over the summer.

William Bryan, science and technology advisor to the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, told reporters at the White House that government scientists had found ultraviolet rays had a potent impact.

“Our most striking observation to date is the powerful effect that solar light appears to have on killing the virus, both surfaces and in the air,” he said.

“We’ve seen a similar effect with both temperature and humidity as well, where increasing the temperature and humidity or both is generally less favorable to the virus.”

He then showed a slide summarizing the results of the experiment that were carried out at National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center.

It showed that the virus’s half life — the time taken for it to reduce to half its amount — was 18 hours when the temperature was 70 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit (21 to 24 degrees Celsius) with 20 percent humidity on a non-porous surface.

This includes surfaces like door handles and stainless steel.

But the half-life dropped to six hours when humidity rose to 80 percent — and just two minutes when sunlight was added to the equation.

When the virus was aerosolized — meaning suspended in the air — the half-life was one hour when the temperature was 70 to 75 degrees with 20 percent humidity.

In the presence of sunlight, this dropped to just one and a half minutes.

Bryan concluded that summer-like conditions “will create an environment with a transmission can be decreased.”

But he cautioned that reduced spread did not mean the pathogen would be eliminated entirely and social distancing guidelines cannot be fully lifted.

“It would be irresponsible for us to say that we feel that the summer is just going to totally kill the virus and then if it’s a free-for-all and that people ignore those guides,” he said.



UST leads in addressing SDG

On April 25, 2020 12:31 AM

By TDT

<https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/04/25/ust-leads-in-addressing-sdg/>

The University of Santo Tomas was ranked as the top Philippine university in terms of addressing the United Nations's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) based on the Times Higher Education's (THE) Impact Rankings 2020.

UST ranked 301-400 in the THE with an overall score of 61.5 to 68.0 in the research, outreach, and stewardship categories to emerge at the top among all Philippine higher education institutions in terms of addressing UN SDG.

According to the summary provided by THE, UST, known for its health and medical programs, ranked high in SDG #3 – Good Health and Well-Being (201-300) after its programs in the health sciences have consistently reaped recognitions and produced excellent professionals who are now serving in local and international communities.

UST also ranked well in SDG #6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), at 101-200 for coming up with projects on the provision of water and sanitary services to Baseco Compound, a slum area in Manila.

As for SDG 14 (Life below Water), UST landed in the 101-200 rank for its researches on the white spot syndrome in shrimps in Taal Lake and its projects on the sustainability and livelihood of those dependent on marine resources.

Finally, UST also ranked high in SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), landing on the Top 82 spot worldwide, with its growing number of partnerships with HEI, industry players, government agencies, as well as foundations and charitable organizations in the country and abroad.

The results of the study, which included 766 universities from 85 countries, can be accessed here: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/rankings/.../2020/overall>



Chinese Embassy launches COVID-19 unity song days after PH's sea protest

By: [Gabriel Pabico Lulu](#) - Reporter / [@GabriellLuluINQ](#)

INQUIRER.net / 09:27 PM April 24, 2020

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1264371/chinese-embassy-launches-covid-19-cooperation-song-days-after-phs-diplomatic-protest>

MANILA, Philippines – The Chinese Embassy in the Philippines has premiered a song about the two countries' cooperation to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, days after local officials filed a diplomatic protest against China's aggressive actions in the West Philippine Sea (WPS).

In the over four-minute video uploaded on the Embassy's social media page, a song from Chinese and Filipino singers was interlaced with clips of the two countries' efforts to fight the latest coronavirus strain. It also showed the assistance and aid provided by the Asian superpower to the Philippines.

The song, entitled *Iisang Dagat* — Tagalog for "One Sea", has been criticized by Filipino netizens as a form of advancing China's conquest to occupy the West PH Sea region.

"China and the Philippines have been supporting and helping each other during the challenge of COVID-19 outbreak, demonstrating a new era partnership of mutual support during trying times and the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind advocated by the Chinese President H.E. Xi Jinping," the Chinese Embassy said.

"This original music video *Iisang Dagat* is dedicated to those who contributed to our fight against the epidemic from both countries, especially the China Medical Expert Team to the Philippines," they added.

Just this Wednesday, Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. confirmed that the **Philippines filed two diplomatic protests** over two issues involving China. The first issue was a Chinese warship's pointing of its radar gun towards a Philippine Navy ship conducting border patrol last February 2020.

The second issue was about Beijing's decision to name two islands within the Philippine territory as Chinese districts, and include them as part of the Hainan province.



Solon urges AFP to focus on Chinese incursions in WPS

By: [Bong Lozada](#) - Reporter / [@BLozadaINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 07:20 PM April 24, 2020

<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1264318/solon-urges-afp-to-focus-on-chinese-incursions-in-wps>

MANILA, Philippines — House Assistant Minority Leader France Castro on Friday urged the Armed Forces of the Philippines to focus on Chinese activity in the West Philippine Sea.

Castro, the ACT Teachers partylist Representative, said in a statement that the military should not neglect its duty to protect Philippine territory amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Department of Foreign Affairs filed a couple of diplomatic protests against China, but Castro said the AFP should give protection to local fishermen in the area.

“Chinese warships have already targeted Philippine Navy vessels in the West Philippine Sea yesterday. The Armed Forces of the Philippines should prioritize protecting our territories from more Chinese aggression,” said Castro.

As per Article II Section 3 of the 1987 Constitution, “the Armed Forces of the Philippines is the protector of the people and the State. Its goal is to secure the sovereignty of the State and the integrity of the national territory.”

“Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, we need the AFP to protect our sovereign rights from ongoing threats in the WPS,” she said.

The solon added the AFP can leave enforcement of the enhanced community quarantine to the Philippine National Police so that the military can perform its duties in the WPS.

“The world is already battling this COVID-19 pandemic. Still, this should not mean that the Chinese can violate our sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea.”



Make healthy natural environment a right

By The Manila Times

April 25, 2020

<https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/04/25/business/green-business/make-healthy-natural-environment-a-right/718532/>

On Thursday, April 23, in an open letter to the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, the leading global conservation partnership, BirdLife International, marked the 50th anniversary of Earth Day by calling on the UN to take a bold and unprecedented step: declare a healthy natural environment a fundamental human right.

The letter, calls on the UN, as part of its response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic, to add an “Article 31” to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — enshrining a universal right to a healthy natural environment, guaranteed by public policies, governed by sustainability and by scientific and traditional indigenous knowledge.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights rose from the ashes of World War 2 and mapped out for the first time the fundamental human rights that must be protected globally. Its 30 articles cover subjects such as torture, slavery and education, but crucially nothing about preserving the environment – on which human and all life depends. If successful, this amendment would be the first addition since the milestone document was proclaimed in 1948.

“Covid-19 is the biggest global crisis since World War 2. But while the pandemic is devastating, it also gives world leaders a chance, indeed an obligation, to transform society – to further protect our welfare and future generations,” said Patricia Zurita, chief executive officer (CEO), BirdLife International. “Our planet’s health is our health. We humans rely on nature for our survival and sanity, but our actions have upset Earth’s natural balance.”

We are in the grips of the twin climate and biodiversity crises, which have put over a million species at risk of extinction and negatively impact human health, too. The current pandemic has its roots in habitat loss and illegal wildlife trade. And as with the climate and biodiversity crises, Covid-19 highlights once again the need and possibility for humanity to be bold, decisive and work together – quickly.

“There have been efforts to include a right to a healthy environment in the past,” said Melanie Heath, director of Science and Policy, BirdLife International. “Today, we hope that the gravity of the pandemic is a strong enough wake-up call for the UN and world citizens to come together to restore nature and protect us from similar crises in the future.”

“Article 31 would be a gift to the world and future generations. And what more appropriate time to launch a manifesto for it than on Earth Day”, said Asunción Ruiz, CEO of SEO/BirdLife (BirdLife’s Partner in Spain). “Instead of learning from the corona crisis, some leaders are cynically using it as an excuse to roll back environmental protection. Enshrining a healthy natural environment as a sacred human right will be an accomplishment that will benefit humanity for centuries to come and is the only way to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.”

“Covid-19 marks the persistence of an old enemy. We believe that human-caused ecosystem disturbances is one of the urgent environmental issues that should be addressed today in order to prevent pandemics,” said Alejandro Flores, Jr., Haribon Foundation board of trustees chair.

The letter urgently calls for Article 31’s right to a healthy natural environment to be included on the Agenda of the UN General Assembly’s Summit on Biodiversity in September 2020, with the ultimate goal of its approval in December 2023, to mark the 75th anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of the Universal Declaration.

“The future of human health lies on the crucial decisions we make today (April 23). As the BirdLife partner in the Philippines, we support the call of BirdLife International to the UN secretary general on the need to recognize the right of people to a healthy environment,” said Flores.

This letter forms part of a wider push to improve climate and nature policy at the end of the UN Decade on Biodiversity and is an open call to the rest of the planet’s civil society for support; the inclusion of the right to a healthy natural environment is a task we should all be behind if we are to protect our welfare, survival and save our planet.



'New normal'

Published April 25, 2020, 12:46 AM

HOTSPOT

By TONYO CRUZ

<https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/04/25/new-normal-3/>

The year is 2022. January 1, to be exact. Filipinos are waking up to a new year with a sense of bold confidence and national purpose. Long gone were the anxiety and disunity that characterized the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic of 2020.

Workers and their families are more secure now. The new normal bans not just contractualization, but also starvation wages. Regional wage boards were abolished in favor of a national living wage. People insisted workers have earned the right to receive a living wage, but that it was important so workers would have a higher standard of living, with some savings to tide them over during emergencies.

The billionaires of 2020 are still billionaires now, even after the government imposed higher income, inheritance, and other inheritance taxes against them. They remained wealthy even after the government forced their companies to regularize their workers. More workers have since formed or joined unions, so they could collectively negotiate with management.

A Genuine Agrarian Reform Law is transforming the provinces from the "kumunoy ng kahirapan" of the past into centers of prosperity today. any farmers now own the land they till and work with others in cooperative farming. Some are now preparing for mechanization. By the demand of the people, there have been a lot of solutions to directly connect farmers with end-users in the cities. Syndicates of Big Landlords, usurers, and middleman have been disbanded one by one, and their fraudulent-acquired assets seized.

There's no more pork barrel in the national budget. Instead, hundreds of billions have been redirected to build more public hospitals, obtain medical equipment and to raise the salaries of public health workers. Every Filipino is automatically insured. No one is left behind.

Entrepreneurs have formed a consortium to produce the needs of the public healthcare system. They are backed by state colleges and universities, and by associations of scientific, engineering and design experts.

Confidential and intelligence funds have been abolished, and the money saved went directly to setting up National Institutes of Health research centers in the Visayas and Mindanao. There's a proposal to allot one trillion pesos for science and technology, and research and development for the next five years. Nobody is complaining. In fact, some want to raise it to two trillion, because the efforts could also propel chemical, pharmaceutical and pharmaceutical industries.

Public colleges and universities now offer free tuition at all levels. The developments in public health and science are enticing the diaspora to return to the country.

Troll armies have been disbanded. Media criticism now forms part of the curriculum starting in the basic levels. New history books are coming out this year, with graphic depictions of the people's experiences under tyranny and what happens to tyrants, and the people's continuing drive towards broadly-shared prosperity. Fraudulently-acquired properties of tyrants have been seized and are not in the process of being transformed into museums, with free entrance to the public.

Government has successfully improved Internet speeds by imposing higher service quality standards. The Department of Science and Technology is fast emerging as an excellent Internet service provider for all public offices. Remote work has enabled professionals leave their offices in the cities in programmed visits to the provinces where their expertise is most needed.

By now, there are no "epal" politicians at all levels. Government projects are properly labeled "Project of the Filipino People". The people have successfully required officials to add "P.S." after their names, which stands for "public servant" as a reminder of their proper place in the scheme of things. Acts of abuse of power and negligence are stopped starting at the barangay level. All sessions and meetings of Congress are now live-streamed, and no public document is beyond reach of any citizen.

Citizens now trust their soldiers and policemen, after undergoing months of reorientation on their proper roles in society. Many corrupt officials have been sent to jail, with a few exceptions: Those who cooperated with the 'new normal' have been treated leniently. Investigations into past killings are happening domestically and internationally.

We have recovered portions of our territory and exclusive economic zone, thanks to a multinational diplomatic coalition that the Philippines led. The coalition isolated and beat back the foreign invader. We again have lots of fish at public markets, research being done by marine scientists, and oil and natural gas exploration by engineers and scientists. The POGOs were immediately shut down and the tax evaders are awaiting deportation pending the payment of their obligations to the public.

The year is 2022. Filipinos have successfully reimagined their vision for the country and have started to reengineer society according to their interests. They figured the new problems cannot be met by old solutions. The old arrangements cannot suffice. The old must give way to the new.

The coronavirus pandemic presents us a golden opportunity to propose and aspire for changes we need. We must seize that opportunity, and not let the defenders of the rotten status quo define the future for us. They've had their time and their chance. It is time for us to have ours.



Grow your own food and save money

April 24, 2020 03:25 PM

By **Roy Pelovello**

<https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/04/24/grow-your-own-food-and-save-money/>



DA Secretary William Dar suggest the “plant, plant, plant” program to increase food production.

The urban agriculture program being pushed by the Department of Agriculture Secretary Willam Dar would provide the twin benefits of helping provide food for the table of city residents and cut their expenditure.

Earlier, Dar said that while the Philippines has enough supply until June, it would be prudent to institute measures that would augment the country’s food production. For this purpose, Dar is pushing the “plant, plant, plant” program or urban agriculture.

“Due to many variables, it is difficult for us to estimate how much the program would contribute to the overall food production of the country or the food requirement in urban areas,” Mary Ann Guerrero, Division Chief of Research and Production-Bureau of Plant Industry, told Daily Tribune.

“The Secretary just wants to encourage our people, particularly city residents, to plant and grow some of the food they need, particularly during the enhanced community quarantine. That would also help them spend less on food and give them something more to spend for other essential needs,” she added.

She noted that the government has devoted a lot of its resources to provide financial assistance, particularly to the poor families adversely affected by the lockdown imposed due to the coronavirus epidemic.

So far, the DA said Some 548,750 individuals, households and local government units have received seeds and seedlings in Metro Manila. The program will be likely expanded to include other urban areas in the country, according to Dar.

“We don’t have a specific target (of beneficiaries). As long as there are people who are interested to go into urban farming, we will provide them with free seeds or seedlings,” Guerrero said.

At the moment, the BPI is providing a set that contains the seeds of the following vegetables: “Pechay”, “Mustasa” (mustard greens), tomatoes and “Kangkong.” However, Guerrero said they recently ran out of “Kangkong” and replaced it with “Upo” (bottle gourd) in the set.

As an alternative, the BPI is also giving away for seedlings of eggplant and tomatoes, as well as “regional vegetables” like “Saluyot,” “Malunggay,” and “Alugbati.

“Many people are requesting seedlings of those (regional vegetables) too,” she explained.

She added that the seeds and seedlings the bureau is currently distributing for free are chosen because they are suitable for planting in the coming hot summer months. The set includes a planting and cultivation guide to help ensure successful growing.

To avail of the free seedlings, interested parties can call the bureau. But with limited personnel, Guerrero said delivery is normally by pickup of online delivery services, with the cost shouldered by the requesting party.

“We are encouraging people to send their request as a group to reduce delivery cost,” she said.

She added that among the most popular seeds requested include tomatoes and eggplant. The latter, she said is popular because of its relative longevity in terms of production.

Guerrero explained that from the time of initial harvest, eggplants are likely to produce more fruits for the succeeding two or three weeks.

After that, the eggplant can be pruned and fertilized and it would be able to produce more fruits.

Guerrero said that while urban gardening may not make a huge dent in satisfying the overall food demand of the country, any additional production would go a long way towards achieving food security in the aftermath of the coronavirus epidemic.



Lockdown reveals fresh air, cleaner rivers in India

Associated Press / 05:39 PM April 24, 2020

<https://technology.inquirer.net/98690/lockdown-reveals-fresh-air-cleaner-rivers-in-india>



Distant hills and a water body are clearly visible during lockdown to control the spread of the coronavirus in Dharmasala, India. Image: AP/Ashwini Bhatia

NEW DELHI—India’s extended lockdown to curb the coronavirus outbreak has shut down schools, workplaces, industries and transport, and forced people to stay home.

It also led to an unexpected bonus in the country with six out of 10 of the world’s most polluted cities: cleaner air.

“It is a hell of a change,” said Kunal Chopra, who suffers from chronic bronchitis and whose morning walks no longer begin with a shot from an inhaler. “The air is much fresher and my breathing problems have gone down.”

India accounts for the highest pollution-related deaths in the world with more than 2 million people every year, according to a December 2019 report by the Global Alliance of Health and Pollution.

On March 25, the first day of the lockdown, the average PM 2.5 levels decreased 22% and nitrogen dioxide—which comes from burning fossil fuels—dropped 15%, according to air pollution data analyzed by the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

“These are extraordinary times,” said Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director at the Center for Science and Environment, a research and advocacy organization in New Delhi. She attributed the drop in air pollutants to fewer vehicles on the road and construction activities, and factories shutting down.

“People are more vulnerable during a pandemic in areas with high pollution,” she said. “Our lungs and hearts are already compromised, and we cannot fight the virus.”

India has reported nearly 20,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 600 deaths.

The stringent lockdown measures that are set to be lifted on May 3 also have had an effect on India’s rivers. Pictures of pristine clear waters of the Ganges, India’s longest river considered holy by Hindus, were enthusiastically shared on social media a few weeks into the lockdown. India’s pollution monitoring body said the water had even become fit for bathing in some areas, according to real-time monitors placed along the 2,575-kilometer (1,600-mile)-long river.

A recent analysis by the Delhi Pollution Control Board found that the quality of the Yamuna River flowing along New Delhi has also improved during the lockdown. The report cited a decrease in runoffs from 28 industrial clusters and less trash.

“The lockdown has clearly told us what the main sources of pollution are,” said Vimlendu Jha, an environmentalist and founder of Swechha, a non-governmental organization helping youth fight climate change. “Effluents are forced into our river bodies, and that is major reason why our rivers are black.”

Jha and other experts warn that the environmental improvements may be short-lived as the government eventually lifts the lockdown and rampant economic activity resumes.

“How was a lockdown for just a few weeks able to achieve what governments could not for decades?” said Jha, who believes authorities should study data collected during the lockdown to devise better environmental policies.

Roychowdhury suggested private workplaces that shifted their work online during the lockdown should institutionalize working from home to consider the impact of commuting on air pollution. But that’s not everyone.

Ashok Mandal, a scrawny rickshaw driver in New Delhi, spends hours scanning the streets for a passenger. He finds none. Used to making at least 400 rupees (\$5) every day ferrying passengers in a residential neighborhood, his income has been slashed to a meager 70 rupees (\$1) for picking up and delivering groceries.

“Clean air means nothing to me,” Mandal said. “I am just trying to make it through each day.” **CL /ra**