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Lockdown surprise: Rare bird sightings

By: Maricar Cinco - Reporter / @maricarcincolNQ Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:04 AM May 16, 2020 https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1275837/lockdown-surprise-rare-bird-sightings



RESCUED Wildlife enforcers rescued two juvenile Brahminy kites in Mabini, Batangas. The Biodiversity Management Bureau said it has recorded sightings of endangered raptors during the virus lockdown. Photo contributed by BMB-DENR

SAN PABLO CITY—More sightings of endangered wildlife, particularly raptors, have been recorded by the Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) amid restrictions on human activity and movement in communities on lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Extreme heat has also forced these animals to leave their natural habitat and find their way into human settlements, said Rogelio Demelletes Jr., the BMB senior ecosystems management specialist.

The public should seek out authorities when they encounter these rare birds, he said, pointing out that illegal traders were also exploiting the pandemic, dangling easy cash in exchange for the wildlife.

"We have a [skeleton] force operating during the lockdown. We could send a team for [the animal rescue]," Demelletes said on Monday.

The BMB has received at least five reports of raptors being sighted in the provinces of Cavite, Rizal and Batangas, and in the Visayas over a month since these areas were placed under a community quarantine.

'Human imprint'

The latest animals it rescued were two juvenile Brahminy kites (Haliastur indus) in Mabini, Batangas, on Sunday. Residents found the raptors in a forested area in Barangay Sto. Tomas about a week ago, according to Demelletes.

"They tried to release [the raptors], but the birds kept coming back. Our veterinarian's assessment was that they already have a 'human imprint,' meaning they have been tamed," he said.







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The raptors were turned over for rehabilitation to the rescue center of the BMB, an agency under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

"Once it has lost its wildlife instinct, it will find it hard to look for food and water, and survive in the wild. The bird has to be quarantined from any human interaction before it is released," Demelletes said.

He said that before the residents turned over the raptors, someone from an online group called Batangas Exotic Keepers contacted them and offered to buy the birds for P15,000 apiece.

'In exchange for liquor'

The online group has been among the BMB's targets for illegal wildlife trade.

In Antipolo City, Rizal province, the bureau also received a report of a Philippine scops owl (Otus megalotis) taken down with a slingshot about two weeks ago. The tipster told wildlife enforcers that the bird was put on sale, not for cash, but "in exchange for liquor."

The Brahminy kite population is described to be decreasing, while the scops owl is listed under the "least concern" conservation status by the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species.







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Ending illegal wildlife trade post – Covid-19

By John Leo Algo
May 16, 2020
https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/05/16/business/green-business/ending-illegal-wildlife-trade-post-covid-19/725057/

The coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic is not only a health crisis, but also a reflection of the environmental crisis. This coronavirus is widely believed to have originated from the markets of Wuhan, China, and likely transmitted from bats to humans through some of the animals being peddled in the area.

Covid-19 has placed a spotlight on the issue of illegal wildlife trade (IWT), considered as the fourth most profitable illegal business globally. The Philippines is expected to play an important role in curbing it internationally, while also needing to address the domestic side of this problem.

Domestic baseline

The Philippines is one of the 17 megadiverse countries in the world, home to about 53,000 species of animals and plants, of which more than half are endemic. However, this is also what makes the Philippines a hotspot for IWT. This business is valued at P50 billion a year, which includes the market value and ecological value of wildlife, damage to their habitats due to poaching, and losses in ecotourism revenues, according to data from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources—Biodiversity Management Bureau (DENR-EMB).

Many areas in the Philippines are afflicted with different stages of IWT, which adds to the difficulty in addressing it. For instance, poaching within the country mostly takes place in the following areas: Pampanga, Palawan, Aurora, Quezon province, Nueva Ecija, Samar, Leyte, Bohol, Agusan del Norte, Bukidnon, Mapun Island and Turtle Islands.

One of the most traded species is the Philippine pangolin, one of the animals frequently linked to transmitting the Covid-19 virus to humans. An estimated 1 million pangolins were smuggled from 2000 to 2013, making them the world's most heavily trafficked mammals.







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Another frequently-traded species is the endemic Philippine forest turtle, one of the 25 most endangered turtle species in the world. A creature recently rediscovered in the wild, its preferred habitat of streams in lowland peat swamp forests has almost disappeared in Palawan, having been converted to rice paddy fields. The loss of these forests is also a loss of terrestrial carbon sinks, which is important in addressing climate change.

The mysterious nature of the Philippine forest turtle has also made it a target for IWT, being marketed as pets, traditional medicine and food. A notable incident occurred in June 2015, when nearly 4,000 turtles were seized and prevented from being shipped to China.

Several ports are also identified as points of transshipment, where goods are transferred across ships before being transported to a different destination; these include ports in Cavite, Batangas, Quezon province, Cebu, Negros Occidental, Surigao del Norte and Davao Oriental.

Stopping the 'traffic'

The legal and policy framework for addressing the IWT in the Philippines already exists. Republic Act (RA) 9147 or the "Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act of 2001" serves as the primary law on addressing criminal acts related to wildlife trafficking in the country.

Under this law, the Environment Secretary must deputize wildlife enforcement officers, who can seize illegally-traded wildlife and arrest violators. They may come from law enforcement agencies or even nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and volunteers, given they have the proper training. Wildlife traffic monitoring units must also be operating in key air and seaports in the country to ensure strict compliance. Concerned citizens may report any illegal activities to these personnel to prevent IWT in their respective areas.

Violators involved in such acts would result in fines and imprisonment, depending on the status of organisms involved. For instance, offenses involving critically endangered species would result in up to P300,000 of fines and imprisonment of two to four years. Meanwhile, acts against threatened species would lead to fines of up to P50,000 and imprisonment of up to six months.







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Despite public and private efforts, there remains significant challenges in suppressing in the Philippines. To add to the usual problems of corruption, lack of strict enforcement, resources and manpower, transactions can now happen through social media; this requires new methods for suppressing wildlife trafficking, especially in the post-Covid-19 world.

To help address these challenges, the DENR finished the 2018-2028 Wildlife Law Enforcement Action Plan, which serves as the national roadmap to address IWT. It focuses on enacting stronger policies, strengthening networking and coordination among government agencies, building capacities and educating the public to participate in curbing wildlife trafficking.

To complement this, government agencies such as the DENR-BMB are implementing programs that provide biodiversity-friendly livelihoods and technologies and raise awareness about these issues. With a renewed focus on the environment, expect stronger pushes from both government and non-government entities to enhance its anti-IWT policies and programs, including amending RA 9147 and other biodiversity-related laws.

In the post-Covid-19 world, the Philippines must lead in stopping the illegal wildlife trade. A country is only as healthy and resilient as its biodiversity, a lesson it must uphold in the "new normal."

John Leo is a Haribon member. He is program manager of Living Laudato Si Philippines and Climate Action for Sustainability Initiative. He has also been a citizen journalist and feature writer since 2016.







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Tarsier spotted in Davao City anew

Published May 15, 2020, 3:12 PM By Ivy Tejano https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/05/15/tarsier-spotted-in-davao-city-anew/

DAVAO CITY – A Philippine tarsier was earlier seen in a farm near a school in Barangay Megkawayan in Calinan District in Davao City.



DENR DAVAO / MANILA BULLETIN

As tiny as the size of the palm of an adult, the Philippine tarsier is one of the smallest primates in the world with large goggling eyes as its arresting and most prominent feature.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Davao Region said on its official Facebook page that school teacher Jaypee Joromat was the one who found the tarsier.

According to Joromat, it was not the first time that they saw a tarsier in their yard. The school teacher then informed the government agency on the matter.

Tarsiers are endemic to a few areas in Visayas, particularly in Bohol, DENR-Davao said.

But over the years, frequent sightings of these tiny primates suggest that they may have also found a home in Mindanao, one of which was the Davao Region.







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Tarsier spotted in Davao City anew

"Experts are yet to conclude on the characteristics and distinctions of the Mindanao tarsiers from those of other areas," the DENR-Davao said.

For research and conservation purposes, the agency is calling on the public to not possess, trade, harm or even touch these primates.

The Philippine tarsier is listed as a nearly threatened species, and, if not conserved, may lead to extinction.

DENR-Davao said that threats to the descending population of the tarsiers include low birth rate, loss of habitat and as aforementioned, human intervention.

"Again, may we remind the public that if a tarsier is in sight, do not touch it unless necessary. If found displaced, you may release it back to the wild handling it carefully," the agency said.

The tarsiers are nocturnal in nature, thus, the government also asked the public to avoid taking photographs with flash as this will frighten them.







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Carcass of sperm whale buried in Surigao

Published May 15, 2020, 11:36 AM By Mike Crismundo https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/05/15/carcass-of-sperm-whale-buried-in-surigao/

BUTUAN CITY — To prevent the possible spread of bacteria, the decomposing carcass of a sperm whale was chopped into pieces and buried in an uninhabited area after it was found floating in the waters off Hinatuan in Surigao del Sur.



(Bislig City DENR-CENRO / MANILA BULLETIN)

The estimated 40,000 kilos weights sperm whale was found by fisherfolk, floating dead at the coast of Hinatuan, Surigao del Sur on May 9.

"The 17.68 meters (56 feet long) sea sperm whale was so big that at least 30 villagers helped one another in chopping and burying it in an uninhabited area," said Community Environment and Natural Resources Officer (CENRO) Victor R. Sabornido on Friday.

He said the cutting up the giant sperm whale started on Monday, and these were buried on Friday, May 14.

Sabornido personally supervised the process along with the barangay officials of Baculin so that proper health precautionary measures would be followed.

He said local officials, led by Hinatuan town Mayor Shem G. Garay, also helped in burying the whale.







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Pit viper found in Palawan protected area

Published May 15, 2020, 10:06 AM By Aira Genesa Magdayao https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/05/15/pit-viper-found-in-palawan-protected-area/

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY, Palawan – A highly venomous pit viper (Tropidolaemus subannulatus) found by park rangers at the Biodiversity Assessment Monitoring System (BAMS) site of El Nido -Taytay Managed Resource Protected Area (ENTMRPA) in Barangay Maligaya, El Nido town early this week.



Bret Heart Sanogal VIA Cenro Taytay El Nido / MANILA BULLETIN

ENTMRPA Protected Area Superintendent Mildred Suza told Manila Bulletin Wednesday that park rangers were conducting camera trap retrieval in the forest when they found the snake.

Suza said that camera traps were installed in mountainous areas of El Nido earlier in February this year to assess species population as indicators of conservation effectiveness.

The project is in partnership with Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) and supported by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Protect Wildlife Project and in coordination with the Local Government Unit of El Nido.

"Nagco-conduct sila ng assessment at retrieval ng mga camera traps sa gubat na ininstall noong February para malaman ang iba't-ibang wildlife na nandito sa ating kagubatan. Noong nakita nila itong pit viper na natutulog sa gubat, isa ito sa venomous na snake," Suza said.

She said that based on initial study the snake could be found in the forest of northern part of Palawan, part of Balabac town and other areas of Palawan.







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Pit viper found in Palawan protected area

"Base doon sa mga published na pag-aaral ay sa northern Palawan at Balabac lang ito makikita. Kapag endemic species kasi ay may particular areas lang na nandoon sila matatagpuan. Medyo hindi kasi napa-prioritize sa mga studies ang pit viper kaya wala tayong data ng population nito" Suza said.

She said that there were already reports of pit viper sightings in the past years.

"Dati may mga nakikita na, may mga sightings na ng pit viper dito. Ngayon nakita mismo nila, ito 'yong triangle ang ulo na ahas at venomous," Suza said.

In addition, she also encouraged herpetologists to join them in the research for reptiles and amphibians in ENTMRPA.

"We encourage them to conduct research particularly the herpetologists and other researchers from the academe to study sa mga species na mayron tayo, we need them," Suza said.

She also remind the public to help in conservation of the flora and fauna, including the marine animals which perform vital role in the ecosystem.

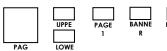
Suza said that Palawan has rich biodiversity and every species have important role to maintain balance in the ecosystem.

She said that people have a responsibility to protect and conserve the environment, especially in Palawan being a last frontier of the Philippines.

"Sa ating mga kababayan kapag may nakita po tayong mga ahas o anumang wildlife ay 'wag natin patayin o saktan kasi umaatake lang naman sila kapag na-threathen o naramdaman nila ang panganib. Sila ay parte ng ating biodiversity, ng ating ecosystem. Kaya patuloy ang aming kampanya sa pagpapalaganap ng impormasyon tungkol sa biodiversity conservation and protection, isinasagawa namin ito sa mga paaralan at komunidad para maging katuwang natin sila sa pangangalaga ng kalikasan", Suza said.







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P118-K hot logs seized in Agusan Sur town

By Alexander Lopez May 15, 2020, 9:01 pm https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1103007



HOT LOGS. Some 4,745 board feet of lauan flitches with a total market value of PHP118,625 are seized by authorities during a search and retrieval operation in Sitio Kosep, Barangay Bayugan 3, Rosario, Agusan del Sur on Friday (May 15, 2020). Environment officials cited the support of the police and the military in their enforcement activities. (Photo courtesy of DENR-13 Information Office)

BUTUAN CITY – Backed by the military and the police, personnel of the Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) in the Agusan del Sur town of Bunawan confiscated on Friday some 42 pieces of illegally-cut lauan flitches in the neighboring town of Rosario.

In a report, CENRO chief Jerome H. Albia said 4,745 board feet of lauan flitches were seized by authorities during a search and retrieval operation in Sitio Kosep, Barangay Bayugan 3, Rosario.

The confiscated forest products were valued at PHP118,625.

"The confiscated lauan flitches are now deposited at the depository area of CENRO-Bunawan in Barangay Kalingayan, Bunawan, Agusan del Sur," Albia said.

He also thanked Rosario's municipal environment office for the success of the operation.







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P118-K hot logs seized in Agusan Sur town

Albia also cited the support of the community in the area, particularly in providing information on the ongoing illegal gathering of forest products inside the timberlands of the government.

In a statement on Friday, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) 13 (Caraga) Executive Director Felix S. Alicer commended the efforts of CENRO-Bunawan in guarding the government-owned timberlands.

Alicer was also thankful for the support extended by the police and the army to the agency's enforcement activities.

"I already ordered an investigation to unmask the financier and owner of the illegal forest products to face criminal charges for violating the forestry law, rules and regulation, and qualified theft for stealing at government timberland," he said.

From January to April, DENR-13 confiscated 294,069.88 board feet of illegal logs and lumber products valued at PHP8,489,338.

During the period, 23 cases were filed in court and 40 individuals had been charged for violating the country's forestry laws. (PNA)







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Vivant Energy to continue support for Palawan turtles

By Jordeene B. Lagare May 16, 2020

https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/05/16/business/green-business/vivant-energy-to-continue-support-for-palawan-turtles/725058/

VIVANT Energy Corp., the power business of the Garcia-Escaño family's Vivant Group, pledged to keep supporting efforts in rescuing and sheltering endangered sea turtles in Puerto Princesa, Palawan province.

In a statement, Vivant Energy and its subsidiary Delta P Inc. vowed to continue supporting local officials and volunteers who are part of the Marine Turtle conservation project in the city's Simpocan village.

The company recently donated solar-powered flashlights, T-shirt uniforms and aquabags to volunteers of the sea turtle sanctuary.

Earlier, Delta P rehabilitated the generator set of the said village and conducted training of some residents responsible for maintaining the equipment.

"We recognize the value of the sea turtle conservation project in Simpocan in maintaining Palawan's position as the country's last frontier," Vivant Energy Chief Operating Officer Emil Andre Garcia said.

"Vivant takes its responsibility towards the environment seriously and our values are shared by our subsidiaries and partners," he added.

Every November, different sea turtle species — including the critically endangered Hawksbill, the endangered Green turtle, and the Olive Ridley — lay eggs on the shores of Simpocan.

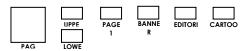
Simpocan, a vital site to the conservation of sea turtles, was one of the beneficiaries of Candis 3 Marketing Cooperative marine turtle conservation project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development from 2014 to 2016.

Since its turnover, the project has been managed by the City Environment and Natural Resources Office in Puerto Princesa with the help of the community.

In the first quarter of 2020, about 400 sea turtle hatchlings were released in the area.







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Avilon Zoo cries for help for animals amid COVID-19 pandemic

Ratziel San Juan (Philstar.com) - May 15, 2020 - 7:50pm https://www.philstar.com/lifestyle/pet-life/2020/05/15/2014277/avilon-zoo-cry-help-animals-amid-covid-19-pandemic

MANILA, Philippines — The Rizal-based Avilon Zoo, the largest zoological park in the country, has started a fundraiser to help secure its animals' needs since the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has affected their operation.

"While under quarantine, we in AVILON ZOO exert our best effort to provide for the needs and welfare of all life under our care. We must admit though that it is quite challenging to maintain good quality animal care and veterinary services in this extraordinary time. We need your support," the institution said in a statement.

Specifically, Avilon Zoo is asking the public to purchase online admission tickets (P600 each) in advance. The said tickets will never expire and may be used any time after quarantine restrictions are lifted.

"Avail as much as you can and help us continue to provide for our animals and the people taking care of them. We greatly appreciate your kind support!"

According to its social media page, the 7.5-hectare zoo houses more than 500 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, fishes and invertebrates, along with nearly 400 plant species "of which more than half are endemic to the Philippines."







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Climate change crisis as serious as Covid pandemic

By Ludwig O. Federigan May 16, 2020 https://www.manilatime

https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/05/16/business/green-business/climate-change-crisis-as-serious-as-covid-pandemic-2/725056/

Seventy-one percent of citizens around the world agree that climate change is as serious a crisis as the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic, according to the study made available by Ipsos, titled "How does the world view climate change and Covid-19?"

The study also shows that 65 percent of citizens globally agreed that it is important for governments to prioritize climate change in their post-Covid-19 economic recovery plan.

Eight out of 10 - 79 percent — citizens globally are willing to seek out products that are healthier and better for the environment.

The study also found that climate change remains to be the most important environmental issue in the world today. It is cited by 37 percent of those surveyed in ranking their three top environmental issues, a 7-percent increase from the last time the study was conducted in 2018.

Other environmental issues that are also important are air pollution (33 percent), dealing with the amount of waste we have (32 percent), deforestation (26 percent) and water pollution (25 percent). Concern for these five issues have increased since two years ago. These are the top environmental issues that citizens expect their local leaders receive the greatest attention.

Completing the top 10 environmental issues that matter to citizens globally are depletion of natural resources (20 percent), future energy sources and supplies (18 percent), over-packaging of consumer goods (15 percent), wildlife conservation (15 percent) and overpopulation (15 percent).

Two thirds — 68 percent — of citizens globally agree that if government does not act now to combat climate change, the government will be failing its people. More than half — nearly six in ten (57 percent) — say they would put off from voting a political party whose policies do not take climate change seriously.

Seventy-seven percent of citizens globally agree that human activities contribute to climate change. Only 9 percent disagrees.

Majority of citizens feel that they are likely to make changes to their own behavior to limit their personal contribution to climate change within the next year.







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On dealing with the amount of waste we produce, the public are willing to exercise the power of their purse when 57 percent agree that they are willing to avoid products that have a lot of packaging. South Koreans and the Chinese take the lead at 80 percent and 71 percent, respectively. Eighteen percent of citizens globally are not certain to do this.

Fifty-two percent of citizens globally will buy second hand or used products, thereby, avoiding buying new ones. South Koreans and Malaysians take the lead at 70 percent and 66 percent, respectively. Twenty-three percent of citizens globally is unlikely to do this.

Half (50 percent) of the citizens globally will save energy at home, for example by installing insulation or switching off lights. South Koreans and the Chinese take the lead at 74 percent and 69 percent, respectively. Eleven percent of citizens globally is are not certain to do this.

Nearly half (49 percent) of the citizens globally will recycling materials such as glass, paper and plastic. South Koreans and the Chinese take the lead at 74 percent each. Only a tenth — one out of 10 — of citizens globally is not likely to do this.

Nearly half (49 percent) of the citizens globally will save water at home for example taking shorter showers or not watering one's garden. South Korean and the Chinese lead at 72 percent and 66 percent, respectively. Sixteen percent of citizens globally is not certain to do this.

On our willingness to change our travel habits, 46 percent of citizens globally is willing to change their daily travel by walking, cycling or using public transport instead of driving a car or motorbike. South Koreans and the Chinese lead at 66 percent and 64 percent, respectively. Twenty-three percent is unlikely to change their daily travel.

Citizens are divided on how likely they are to undertake less comfortable and convenient lifestyle changes. A considerable proportion is saying that they are unlikely to make such changes within the next year.

Forty-one percent of citizens globally are willing to avoid flying and, perhaps, replace some flight with train or bus journeys. However, 33 percent are unlikely to make the changes.

The Chinese, Peruvians and Mexicans are likely to avoid flights while Canadians, Australians and Britons are unlikely to do the same.

Forty-one percent of citizens globally say they are likely to eat less meat, or replace the meat in some meals with alternatives such as beans, in the next year. However, a similar proportion — 39 percent — say they are unlikely to do this. The Chinese, Malaysians and Saudi Arabians are likely to eat less meat while Japanese, Americans and Canadians are likely to continue to have meat on their plates.







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Nearly half — 49 percent — of citizens globally led by Dutch, Japanese, Australians and Swedish are not willing to eat and drink fewer daily products. Only a third — 35 percent — led by the Chinese, Malaysians and Peruvians are willing to eat and drink fewer daily products and replace this with alternatives like soya milk.

The study How does the world view climate change and Covid-19? contains findings from four sample sets: a worldwide 29-country study, conducted from February 21 to March 6 this year using Ipsos Online Panel system, with 20,590 respondents aged 16 to 74; a 12-country sub-set of the 29 countries with 10,504 respondents aged 16 to 74; a 14-country online study, conducted from April 16 to 19 this year using Ipsos Online Panel system, with 28,039 respondents aged 16 to 74; and a 12-country online study, conducted between September 26 and October 10, 2014 via the Ipsos Online Panel system, with 12,135 respondents aged 18 to 65.

Ipsos is the third largest global market research company. It was founded in 1975 and its headquarters based in Paris

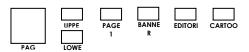
A full copy of the study is found here:

https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2020-04/earth-day-2020-ipsos.pdf

The author is the executive director of the Young Environmental Forum. He completed his climate change and development course at the University of East Anglia (United Kingdom) and executive program on sustainability leadership at Yale University (USA). He can be emailed at ludwig.federigan@gmail.com.







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Palace: Quarantine laws apply to all

May 15, 2020 05:21 PM ByFrancis Wakefield

https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/05/15/palace-quarantine-laws-apply-to-all/

Malacañang stressed on Friday that the quarantine protocols set by the government to fight the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) applies not only to the poor but to the rich and powerful as well.

This comes after the controversy surrounding the alleged birthday celebration of Santo Tomas, Pangasinan Mayor Timoteo "Dick" Villar III with several guests early this month.

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) is now looking into the incident and conducting a probe.

"The DILG is already investigating the incident," said Roque in a radio interview. "This means that whether you are rich or poor, the quarantine protocols should apply to all because it is for the safety of the public."

On Thursday, Roque asked the public to immediately file a complaint before the DILG if they witnessed public officials violating quarantine protocols set by the government in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The alleged birthday celebration took place despite the Province of Pangasinan which was still under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ).

Villar, however, has denied the allegation and insisted that no celebration took place. He also said that they did not violate rules on social distancing.







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SEVERE TROPICAL STORM AMBO

Social distancing must be ensured in evacuation centers, LGUs reminded

Published May 15, 2020 3:00pm

https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/738383/social-distancing-must-be-ensured-in-evacuation-centers-lgus-reminded/story/

Families who will have to stay in evacuation centers due to the threats of Typhoon Ambo should be protected from risks of COVID-19 transmission too, according to Senator Sherwin Gatchalian on Friday.

In a statement, the lawmaker urged the local government units to ensure that evacuees will be able to practice social distancing and frequent handwashing in their temporary shelters.

"The very reason why we force people to evacuate their homes in times of calamities and natural disasters is to keep them out of harm's way. We want them in a place where we know they are safe," Gatchalian said.

"Magiging walang silbi ang paglikas natin sa ating mga kababayan kung dadalhin natin sila sa isang lugar na sa bandang huli ay maaari ring magdulot ng pagkahawa ng COVID-19," he added.

Gatchalian also renewed his call for the creation of permanent evacuation centers in every city and municipality. He filed Senate Bill No. 747 last year supporting such a proposal. — **Dona Magsino/RSJ, GMA News**







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Typhoon-drenched Philippines prepares to reopen economy from virus

Arianne Merez and Jamaine Punzalan, ABS-CBN News Posted at May 15 2020 01:23 PM

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Residents brave rains and strong wind as they walk past uprooted trees along a highway in Can-avid town, Eastern Samar on May 14, 2020, as Typhoon Ambo makes landfall. *Alren Beronio, AFP*

MANILA -- Soaked from a powerful typhoon, the Philippines on Friday prepared for the cautious easing of a 2-month-old coronavirus lockdown to revive its shrinking economy and halt job losses that topped the 1-million mark.

Starting Saturday, Metro Manila, which accounts for a third of gross domestic product, will allow select sectors to restart up to 50 percent capacity.

Malacañang said different government agencies are on alert as it appealed for public cooperation ahead of the transition.

"We ask the public, especially those who will be hit by Typhoon Ambo, to remain vigilant and to cooperate with authorities as they implement their disaster preparedness and response to ensure everyone's safety," Presidential Spokesman Harry Roque said Friday.

Aside from the capital region, the so-called modified enhanced community quarantine will stay until May 31 in Laguna, home to factories and economic zones, and Cebu City, the Visayas' commercial capital.

In all areas, people will be required to wear face masks, observe physical distancing and bring their quarantine passes with them when running errands.

Public transport is banned in modified ECQ and limited in the rest of the country, which is under a general community quarantine or GCQ. Mall operators agreed to cut free WiFi and lower aircon settings to discourage loitering

In the run-up to the quarantine easing, restaurants also ramped up delivery and takeout services. During the lockdown, consumers relied on motorcycle deliveries for almost everything from fresh produce to medicine.

Dining, gyms, barbershops, salons, and spas are barred in all areas under community quarantine. Outdoor

ECONOMY SHRINKS

The Philippines recorded close to 12,000 confirmed coronavirus infections with 790 deaths and 2,337 recoveries as of Thursday. The Department of Health said it would soon release case data in real-time instead of once daily to guide lockdown protocols.







2/2 Page **16 May 2020** Date

Typhoon-drenched Philippines prepares to reopen economy from virus

"The easing up of the restrictions, hindi iyan ibig sabihin na wala na ang COVID, just because we allow certain people," President Rodrigo Duterte said in a taped address, aired on May 12.

(The easing of the restrictions, just because we allow certain people outside, it doesn't mean COVID is gone.)

"We cannot afford a second or third wave na mangyari (to happen)," he said.

The economy shrank by 0.2 percent in the first quarter, the first contraction in 22 years as the lockdown that started on March 17 shut businesses and forced people to stay at home. The government revised its growth forecast for 2020 to a contraction of 2 to 3.4 percent.

The economy lost up to 1.5 million jobs permanently or temporarily because of the pandemic, Finance Secretary Carlos Dominguez said on May 12, as he unveiled a 5-point plan to restart the economy.

NEW NORMAL

Private cars began plying EDSA, the capital's main highway in the lead up to Saturday. While buses and jeeps are banned, companies can shuttle their employees to work.

The MRT, which runs from the north to the south ends of the highway, also began test runs. What appears to be dividers to enforce physical distancing are visible from the ground level.

Metro Manila's busiest train system ferries on average half a million passengers daily.

On entrances to groceries, foot baths and temperature checks have become commonplace. More establishments are now offering cashless and contactless payments.

In supermarket checkout and pharmacy counters, plastic shields separate staff from shoppers.

FIRST OF THE YEAR

Typhoon Ambo (international name: Vongfong) hit land for the sixth time on Friday morning and moved south of the capital, as pandemic protocols complicated the evacuation of tens of thousands.

Ambo earlier made landfall in Eastern Samar, Dalupiri and Capul islands in Northern Samar, and Ticao and Burias islands in Masbate.

Provincial and city governments, many of which are already strapped for resources due to the outbreak, are grappling with logistical and space issues, with an estimated 200,000 people needing evacuation from flood and landslide-prone areas.

The health department requires a one-meter distance between evacuees.

In Albay, shelters accepted only half their capacity while evacuees in churches were asked to sleep one bench apart to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Hundreds of evacuees in neighboring Buhi, Camarines Sur, were given face masks before they were allowed in the evacuation centers.

Camarines Norte also used COVID-19 resources and re-aligned funds from other projects to feed up to 15,000 evacuees, said incident management commander Atty. Don Culvera.

The storm also knocked down power and communication lines in the whole Northern Samar, where some 10,600 people evacuated, said provincial disaster chief Josh Echano. Authorities, he said, had yet to receive reports of any resident killed or missing due to Ambo.







1/2 Page **16 May 2020**Date

Typhoon forces 140,000 from homes in virus-hit Philippines

posted May 15, 2020 at 02:19 pm by <u>AFP</u> https://manilastandard.net/mobile/article/323783

Manila - Tens of thousands of people crammed into evacuation centres while trying to follow social distance protocols Friday, as a powerful typhoon hammered the Philippines.



A resident clears a street of debris next to a crucifix blown from the church after it was destroyed at the height of Typhoon Vongfong in Arteche town, Eastern Samar province on May 15, 2020, a day after the typhoon hit the town. - Typhoon Vongfong(local name Ambo) has dumped heavy rains and torn off roofs since it roared ashore on central Samar island May 14, with hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people in its path on the coast or in flimsy homes. (Photo by Ted ALJIBE / AFP)

Typhoon Vongfong(local name Ambo) has dumped heavy rains and torn off roofs since it roared ashore on central Samar island Thursday, with hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people in its path on the coast or in flimsy homes.

The storm hit as tens of millions of Filipinos are hunkered down at home against the coronavirus, but at least 141,700 have had to flee because of the powerful storm, disaster officials said.

"We have to wear masks and apply distancing at all times," local police official Carlito Abriz told AFP. "It's difficult to enforce because they (the evacuees) are stressed. But we are doing our best."

Authorities have said they will run shelters at half of capacity, provide masks to people who don't have them and try to keep families grouped together.

However, many spaces normally used as storm shelters have been converted into quarantine sites for people suspected of being infected with coronavirus.







Typhoon forces 140,000 from homes in virus-hit Philippines

"The challenge really lies in the physical distancing," said disaster official Junie Castillo, who added they were housing people in classrooms emptied by the pandemic.

Fortunately the central region where the storm struck first is not one of the hotspots of the Philippines' outbreak, which has seen 11,876 reported infections and 790 dead.

Overlapping disasters -

Tens of millions more people live along Vongfong's path, which is forecast to take it near the densely populated capital Manila later Friday or early Saturday.

However, the national meteorological agency says the typhoon could weaken to a severe tropical storm as it churns north over the Philippines.

Authorities have not reported any deaths so far, but disaster crews were just beginning on Friday their assessment of hard-hit areas cut off by the storm.

It is not unheard of for disasters to overlap in the Philippines, and some 22,000 people were evacuated from the slopes of the active Mayon volcano ahead of the typhoon's arrival.

Heavy rains in the past have sent landslides of debris cascading down the volcano, burying and killing the communities in their paths.

Typhoons are a dangerous and disruptive part of life in the Philippine archipelago, which gets hit by an average of 20 storms and typhoons each year.

The storms put millions of people in disaster-prone areas in a state of constant poverty and rebuilding.

A July 2019 study by the Manila-based Asian Development Bank said the most frequent storms lop one percent off the Philippine economy, with the stronger ones cutting economic output by nearly three percent.

Many of the areas in Vongfong's path have already gone through much of their emergency disaster money while responding to the pandemic, and have asked the national government for help.

The country's deadliest cyclone on record was Super Typhoon Haiyan(local name Yolanda), which left more than 7,300 people dead or missing in 2013.







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Company ID, COE sapat na sa mga awtorisadong manggagawang balik-trabaho

ABS-CBN News

https://news.abs-cbn.com/video/news/05/15/20/company-id-coe-sapat-na-sa-mga-awtorisadong-manggagawang-balik-trabaho?fbclid=lwAR1jNFYpvqS-mUXcTgySdGwdl16DGjaKTSBcj-V68b6N676LiiqilDJMSJ

MAYNILA - Palulusutin ng awtoridad sa mga border ang mga manggagawa sa mga industriyang balik-operasyon na simula Sabado.

Ayon kay Lt. Gen. Guillermo Eleazar, hepe ng Joint Task Force COVID-19 Shield, sapat na ang company ID at certificate of employment para makadaan sa borders ang mga awtorisadong manggagawa na papunta sa kanilang mga trabaho sa modified lockdown o general community quarantine areas.

"Kung meron pong katunayan na self-employed kayo at 'yung inyong nature of business is permitted sa GCQ or modified ECQ, sapat na po ang basic documents na nagpapatunay na kayo ay bahagi ng workforce na 'yun," pahayag ni Eleazar sa panayam sa DZMM Teleradyo.

Kikilalanin din ang mga dokumento at ID ng mga self-employed.

Magagamit pa rin aniya ang mga ID mula sa IATF at rapid pass.

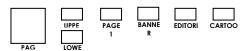
Dagdag ni Eleazar, mahalagang makita sa mga dokumento at ID ang address ng bahay at trabaho.

Samantala, inaasahan ng task force na maraming sasakyan at mga tao ang lalabas sa Sabado sa pagsisimula ng general quarantine sa bansa at modified lockdown sa Metro Manila, Cebu City at Laguna province.

Banggit ni Eleazar na hamon sa kanilang tutukan ito kaya posibleng magpatupad sila ng ramdom check at mga mobile checkpoint.







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Government on alert for calamity

May 15, 2020 827

https://ptvnews.ph/government-on-alert-for-calamity/?fbclid=IwAR0bvghjZbCl8ap7VXKdfA0rs76mgwbjUKSdkL4vAlW6Fy7LWilOOgV--Q4

Malacañang said all government agencies are currently "alert and on a standby" through Oplan Listo headed by the DILG and NDRRMC amid Typhoon Ambo.

"We ask the public, especially those who will be hit by Typhoon Ambo, to remain vigilant and to cooperate with authorities as they implement their disaster preparedness and response to ensure everyone's safety," Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said.

Meanwhile, the government is monitoring the transition of some areas from ECQ to MECQ and GCQ even with the occurrence of Typhoon Ambo.

Roque said President Duterte has directed DBM Secretary Wendel Avisado to "determine how much funds from the 2020 National Budget will be realigned to augment the Administration's social amelioration measures."

Roque also confirmed President Duterte will seek Congressional assistance to find additional funding for the second tranche of SAP "to complete the rollout of aid to poor and low-income families."







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16 May 2020Date

Palace monitors COVID situation amid 'Ambo'

May 15, 2020 02:22 PM

By<u>Francis Wakefield</u>

https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/05/15/palace-monitors-covid-situation-amid-ambo/

Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque on Friday disclosed that Malacañang is closely monitoring the situation in the country with the impending implementation from enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) to modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ) and general community quarantine (GCQ) amid a weather disturbance in the Philippines.

In a statement, Roque said that all concerned agencies are alert and on a standby through the Oplan Listo headed by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC).

"We ask the public, especially those who will be hit by Typhoon Ambo, to remain vigilant and to cooperate with authorities as they implement their disaster preparedness and response to ensure everyone's safety," Roque said.

More than 140,000 people were forced into cramped shelters as a powerful typhoon hammered the Philippines on Friday, compounding the nation's battle with the coronavirus pandemic.







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16 May 2020Date

Ambo batters Luzon, Visayas leaving path of destruction

Published May 15, 2020 10:50pm

https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/738445/ambo-batters-luzon-visayas-leaving-path-of-destruction/story/?fbclid=lwAR0p0rEs_q2hN6KggOS-Ceu4cKZbEVDxcnhCwL9CtCqApZBFrnVCqFSVNk8

Felled trees, knocked down power lines, ripped off roofs of structures were evident hours after Typhoon Ambo barreled across the country from the Samar provinces heading to Central Luzon.

Various reports from 24 Oras showed the trail of destruction, which some residents said was like a double whammy as the country was also battling the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Catbalogan City, Samar, a video recorded by YouScooper Kurt Devantes on Thursday showed that the harsh winds of Ambo had destroyed the covers of stalls in the market.

Due to strong waves, a ship anchored near the market had slammed into the port. Larges waves later caused flooding in the port.

Another video caught by YouScooper Renzel Copico in Oras, Eastern Samar showed branches of trees being swept by the strong winds.

Houses in another barangay proved no match against the rain and winds. A lone tree was saved from falling down by electric wires.

In Barangay Rawis, Can-avid in Eastern Samar, residents could only watch as the storm destroyed uprooted coconut trees and houses.

Many residents were also left without electricity and mobile phone signal.

The roads along San Antonio, Northern Samar were strewn with felled trees and other debris showing the typhoon's wrath.

According to YouScooper Victoria Pajuelas, the Catubig River in Las Navas, Northern Samar overflowed while roofs of houses were blown by the wind.

Quezon province

Ambo's sixth landfall in Quezon has electric posts in Gumaca swinging due to strong winds.







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16 May 2020

Ambo batters Luzon, Visayas leaving path of destruction

While evacuating residents, a barangay captain in the area faced another challenge after the roof of her house was blown away.

Trees and structures in the area were also damaged by the storm.

Meanwhile, around 1,000 families in Mulanay, Quezon were evacuated. The local government unit assured that quarantine protocols were being observed in evacuation centers.

Some Catanauan, residents were also evacuated.

Baler, Aurora

Residents of Barangay Sabang in Baler, Aurora have tied down the roofs of their houses in preparation for Ambo.

A resident said his house near the the coast had been destroyed thrice by storms.

"Wala, tali-tali lang ng bahay. Wala, eh, dito po talaga kami nakatira," Allan said.

Meanwhile, another resident called for help for alternative livelihoods.

"Sana naman po mabigyan kami ng pansin ng kaunting sinasabi po naming alternative livelihood para just in case po tumama o dumating 'yung panahon na ganito, na magkaroon po ng kalamidad, meron po kaming ibang pagkukunan," Milagros Imperial said.

Meanwhile, more than 80 families from coastal areas of Dingalan were evacuated as a preemptive measure due to the threat of a storm surge.

Individuals quarantined in Barangay Villa were also evacuated as the facility was stationed near a mountain that may be affected by a landslide.

Laguna

Strong winds and rain prevailed over Siniloan, Laguna as the eye of Ambo neared the area. Due to the incessant rains, the water level of Laguna Lake was also observed to increase.

In preparation for the storm, authorities immediately brought down tarpaulins from billboards.







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Ambo batters Luzon, Visayas leaving path of destruction

Meanwhile, some residents left their houses and braved the storm to move to evacuation centers, including a 90-year-old grandmother.

"Nasa sentro kami ng palayan, eh, malakas ang ulan 'tsaka hangin. Ninenerbyos na. Nagsabi sakin, lilikas muna sa evacuation center," Elpidio Mariscar said.

Initial information from authorities showed that 76 families have evacuated from the 3rd and 4th district of Laguna.

Residents of Pangil, meanwhile, tied their boats to trees to prevent these from being carried away by the strong current while others brought their boats to the side of the road.

The Provincial Government of Laguna also reminded residents to follow protocols amid the threat of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Nueva Ecija

The city disaster risk reduction and management office of Cabanatuan in Nueva Ecija distributed rescue items and equipment as the city is one of the flood-prone areas in the province.

However, authorities have yet to conduct a preemptive evacuation in the area.

According to the Cabanatuan CDRRMO and PDRRMO, they are not expecting widespread flooding in the city.

Despite this, 14 evacuation centers in Cabanatuan have been readied for typhoon victims. Authorities said they will add five more to ensure physical distancing amid the COVID-19 pandemic. —**Joahna Lei Casilao/LDF, GMA News**













16 May 2020 Date





YouScoop: Kita ang malawakang baha at pinsala na dulot ng Bagyong Ambo sa Munisipyo ng Jipapad, Eastern Samar sa kuha ni YouScooper Philip.

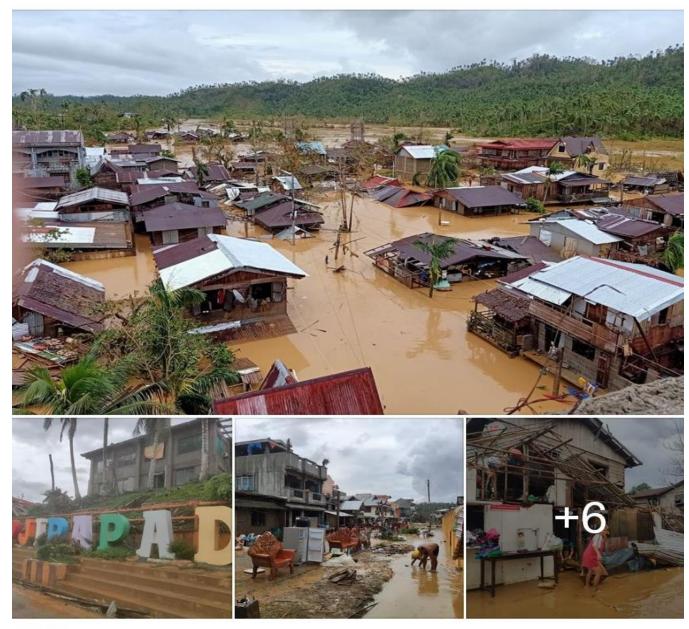
Samantala, itinaas na ang red rainfall warning sa Quezon province, at yellow warning naman sa Metro Manila, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, at Bulacan. Ang mga nasa red at yellow rainfall warning ay pinapayuhang mag-ingat at humanda laban sa posibleng pagbaha.

Chat

FULL STORY: https://bit.ly/3bDh4Vk Kuha ni Philip Raymond Basilia Bote

Para sa ibang balita ukol sa Bagyong Ambo, panoorin ang livestream ngayon ng 24 Oras: https://bit.ly/2Z6sbDu

See Translation











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TINGNAN: Half lane ng national road sa Arteche, Samar apektado ng nangyareng landslide kasunod ng pananalasa ng bagyong Ambo

Photos from ESDEO | via Ryan Lesigues

See Translation













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16 May 2020 Date



Eastern Samar Gov. Evardone: 'Ambo' kasing lakas ng 'Yolanda'

Last updated May 15, 2020 https://tonite.abante.com.ph/eastern-samar-gov-evardone-ambo-kasing-lakas-ng-yolanda/

Tinawag na 'Typhoon Yolanda Jr.' ni Eastern Samar Gov. Ben Evardone ang hagupit ng bagyong 'Ambo' matapos itong mag-landfall sa kanilang lugar noong Huwebes.

Ayon kay Evardone, halos pareho ang pinsalang iniwan ng Ambo sa naranasan nila sa Yolanda noong 2013, na nagresulta ng pagkamatay ng ilang libong indibidwal sa Visayas region.

"I just came from four hardest-hit towns of Dolores, Oras, San Policarpo and Arteche and I can say that devastation in my province is so enormous and unimaginable that I can safely say that Ambo was Typhoon Yolanda Jr in terms of damage to infrastructure," ayon kay Evardone.

Bandang alas-12:00 ng hapon noong Huwebes bumagsak sa kalupaan ng San Policarpio ang nasabing bagyo, kung saan ilang impraistruktura sa probinsya ang nasira, kasama na ang pagkatangay ng bubungan ng isang simbahan.

Bukod pa dito'y tinitingnan din ang epekto ng Ambo sa kanilang agriculture sector, na inaasahang matindi ang pinsala sa kanilang mga pananim lalo pa't sumabay sa COVID-19 pandemic.

"Aside from the massive damage to traditional crops like coconut, corn fruits and root crops, some of the newly-harvest rice were damaged. Storage facilities were also damaged. This is a double whammy for us because we are also facing this COVID crisis," pangamba pa nito. (RP)







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CODE OF CONDUCT | Pandemic threatens to delay adoption of a regional code in disputed sea

May 15, 2020 , 04:33 PM By Dale de Vera, News5 reporter

https://news.tv5.com.ph/breaking/read/code-of-conduct-pandemic-threatens-to-delay-adoption-of-a-regional-code-in-disputed-sea?fbclid=IwAR1Nb6Y7BS8dTcxJ67L6ZmCQgVaBdmygibWmkSl14X5qapgmfektaRoi21Y

MAY 15, 2020 – China's recent aggressive and provocative actions in the disputed South China Sea and the COVID-19 pandemic are seen as obstacles to the conclusion of talks for a regional code of conduct between China and Southeast Asian countries in the strategic waters, maritime experts said.

In an online briefing hosted by the US embassy in Manila, an analyst said last month's sinking of a Vietnamese vessel by a Chinese Coast Guard ship off Woody Island in the Paracel group of islands and Beijing's unilateral declaration of new territorial districts in the disputed waters, which drew protests from its neighbors Vietnam and the Philippines, are seen to heavily impact negotiations for the elusive code.

Moreover, the coronavirus pandemic has prevented ASEAN and China to hold consultative meetings and the delays in the regional meeting, analysts said China's preferred three-year deadline to conclude the document, aimed at restraining hostile acts in the waters, seem to be growing difficult each month.

The ten-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China were hoping to conclude negotiations and adopt the proposed code by next year when they hold summit meetings in Brunei. China claims almost the entire South China Sea, a very important waterway where about \$3 trillion worth of sea-borne trade pass every year. Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have conflicting claims on the strategic sea believed to have rich deposits of energy resources.

China has built seven artificial islands in the South China Sea and has stepped up anti-access and area denial (A2AD) operations to keep extra-regional powers from the area but US continued to challenge China's claims by conducting freedom of navigation patrols. China's excessive nine-dash-line claims was nullified by a 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague after the Philippines sought arbitration on its economic entitlements in the sea under the UN Convention of Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Dr. Hung Son Nguyen, Director-General and Head Institute for the South China Sea at the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam said things look gloomier considering the events in the South China Sea.

Both Vietnam and the Philippines denounced the sinking of a Vietnamese vessel by the Chinese Coast Guard in April 2 and China's establishment of two administrative zones in the South China Sea, saying it undermine the peace and security in the resource-rich waters.

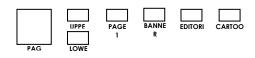
Hung also said that to salvage the code of conduct process, China needs to look at its behavior, its activities in the South China Sea and show its willingness, political will to create conducive environment for ASEAN states to be convinced that the code of conduct is still viable.

Jay Batongbacal, Director of the Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea at the University of the Philippines, feared a possibility of a "deadlock" in the negotiations unless parties come up with confidence building measures.

Batongbacal said states may not be amenable as before or open or cooperative as before especially on matters related to explorations, fishing, military encounters – all of these events in recent months will play into concerns of the diplomats when they decide to resume negotiations.







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CODE OF CONDUCT | Pandemic threatens to delay adoption of a regional code in disputed sea

The United States also accused China of taking advantage of the pandemic to assert its claim in the South China Sea, an accusation Beijing condemns.

Despite delays in the meetings caused by COVID-19, Sumathy Permal of the Maritime Institute of Malaysia, said ASEAN and China should ensure that the process of talks on the code of conduct continues. She said the ASEAN should stay together to come up with one voice to try to resolve the disputes and include regional arrangements for maritime protection in the waters.

Director of Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Greg Poling said thing don't look good now. He explained that news has been universally bad for the last three months or so. But is has been much more obvious during the COVID-19 pandemic.

China, which considers the sea disputes a purely Asian issue is opposed to any foreign intervention, particularly the US. Poling said, all claimants and the international community, including the US, are losing the South China Sea, but it is not lost. It does however require action now.







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16 May 2020Date

Maritime experts say multilateralism is 'optimistic option' in dealing with South China Sea disputes

Published May 15, 2020, 5:14 PM By Roy Mabasa

https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/05/15/maritime-experts-say-multilateralism-is-optimistic-option-in-dealing-with-south-china-sea-disputes/

Several maritime experts in Southeast Asia on Friday agreed that multilateralism is one of most optimistic options in dealing with the South China Sea issue as they see Beijing's continued assertiveness in the volatile region over the next 10 years.



Photographed through the window of a closed aircraft, an aerial view shows Pag-asa Island, part of the disputed Spratly group of islands, in the South China Sea located off the coast of western Philippines on July 20, 2011. (EPA/ROLEX DELA PENA/POOL / MANILA BULLETIN FILE PHOTO)

"We need to look at things from a strategic perspective. It needs a holistic approach. It needs a collective approach from within the region and also internationally," Dr. Nguyen Hung-son, director-general and head of the Institute for the South China Sea of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam during the virtual speaker series forum hosted by the United States Embassy in Manila.

Son maintained that the international community and all stakeholders should not look at the oil and gas incidents involving Malaysia and Vietnam as if it is "China's only interest" in the South China Sea.

As for Dr. Jay Batongbacal of the University of the Philippine' Institute for Maritime Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UP-IMLOS), China will continue increasing its activities in the hotly-contested waters through "active and passive" ways in the next decade.







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Maritime experts say multilateralism is 'optimistic option' in dealing with South China Sea disputes

"By active means sending of their forces and assets to regulate activities in the South China Sea in the way they want it to be regulated. It could simply be passive in the sense that surrounding countries, probably out of fear or to maintain good relations with China, will adjust their behavior and activities to comply with the requirements and demands of China," he explained.

When things start to normalize after the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, Batongbacal said it is an opportunity for everyone to reassess what happened in the South China Sea and to Asia's policies towards China and have a "better future to work for."

"That would be a future that we will find more support from the international community as we try to rebuild from the destruction of this pandemic," he added.

While China will seek to impose more control in the South China Sea through its nine-dash-line claim, Sumathy Permal of the Maritime Institute of Malaysia believes that regional claimants to the dispute will "stand up purposely" against China assertiveness through the ASEAN and in other platforms.

"There will be a lot of engagements. There will be the formation of multilateral and mini-lateralism, with the Southeast Asian countries coming up with some form of framework to deal with China, with the underlying projection that China will impose more rules and regulations," Permal said.







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Aggressive China actions, pandemic seen to bind sea code talks –experts

Published May 15, 2020 1:54pm By MICHAELA DEL CALLAR

https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/738374/aggressive-china-actions-pandemic-seen-to-bind-sea-code-talks-experts/story/

China's recent aggressive actions in the South China Sea, and the COVID-19 pandemic are seen to hamper talks on a proposed code of conduct in the disputed waters, maritime experts said Friday.

Analysts, in an online briefing, said the recent sinking of a Vietnamese vessel by a Chinese Coast Guard ship in the Paracels, and Beijing's unilateral declaration of new territorial districts in the disputed waters—drawing protests from Vietnam, and the Philippines—are seen to heavily impact negotiations for the elusive code.

With all the delays caused by the pandemic to regional meetings, they said China's preferred three-year deadline to conclude the document, aimed at restraining hostile acts in the disputed waters, seem to be growing difficult each month.

"Now things look even gloomier given what is happening in the South China Sea right now," said Dr. Hung Son Nguyen, Director General and Head of the Institute for the South China Sea at the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam.

Both Vietnam and the Philippines denounced the sinking of a Vietnamese vessel by the Chinese Coast Guard on April 2, and China's establishment of two administrative zones in the South China Sea.

Both countries had said such acts undermine the peace and security in the resource-rich waters.

On the other hand, the United States has accused China of taking advantage of the pandemic to assert its claim in the South China Sea. Beijing decried the accusation.

"To salvage the code of conduct process, China needs to look at its behavior, its activities in the South China Sea and show its willingness, political will to create conducive environment for ASEAN states to be convinced that the code of conduct is still viable," Hung said.

Jay Batongbacal, Director of the Institute for Maritime Affairs and Law of the Sea at the University of the Philippines, feared the sea code talks could hit a "deadlock" unless parties come up with confidence-building measures.







<u>1/2</u> Page 16 May 2020 Date

Aggressive China actions, pandemic seen to bind sea code talks –experts

"If that kind of negative trend of assertion continues then by the time this is over and diplomatic activities resume, we could see all this building up into a kind of backlash when things resume," Batongbacal said.

"States may not be amenable as before or open or cooperative as before especially on matters related to explorations, fishing, military encounters —all of these events in recent months will play into concerns of the diplomats when they decide to resume negotiations."

Despite delays in the meetings caused by COVID-19 threat, Sumathy Permal of the Maritime Institute of Malaysia, said ASEAN and China should ensure that the process of talks on the code of conduct would continue.

The ASEAN, she said, should "stay together to come up with one voice" to try to resolve the disputes and include regional arrangements for maritime protection in the waters.

On April 18, China announced that its so-called districts of "Nansha" and "Xisha" will have authority over the Spratlys and the Paracels, respectively, under the authority of the local government in Sansha, a recently established Chinese city in the Southern island of Hainan.

Beijing also gave Chinese names to the features in the disputed waters —a move rejected by the Philippines and Vietnam – two of the most vocal South China Sea claimants.

"Things don't look great right now," Gregory Poling, director of the Washington-based Asia Martime Transparency Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"News has been universally bad for the last three months or so. But is has been much more obvious during the COVID-19 pandemic," Poling said.

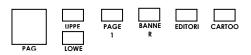
China, which considers the sea disputes a purely Asian issue is opposed to any foreign intervention, particularly the US.

However, multilateral efforts to counter China are still the key, Poling pointed out.

"All claimants and the international community, including the US, are losing the South China Sea, but it is not lost. It does however require action now," he said. —**LBG, GMA News**







16 May 2020Date

Balik Probinsya, Bagong Pag-asa Program promotes inclusive development

By Emmanuel Dooc

May 15, 2020

https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/05/15/balik-probinsya-bagong-pag-asa-program-promotes-inclusive-development/

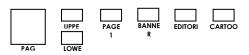
It's not exactly a new idea but the Duterte administration has given it a fresh look in the light of the current Covid-19 pandemic, which is engendered by severe congestion in Metro Manila. How can the authorities enforce a quarantine in slum areas when there is hardly a room for a family of eight to stay inside a 4-meter by 4-meter abode? How can one practice social distancing when the entire village resides in a vacant lot as big as three basketball courts? The influx of migrants from the provinces to Metro Manila to seek greener pastures has blighted the conditions of our inner cities. Absent any employment and resettlement program, the upsurge in population has created colonies of informal settlers, which has spawned a host of social problems.

The NCR confronts perennial issues of joblessness, crimes, health and sanitation, proliferation of drugs and other social menaces that have contributed to the decay of our cities. Unless something drastic is done, this depressing situation is bound to get worse. The initiative undertaken by Sen. Bong Go to introduce the "Balik Probinsya, Bagong Pag-asa Program" (BP2 Program) is a timely intervention to address this issue. Admittedly, previous governments had considered it as part of their social reengineering efforts. For instance, under former President Benigno Aquino III, a similar scheme was launched to support the urban poor and to provide better opportunities for them. The program, however, failed despite its noble objective.

By virtue of Executive Order 114, the BP2 Program was institutionalized by President Duterte as a pillar of balanced regional development. The Program has recognized that the National Capital Region accounts for 38 percent of our country's GDP and its population of roughly 13 million constitute 12.8 percent of our country's total population based on the 2015 national census. The figures betray imbalanced concentration of people in Metro Manila, unequal distribution of wealth and the lack of opportunities in the countryside. The large population strains the limited resources of the LGUs that host them. The BP2 Program aims to promote inclusive development and equitable distribution of income and wealth around the country. Countryside development will be the focus of our government to decongest the NCR. Reverse migration will be encouraged and the provinces will be empowered to achieve development and prosperity.







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Balik Probinsya, Bagong Pag-asa Program promotes inclusive development

In signing EO 114, President Duterte stressed the need to "ensure balanced regional development and equitable distribution of wealth, resources and opportunities through policies and programs that boost countrywide development and inclusive growth; provide adequate social services; and promote full employment, industrialization and an improved quality of life in rural areas." In order to achieve them, the President is given temporary emergency authority to undertake measures as may be reasonable and necessary to implement the program, including reallocating, reprogramming and realigning savings from the budget of the executive department. Likewise, it created the "Balik Probinsya, Bagong Pag-asa Council" to be headed by the Executive Secretary as chairman to ensure that full implementation and complete government support is extended to the program.

What will stand in the way of effectively implementing the BP2 Program will be the lack of total support and comprehensive efforts to cover all the requirements of the program. Section 4, Par. C of EO 114 identified the four key areas such as social, welfare, health and employment to encourage the voluntary and immediate return of workers and the OFWs who are the target of this program. This means that provisions for housing, education, employment, and health services should be available. Beneficiaries of the program should have access to credit facilities to enable them to start their own small businesses. Security and peace and order in their destination should be assured. Affordable dwellings and well-provided resettlement areas are necessary. There will be a need for more clinics, health centers and schools. Community colleges and vocational and technical schools should be opened. Dispersal of industries and location of eco zones and BPOs should be carried out to provide more employment opportunities. All of this should be supported by more infrastructures, power and water sources and better transportation and communication facilities. The absence or lack of them will be a recipe for failure, which will only make the poor poorer and more demoralized. It will be the equivalent of a domestic Marshall Plan for the disadvantaged urban dwellers who failed to adapt to city life. The program implementors should prove to all cynics that the government can solve the problem of inner cities. The creation of resilient and sustainable communities that will keep its inhabitants to stay is the end goal of the BP2 Program.

One does not have to be original to pursue a panacea to our social ills. I salute Sen. Bong Go for taking this worthy initiative to address a lingering problem, which has long bedeviled Metro Manila. With his special closeness to President Duterte and the infinite resources that will be made available to the BP2 Council, I trust that this time his efforts will make a huge difference. If it works, our nation will be forever grateful and indebted to Sen. Bong Go.







<u>1/2</u> Page **16 May 2020** Date

'Government must respect the people, for trust to happen'

AT GROUND LEVEL - Satur C. Ocampo May 16, 2020 - 12:00am

https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2020/05/16/2014302/government-must-respect-people-trust-happen

The overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the effects of drastic and severe measures adopted by governments in their bid to stanch the spread of infection, is giving rise to a mental illness crisis around the world.

"The isolation, the fear, the uncertainty, the economic turmoil – they all cause or could cause psychological distress," noted Devora Kestel, the World Health Organization's director for mental health, in a press briefing Thursday. "The mental health and well-being of whole societies have been severely impacted by this crisis and are a priority to be addressed urgently," she counseled.

Here in our country, the same psychological distress may also be prevalent, and surely our psychologists and social scientists will be examining the data soon. Offers have been posted on Facebook of incredibly huge monetary rewards for the killing of President Duterte – four have been reported so far, with the suspected persons arrested and threatened to be criminally charged. Is this an indication of such psychological distress?

Talking about such distress, the medical anthropologist (and former UP-Diliman chancellor) Michael L. Tan noted the "shock and awe" of ordinary citizens as they endured restricted mobility in home and community quarantine. They were apparently unprepared, he added, for the "coercive power of the state" and the "police and military presence that became stronger" by each passing day.

Tan spoke in a webinar Wednesday sponsored by The Medical City and Inquirer.net. As basis for his observation, he cited the arrest of 21 residents of Barangay San Roque in Quezon City who were asking for food aid in late March, and the recent lockdown of barangays in Tondo, Manila, where 1,400 policemen that included Special Action Force members forcibly restricted the residents in their homes.

It turned out in the Tondo case, Tan pointed out, authorities were supposed to carry out mass testing for COVID-19. "People would now see [the mass testing] as a military affair, like hunting down criminals, he said. "It was a very, very bad move. I don't know how we can repair that."

Tan also cited an incident in Nasipit, Agusan del Norte, when an elderly man said to be drunk was shot dead when he allegedly threatened barangay officials and police at a checkpoint. (The day before that incident – the first reported civilian killing during the quarantine – President Duterte announced on TV his orders to the police and military: "If anyone creates trouble and their lives are in danger, shoot them dead.") He likewise mentioned the shooting by a policeman, also at a checkpoint, of a former Army soldier who was unarmed and afflicted with post-traumatic stress disorder.

The "coercive power of the state" is the dominant characteristic of the Duterte government's response to the COVID-19 crisis: retired military generals are in charge of managing the lockdown and quarantine measures. The police and military are manning the checkpoints and have made thousands of arrests of alleged lockdown and quarantine violations. Of late, Duterte even ordered the military to help the DSWD (headed by a retired general) to distribute the P8,000 or P5,000 social amelioration aid promised to the poorest families.







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'Government must respect the people, for trust to happen'

This has spurred increasing criticisms from human rights institutions and defenders, both here and abroad, led no less than by the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights Michele Bachelet. She has raised alarm over "numerous reports … that police and other security forces have been using excessive and, at times, lethal force to make people abide by lockdown and curfews." She reminded governments that "emergency powers should not be a weapon" used by governments "to quash dissent, control the population, and even perpetuate their time in power."

In his latest weekly televised report to the nation, President Duterte left many people confounded when out of the blue he offered a P2-million reward to anyone who can provide information that would lead to the arrest of top New People's Army leaders. "Kapag ikaw ang nakaturo at nahuli ang commander na mabigat, may hati ka diyan sa pera," he said. Note that he only promised a "portion" of the reward money. Instead, he offered protection to the informers by providing them new identities and moving them into safehouses, purportedly to protect them against NPA reprisal. Who, in one's right mind, would accept to live his/her life like that in exchange for a paltry amount?

But the AFP spokesperson gleefully welcomed Duterte's reward offer, saying it will boost the military and police unrelenting counterinsurgency campaign – aimed at ending the 50-year plus armed conflict before Duterte's term ends in 2022. That's the military's promise to Duterte, in exchange for his abandoning formal peace negotiations with the Left revolution movement. The campaign has entailed not only armed operations against the NPA, but more and more has targeted civilians suspected of being either members or supporters of the CPP-NPA.

Yesterday, human rights watchdog Karapatan accused the Duterte government of intensifying its counterinsurgency operations as a "cover-up for its failure in handling the COVID-19 pandemic." It cited two recent incidents as proof: the killing, on May 8, of five farmers in Barangay Dolor, Bulan, Sorsogon, allegedly in a joint military-police operation; and the arrest in Barangay Coral in Calaca, Batangas of six farmers and leaders of a peasant association, in a joint raid of 13 households by elements of the PNP, Army, and Air Force.

Going back to Michael Tan's observations, he mentioned the problem of lack of trust between the government and the people. For sure, this isn't anything new. But trust that Tan has done a lot of research and thinking about this, as evidence in what he has been writing over the years.

"The reason the authorities are so hard on the people is because they don't trust the people," he said. "They have to learn to trust people, that they will comply, that people understand what's behind this."

"On the other hand," he pointed out, "people need to trust government. Government has a very low credibility and that's going to be tougher..." Turning to the government, he advised, 'You show respect to the people, they will respect you. It has to be reciprocated."

There's some food for thought. Maybe Malacañang should get a heavy ration of this in its "ayuda pack"?







`1/2 Page 16 May 2020 Date

Not out of the woods yet

"Right now, it is about adapting, evolving and adjusting according to the new normal. May 16, 2020 12:20 AM

By Joe Zaldarriaga

https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/05/16/not-out-of-the-woods-yet/

Today is the first day that various classifications pertaining to the lockdown will be implemented nationwide, ending the more than two months of enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) period. As announced last Tuesday by Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) spokesman Harry Roque, after a short speech by President Rodrigo Duterte "scratching the surface" on who will be allowed and who will have to remain home, we now have another acronym — MECQ, or "modified" ECQ.

Most people were expecting that the government will ease the lockdown in most key regions in the country, including some parts of the National Capital Region, where the cases of COVID-19 infections are on a downward trend. After staying at home since mid-March, the people were already familiar with GCQ or general community quarantine where we were told that certain people and businesses will be allowed to work and operate, while those under ECQ stayed under quarantine. Hence, many were disappointed that we failed to transition from ECQ to GCQ, and instead had been introduced to another jargon called modified ECQ, where citizens stay home while factory workers and laborers go to work.

I understand why the government is very cautious in lifting the lockdown. Definitely, we are not out of the woods yet in our fight against the global pandemic. The government wants to gradually start economic activity at half the capacity. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) is predicted to decline two percent to 3.4 percent this year, the first contraction in 22 years since the Asian financial crisis and the biggest decline since the waning years under Ferdinand Marcos, and worse than the government's forecast of -1.0 percent to zero growth in March.

Under MECQ, utility services providing food, electricity, water and other such products will continue to operate in order to keep our communities and economy afloat. Transportation will still be very limited, unless it is for utility services, and classes are still called off.

In many ways, this is similar to our experience these past couple of months, which many of us had gotten used to this kind of life. And while it dashed away hopes to finally get out into the "real world," we can use this last stretch as a way of mentally and psychologically preparing ourselves to embracing the new normal.

Unlike US President Donald Trump, who has been at odds with Dr. Anthony Fauci, US director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, on how to manage the spread of the coronavirus in the US, President Duterte defers to the World Health Organization's (WHO) advisory for COVID-infected countries like the Philippines to go slow on the lifting of lockdowns, or face a second or even a third wave of the contagion. He cautioned us from letting our guards down, lest we become part of the still growing number of fatalities from this deadly flu-like infection.

The threat is still there, and we can't be complacent. In fact, we are still behind in many aspects of this war against the pandemic. For example, we are behind schedule in terms of mass testing, and struggling to meet the desired 30,000 tests a day, and without an effective contact tracing and effective drug therapy versus COVID-19.







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Not out of the woods yet

Our neighboring countries such as Vietnam, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore have eased down their respective lockdowns. But what made them successful in preventing high death rates is an accurate tracking, testing and treating of suspected COVID-19 patients. They also have more robust public health systems that allowed them to respond more effectively.

At the onset of the coronavirus, Vietnam immediately set up 100 laboratories to process tests. This country is the gold standard as far as effective response to an epidemic is concerned. They had just over 200 cases and no fatality. Taiwan and South Korea likewise responded admirably. They quickly deployed tests and isolated infected persons.

Clearly, if we do not have reliable data on hand, which mass testing will provide, then perhaps we have no real reference on our status in this crisis.

This is the main reason why in partnership with Asian Development Board and the private sector, the IATF—National Task Force (NTF) and the Department of Health (DoH) rolled out the Task Force T3 (Test, Trace and Treat). This is to support the government's efforts to swiftly expand RT-PCR (Reverse Transmission-Polymerase Chain Reaction) testing for COVID-19 from the current level of approximately 4,500 per day to at least 30,000 tests per day by 30 May 2020.

Vince Dizon, the deputy chief implementer of the NTF COVID-19, said the government is also planning to set up an additional 50 laboratories within the month, on top of the 20 existing testing laboratories from the government and private sector.

There are now 26 licensed RT-PCR testing laboratories in the Philippines that are capable of detecting the SARS CoV-2 — the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. This is after the DoH approved the accreditation of the Jose B. Lingad Memorial Regional Hospital and the Eastern Visayas Regional Medical Center as independent COVID-19 testing facilities.

The new testing labs are expected to equip the government to perform better contact tracing, since more cases will be spotted before they are able to further spread the virus.

One good thing about a longer ECQ is that from the safety of our homes, we can contribute to the cause by practicing social distancing. This will never be over until the world discovers a cure or vaccine, unfortunately. But right now, it is about adapting, evolving and adjusting according to the new normal.

Since we will likely have to do testing, tracing and isolating, the next few months should also be an ideal time to rebuild our grassroots health system. Fighting COVID-19 will push us to reconfigure our health system.

There is no need to belabor how COVID-19 has brought down our economic growth for the first three months this year to almost zero, but as we open our economy, there will be new risks exposed. We need to learn lessons from the successes and failures of other countries in fighting this pandemic.







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EDITORYAL - Ipagpatuloy ang mga nakasanayan sa COVID

May 16, 2020 - 12:00am

https://www.philstar.com/pilipino-star-ngayon/opinyon/2020/05/16/2014326/editoryal-ipagpatuloy-ang-mga-nakasanayan-sa-covid

SABI ng mga eksperto, matatagalan pa bago mawala ang coronavirus o ang COVID-19. Pero ang pahayag ng World Health Organization (WHO) kahapon, maaaring hindi na umano umalis o mawala sa piling ng mga tao ang sakit na ito. Mananatili na umano ito na walang pinagkaiba sa sakit na tuberculosis (TB) at Acquire-Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Ang tanging magagawa para ito malabanan ay ang makatuklas ng bakuna. Pero kahit na nga may bakuna, mananatili na ang sakit na ito sa kapaligiran o ang tinatawag na endemic. Pahihinain lamang ito ng bakuna pero kahalubilo na ng mga tao.

Kung totoo ang sinabi ng WHO na magiging endemic ang COVID-19, nararapat lamang na ipagpatuloy ng mamamayan ang nakasanayan nang pag-iingat para makaiwas sa virus. Huwag nang bumalik sa dating nakasanayan na hindi nagsusuot ng face mask, kumpul-kumpol sa isang lugar, hindi naghuhugas ng kamay at kung anu-ano pang hindi magandang gawain na nagdudulot ng pagkakasakit.

Mula nang manalasa ang COVID-19, natuto ang marami sa tamang kalinisan. Itinakwil ang hindi magandang nakagawian gaya nang pagdura, pagdumi sa kung saan-saan at iba pa. Marami ngayon, pag-uwi ng bahay naliligo agad at nilalabhan ang sinuot na damit. Hindi na rin ipinapasok sa loob ng bahay ang suot na sapatos para hindi makapagdala ng virus. Ayaw nilang mahawa ang pamilya.

Ipagpatuloy ang mga nakasanayang ginagawa habang nananalasa ang COVID-19. Ito ang nararapat ngayon at sanayin na ang sarili sa mga gawaing ito. Bahagi na ng buhay ang pag-iingat upang hindi kumalat ang sakit. Kung maipagpapatuloy ang nakaugalian, hindi na magugulat o matataranta kapag may mas matindi pang sakit na manalasa. Nakahanda na ang lahat.

Subalit dapat din namang apurahin ng mga kinauukulan ang pagtuklas ng bakuna laban sa COVID-19 para nakasisigurong ligtas ang sangkatauhan.







16 May 2020Date

Global cost of the virus could reach \$8.8 trillion — ADB

Published May 15, 2020, 10:44 PM By Bloomberg

https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/05/15/global-cost-of-the-virus-could-reach-8-8-trillion-adb/

The cost of the coronavirus pandemic could reach as much as \$8.8 trillion, or almost 10% of global gross domestic product, depending on how long the outbreak continues and the strength of government responses, according to the Asian Development Bank.

A shorter containment period of three months coupled with strong policy measures could limit the impact to \$4.1 trillion, or 4.5% of world output, the Manila-based lender said in a report Friday. The Asia Pacific region is expected to account for about 30% of the overall decline in global output, it said.

The analysis "highlights the important role policy interventions can play to help mitigate damage to economies," ADB Chief Economist Yasuyuki Sawada said in a statement.

The new cost estimates are more than twice the range of \$2 trillion to \$4.1 trillion the development bank gave April 3. There are now more than 4 million confirmed cases of coronavirus globally with deaths exceeding 300,000.

The lender suggests boosting health systems, as well as income and employment protections, to avoid an even more difficult recovery. Sustained measures from governments could soften the economic impact of the virus by as much as 40%, ADB said

Between 158 million to 242 million jobs could be lost globally, with 70% of those in Asia and the Pacific, according to the ADB. The region accounts for a bigger share of job losses as its manufacturing sector remains labor intensive, James Villafuerte, a senior economist at the ADB, said in an interview Friday with Bloomberg TV's Haslinda Amin and Rishaad Salamat. In China, as many as 95 million jobs could be lost, he said.

While manufacturing and hospitality industries will be hit hardest, skilled workers in other sectors could also see temporary job displacement, Villafuerte said.

As consumption and investment declines, wages will drop globally, particularly in the US and Europe, chief economist Sawada said separately in an online briefing Friday.

"This is a health risk and not driven by fundamental economic problems," Sawada said. "Smart health policies and containment policies are really the key," he said, citing measures implemented in South Korea and Vietnam.

Travel restrictions and lockdowns implemented to arrest the virus' spread will likely cut global trade by \$1.7 trillion to \$2.6 trillion, the ADB said.







16 May 2020Date

Virus could cut up to 9.7 percent off global economy: ADB

posted May 15, 2020 at 05:00 pm by <u>AFP</u> https://manilastandard.net/mobile/article/323792

The coronavirus pandemic could cut up to 9.7 percent off the global economy, the Asian Development Bank said Friday, doubling its previous estimate as the virus stifles trade and leaves millions jobless.

The estimated impact would cost as much as \$8.8 trillion based on a range of scenarios, but ADB said government interventions could help offset the losses inflicted by the crisis.

Up to 242 million jobs will be lost due to the virus, more than seven times higher than the employment losses seen during the global financial crisis a decade ago. Foregone labour income could top \$1.8 trillion.

"These will be difficult to recoup," the Manila-based lender said, warning it could not discount the possibility of a financial crisis if the pandemic was not contained quickly enough to prevent defaults and bankruptcies.

The coronavirus has killed 300,140 people worldwide, according to an AFP tally based on official sources.

The World Health Organization has said the virus may become just another endemic virus in communities and populations will have to learn to live with it.

Over 4.4 million cases have been officially recorded in 196 countries and territories, with the United States recording the most deaths at 85,906.

To stem the economic losses, governments have announced a range of stimulus measures such as payroll support to keep jobs, cash transfers, and tax breaks.

"These helped counteract some of the adverse economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic," ADB said.

The bank noted the United States stands to lose up to \$2.2 trillion or a tenth of its GDP while losses in China, where the virus first surfaced, could top \$1.6 trillion or 11 percent of its economy.

Among industries, tourism and aviation were hit hard as countries closed borders and enforced lockdowns to contain the spread of the virus.

Many airlines have either retrenched staff or told their employees to take unpaid leave.

"The impact on employment was severe. Unskilled workers normally working on a casual or 'per piece; basis were hardest hit," ADB said.

Travel restrictions will cut global trade by up to \$2.6 trillion, which is already reeling from trade tensions between the United States and China, a global growth slowdown and weaker business confidence.







16 May 2020Date

COVID-19 threatens global progress

May 16, 2020 04:00 AM

ByTDT

https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/05/16/covid-19-threatens-global-progress/



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF UN UNICEF is helping to protect vulnerable babies in Côte d'Ivoire from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

While more people are living longer and healthier lives, the rate of progress is too slow to realize global efforts to stamp out poverty and inequality by 2030, the World Health Organization (WHO) said.

WHO's latest World Health Statistics reveal that low-income countries reported the biggest gains in life expectancy, which rose by 11 years between 2000 and 2016.

Other achievements during this period include a dramatic scale-up in access to services to prevent and treat HIV, malaria and tuberculosis. Child mortality was also halved thanks to better maternal and child healthcare.

However, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that the COVID-19 pandemic could further thwart progress.

"The new statistics shine a light on one of the key drivers of this pandemic: inequality," he said during the agency's latest update on the crisis.

Tedros reported that more than one billion people worldwide spend at least 10 percent of their household budgets on health care, while more than 55 percent of countries have fewer than 40 nursing and midwifery personnel, per 10,000 people.

"The COVID-19 pandemic is causing a significant loss of life, disrupting livelihoods, and threatening to undo much of the progress we have made," he said.

"While the coronavirus is an unprecedented shock to the world, through national unity and global solidarity, we can save both lives and livelihoods and ensure that other health services for neglected diseases, child vaccination, HIV, TB and malaria continue to both function and improve."

WHO also highlighted the challenge of preventing COVID-19 deaths in long-term care facilities, an "unfortunate phenomenon" that has occurred across the world, according to the agency's Executive Director.







16 May 2020Date

Antarctica's splendid isolation keeps coronavirus at bay

posted May 15, 2020 at 10:15 am
by <u>AFP and Paulina Abramovich</u>
https://manilastandard.net/mobile/article/323771

As the planet battles the seemingly inexorable spread of the coronavirus, Antarctica remains the only COVID-19-free continent -- thanks in the main to strict security and not a little luck.



This image released by the Chilean Antarctic Institute shows Antarctica without snow at Villa Las Estrellas, King George Island, on February 14, 2020. - While the new coronavirus spreads all over the world, there is only one continent that still breathes relieved: Antarctica. Due to strict control measures and a little luck, the territory remains free from contagion. Chilean Antarctic Institute / AFP

The natural isolation of the frozen and desolate expanse has been taken to new extremes since the WHO declared a pandemic on March 11.

Authorities canceled all tourism, evacuated non-essential personnel, and prohibited contacts between the international ice stations.

"We are isolated within this natural isolation that we already have," Alejandro Valenzuela, the maritime governor of Chile's Antarctic territory, told AFP by phone.

Strict new health protocols were quickly put in place and visits limited to vital supplies.

Chile has cut its Antarctic staff to a minimum, maintaining a skeleton force of 10 navy personnel at its Escudero military base in Bahia Fildes on the South Shetlands.

The harsh environment has always demanded close cooperation between various international missions.







16 May 2020 Date

Amazon could be next virus hot zone, says scientist

<u>Agence France-Presse</u> / 05:59 PM May 15, 2020 https://technology.inquirer.net/99530/amazon-could-be-next-virus-hot-zone-says-scientist



The Amazon rainforest. Image: AFP/Evaristo Sa via AFP Relaxnews

The next pandemic could come from the Amazon rainforest, warns Brazilian ecologist David Lapola, who says human encroachment on animals' habitats — a likely culprit in the coronavirus outbreak — is soaring there because of rampant deforestation.

Researchers say the urbanization of once-wild areas contributes to the emergence of zoonotic diseases — those that pass from animals to humans.

That includes the new coronavirus, which scientists believe originated in bats before passing to humans in China's rapidly urbanizing Hubei province, probably via a third species.

Lapola, 38, who studies how human activity will reshape the future ecosystems of tropical forests, says the same processes are in play in the Amazon.

"The Amazon is a huge reservoir of viruses," he told AFP in an interview. "We'd better not try our luck."

The world's biggest rainforest is disappearing at an alarming rate.

Last year, in far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's first year in office, deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon surged 85 percent, to more than 10,000 square kilometers (3,900 square miles) — an area nearly the size of Lebanon.

The trend is continuing this year. From January to April, 1,202 square kilometers were wiped out, setting a new record for the first four months of the year, according to data based on satellite images from Brazil's National Space Research Institute (INPE).







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Amazon could be next virus hot zone, says scientist

That is bad news, not just for the planet but for human health, said Lapola, who holds a PhD in earth system modeling from the Max Planck Institutes in Germany and works at the University of Campinas in Brazil.

"When you create ecological disequilibrium... that's when a virus can jump" from animals to humans, he said.

HIV, Ebola, dengue

Similar patterns can be seen with HIV, Ebola and dengue fever — "all viruses that emerged or spread on a huge scale because of ecological imbalances," he said.

So far, most such outbreaks have been concentrated in South Asia and Africa, often linked to certain species of bats.

But the Amazon's immense biodiversity could make the region "the world's biggest coronavirus pool," he said — referring to coronaviruses in general, not the one behind the current pandemic.

"That's one more reason not to use the Amazon irrationally, like we're doing now," he said.

And one more reason to be alarmed by the surge in deforestation by illegal farmers, miners and loggers, he added.

Bolsonaro, a climate-change skeptic who wants to open protected indigenous lands to mining and agriculture, deployed the army to the Amazon this week to fight deforestation, in a rare protective move.

But Lapola said he would rather see the government reinforce the existing environmental agency, IBAMA, which has faced staffing and budget cuts under Bolsonaro.

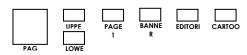
"I hope under the next administration we'll pay more attention to protecting what may be the planet's greatest biological treasure," Lapola said.

"We need to reinvent the relationship between our society and the rainforest."

Otherwise, the world faces more outbreaks — "a very complex process that is difficult to predict," he said. "We'd better just play it safe." **IB**







16 May 2020 Date

Antarctica's splendid isolation keeps coronavirus at bay

Nearby is one of five Russian bases, as well as missions from Uruguay, Korea and China. Provisions are often unloaded and loaded together and recreation areas shared.

There were sports competitions and mutual invitations for national day celebrations and birthday parties.

But the fear of the coronavirus has put an end to all physical contact between the bases.

Lucky break

Antarctica caught a lucky break when the start of the crisis coincided with the end of the tourist season, which brings around 50,000 visitors a year on cruise ships to view penguins and seals in the pristine environment.

The last tourist ship arrived in Bahia Fildes on March 3, just when the first case of infection was reported in Chile.

And the continent dodged a bullet when an inward bound Australian tour ship, the Greg Mortimer, was forced to turn back when the first cases of COVID-19 were discovered aboard, an outbreak which eventually affected nearly all 217 passengers and crew.

From April, as the austral winter closes in and sun becomes a memory, weather conditions prevent all but essential travel to and from the continent, isolating personnel even further.

The declaration of a pandemic made controls even tighter, said Valenzuela.

"Supplies are sanitized before they can be brought in and contact with the ship is minimal. People stay on board and we don't have direct contact now," he said.

Strict hygiene controls are also now in place at Chile's Eduardo Frei Air Base. The maximum number of people allowed to eat at a table in the canteen at any one time is limited to four, and sports activities in the gym and indoor recreation dome are suspended.

A year in isolation

Uruguay cut staff at its Artigas base to just nine people, after recently evacuating 10 non-essential personnel.

"The next turnover will be in the first fortnight of December, so the people left there will spend all winter there," Rear Admiral Manuel Burgos, president of the Uruguayan Arctic Institute, told AFP.

The Uruguayans who stayed behind, like the Chilean marines, will have no contact with the other bases.

"We are very conscious of what we are experiencing. We assume it with a resolve and we don't let ourselves get down," said Valenzuela, who arrived in Antarctica in November for a stint that will last a full year.

The spirit among those there is strong. So much so, Valenzuela said, "that now we are the ones sending messages of encouragement to our families."







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Researchers go 'cuckoo' over Antarctic penguin poop

<u>Agence France-Presse</u> / 06:12 PM May 15, 2020 <u>https://technology.inquirer.net/99533/researchers-go-cuckoo-over-antarctic-penguin-poop</u>



King penguins emit high levels of nitrous oxide or laughing gas. Image: AFP/Richard A. Brooks via AFP Relaxnews

Antarctica's king penguins emit such copious amounts of nitrous oxide, or laughing gas, via their feces that researchers went a little "cuckoo" studying them, according to a Danish scientific study published Thursday.

"Penguin guano produces significantly high levels of nitrous oxide around their colonies," said the head of the study, professor Bo Elberling of the University of Copenhagen's Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management.

While studying colonies of king penguins on the Atlantic island of South Georgia between South America and Antarctica, "the researchers went 'cuckoo' from being surrounded by penguin poop," he said.

Besides being a strain on the climate, nitrous oxide has an effect very similar to the sedative laughing gas used at the dentist's.

"After nosing about in guano for several hours, one goes completely cuckoo. One begins to feel ill and get a headache," Elberling said.

Nitrous oxide is 300 times more polluting to the environment than carbon dioxide.

The nitrous oxide is explained by the penguin diet of krill and fish, which contains high levels of nitrogen.

Nitrogen is released from the penguins' feces into the ground and soil bacteria then convert it into nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas.

"While nitrous oxide emissions, in this case, are not enough to impact Earth's overall energy budget, our findings contribute to new knowledge about how penguin colonies affect the environment around them, which is interesting because colonies are generally becoming more and more widespread," Elberling said. **IB**