

PTV 10 hrs · 🌐

#UlatBayan | Higit P100,000 halaga ng smuggled na kahoy, nakumpiska sa Rosario, Agusan del Sur

52 P 179594 918320 accuracy: 2m

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52 P 177551 917230 accuracy: 3m

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52 P 174738 912443 accuracy: 12m

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MGB-6 cites aggregate sector's 'bayanihan' act amid COVID-19

By Jaime S. CabagPublished on May 16, 2020

ILOILO CITY, May 16 (PIA) – The Mines and Geosciences Bureau-6 here described as a “concrete act of bayanihan” the gesture of the aggregate sector of extending economic relief to households and individuals affected by the community quarantine due to the COVID-19 health emergency in Region 6.

The aggregate sector comprising sand and gravel, quarry and mineral processing operators or permit holders handed out food packs and cash assistance to 10,914 households in different barangays in Aklan, Antique, Iloilo and Negros Occidental, said MGB-6 in a press release.

It added that some 670 frontliners, senior citizens and persons with disabilities were also recipients of the assistance.

The permit holders used the funds allocated to implement a Social Development Management Program or SDMP required of mining or quarry permittees/operators for the development of mining host communities, the press release noted.

Based on a consolidated report of MGB-6 as of May 12, 2020, the companies have utilized P3,255,866.00 of the P4,464,639.35 SDMP funds allocated for the program.

“This is indeed a concrete act of ‘bayanihan’ in support to Republic Act No. 11469 or The Bayanihan We Heal as One Act to cushion the health, economic, and social impact of COVID-19 in the country,” the bureau said. (MGB-6/PIA6)

Angat Dam water level rises after 'Ambo'

Published May 16, 2020, 1:04 PM

By *Ellalyn de Vera-Ruiz*

The water level in Bulacan's Angat Dam rose by almost three meters on Saturday after tropical storm "Ambo" (international name: "Vongfong") passed through Central Luzon.



A part of Angat Dam is seen at Norzagaray, Bulacan. (JANSEN ROMERO / MANILA BULLETIN)

Based on the monitoring of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA), Angat Dam's water level increased to 190.19 meters on Saturday from 187.53 meters last Friday.

The weather agency had earlier projected that the water level of Angat Dam may rise by around two to three meters when "Ambo" traverses Luzon.

The water reservoir has been consistently declining since the second week of January due to lack of significant rainfall over the Angat Watershed in Norzagaray, Bulacan.

While it remains below the 210 to 212-meter normal high water level, authorities are confident that water will be sufficient to meet the household and irrigation requirements until the next rainy season.

The National Water Resources Board (NWRB) has started releasing additional 2 cubic meters per second of raw water to the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System last May 14.

From 46 cubic meters per second, equivalent to almost 3,975 million liters per day, water allocation is now at 48 cubic meters per second or 4,147 million liters per day until the end of May.

The additional 2 cubic meters per second raw water allocation from Angat Dam was intended to meet the demand of consumers in Metro Manila, and adjacent provinces of Bulacan, Rizal, and Cavite during the national health emergency arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Board also considered in its decision to allocate additional water to the relatively high heat index this month that resulted in higher water demand of the consumers.

However, the NWRB has been calling on the public to continue practicing the responsible use and conservation of water to further secure the country's needs in the succeeding months and for the Angat Dam to recover to a more comfortable level by the end of the year.

'Ambo' rains slightly raise water level in Bulacan dams

By Manny Balbin **May 16, 2020, 6:20 pm**



IMPROVED. The water level of Angat Dam in Bulacan slightly rises due to rains dumped by Typhoon Ambo as of Saturday (May 16, 2020). The water coming from Angat Dam supplies more than 90 percent of Metro Manila's domestic water use. *(File photo courtesy of PDRMO-Bulacan)*

CITY OF MALOLOS, Bulacan – The water level in Angat, Ipo, and Bustos dams in the province slightly rose due to the rains dumped by Typhoon Ambo, according to the report by the Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office.

Angat Dam, the main source of the potable water supply of the residents in Metro Manila, was monitored on Saturday at 190.28 meters, 2.76 meters above its previous day's level of 187.52 meters.

The rains sent the water elevation of Angat Dam to 10.28 meters above its minimum operating level of 180 meters and 21.72 meters below its high normal water level of 212 meters.

Water elevation at the Ipo and Bustos dams were monitored Saturday morning at 100.66 meters and 15.06 meters, respectively, a bit higher compared to the previous day's 100.06 meters and 14.80 meters, respectively.

Meanwhile, Felix Robles, chief of the water control and coordinating unit of Bustos Dam, said the repair works at the Bustos Dam's Rubber Gate 5 was not completed on its target date of May 15.

"Air leaks were detected on its air bladder when it was subjected for test operation," Robles said.

He, however, said the engineering unit is rushing the completion of the repair works since the irrigation deliveries to the south zone service areas of the National Irrigation Administration is scheduled to start this June 1.

On the other hand, Crispulo Bautista, regional director of the Department of Agriculture in Central Luzon, said the light to moderate rains brought by Ambo was a welcome development for the region's farmers.

"The rains brought by typhoon Ambo is a big boost to start the planting preparations for the upcoming main rice cropping season," Bautista said. **(PNA)**

Ambo rains raise water level in Bulacan dams

[Ramon Efren Lazaro](#) (The Philippine Star) - May 17, 2020 - 12:00am

MALOLOS, Philippines — The water level in the dams in Bulacan has increased due to heavy rains brought by Typhoon Ambo.

Angat Dam's water elevation was monitored at 190.28 meters yesterday. It was 2.76 meters higher than Friday's 187.52 meters or 10.28 meters above its minimum operating level.

The normal high operating level of Angat Dam, which supplies 90 percent of Metro Manila's water needs, is 212 meters.

Authorities said the dam's water level should not dip to its critical mark to ensure a steady supply not only for households amid the coronavirus 2019 pandemic, but also for irrigation of farms in Bulacan and parts of Pampanga.

The water level in Ipo Dam yesterday was at 100.66 meters, an increase of .50 meters compared to Friday.

Bustos Dam's water elevation was at 15.06 meters compared to 14.80 meters the other day.

Felix Robles, Bustos Dam's water control and coordinating unit head, said their engineering unit is rushing repair works on the dam's rubber gate 5, which was supposed to be completed on Friday.

Robles said irrigation deliveries to the south zone service areas of the National Irrigation Administration in Bulacan is scheduled to start on June 1.

Crispulo Bautista, Department of Agriculture-Central Luzon director, said rains spawned by Ambo was a welcome development for farmers who are preparing for the rice cropping season.

Rains dumped by ‘Ambo’ raise Angat Dam level

By: [Carmela Reyes-Estropo](#) - Correspondent / [@inquirerdotnet](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 01:29 PM May 16, 2020

CITY OF MALOLOS — Moderate to strong rains brought by Tropical Storm “Ambo” raised the water level at Angat Dam by almost three meters on Saturday morning.

The Bulacan Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office said the dam’s elevation was at 190.19 meters above sea level (masl) as of 6 a.m. The record on the previous day was at 187.72 masl.

Despite the increase, the reservoir’s stock remains below the normal high level of 210 masl. Angat Dam is the major source of water for domestic consumption in Metro Manila.
LZB

Will clear skies prevail after the COVID-19 lockdown?

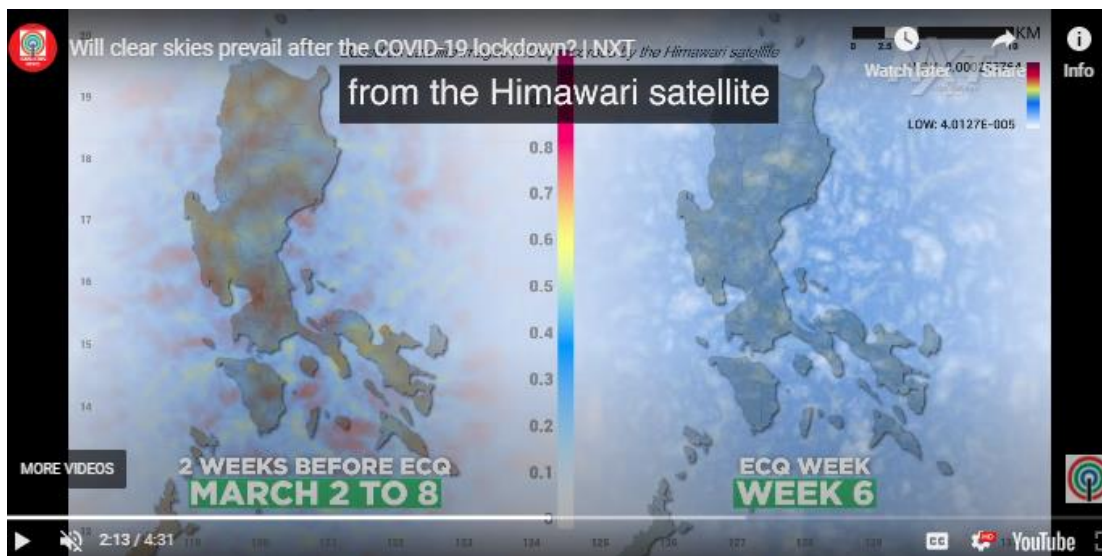
ABS-CBN News

Posted at May 16 2020 11:18 AM

Photos of clear skies, breathtaking sunsets, and the Sierra Madre mountain range looming over the Metro Manila skyline went viral after government suspended public transportation and non-essential businesses as it placed Luzon under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) in mid-March to contain the coronavirus disease.

This helped reduce air pollution in Metro Manila.

But will we be able to sustain low air pollution levels after the lockdown?



Source: https://news.abs-cbn.com/spotlight/multimedia/video/05/16/20/will-clear-skies-prevail-after-the-covid-19-lockdown?fbclid=IwAR1-jYK9jeuK6oZQ4WzWPWoXW3RFDPiHIOZfq_O6rQkWt1fLDPIKaTPOEIE

‘Balik Probinsiya’ Program needs more support

By [William B. Depasupil](#)

May 16, 2020

THE government needs to infuse more resources and encourage investments in the provinces to ensure the success of the Balik Probinsiya Program initiated by Sen. Christopher Lawrence “Bong” Go, according to a Catholic bishop.

Manila Auxiliary Bishop Broderick Pabillo, the administrator of the Manila archdiocese, pointed out that providing skills training and cash assistance were not enough to encourage people to go back to their provinces and stay for good.

“Now they promise to give skills training to the people and give them a bit of a capital for them to stay there. This is already a positive realization,” Pabillo said even as he stressed that these were not enough.

The prelate pointed out that previous initiatives similar to the program has already been done in the past but have all failed because of the need for stable jobs, which prompted people to back to Metro Manila.

He added that unless realities are taken into account, the revived program would not work any better, stressing that the present administration should learn from the past.

The government and businesses, he further said, “should pour massive investment” in rural areas so that they get adequate human services and jobs in the provinces.

“In a word, the development plan — and the budget — should all be aligned to give importance to the rural areas in order to develop the agricultural and fishery sectors of our society,” he said. “They are essential to our economy and to our survival.”

On May 6, President Duterte signed Executive Order 114, which seeks to institutionalize the Balik Probinsiya Program as “a pillar of balanced regional development.”

The program aims to ease Metro Manila’s ballooning population and convince people to go home to their provinces as the government struggles to contain the coronavirus in major cities.

“The uncontrolled upsurge of population in the National Capital Region (NCR) brings to fore the longstanding issues on the lack of viable and sustainable employment opportunities in the countryside, unbalanced regional development and unequal distribution of wealth,” the EO 114 indicated.

Source: <https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/05/16/news/regions/balik-probinsiya-program-needs-more-support/724996/>



SOLUSYON O REBOLUSYON; BALIK-PROBINSIYA, BAGONG PAG-ASA

May 16, 2020 @ 4:20 PM 16 hours ago

Views: 355

Galawang panggugulo ang makikita mo sa mga makakaliwang kongresista tulad nitong si Bayan Muna Rep. Carlos Zarate.

‘Yan ang kapansin-pansin makaraang mapuna pa ng kongresista ang panghuhuling ginagawa ng pamahalaan sa mga taong hayagang nagbabanta sa buhay ng ating Pang. Rodrigo Roa Duterte.

Kapalit ng pabuyang salapi ay sinasabing sinoman ang makapapatay sa Pangulo ay bibigyan ng P50M hanggang P500 milyon. May kalakip pang pagmumura ang alok na pagpatay.

TOKHANG ONLINE?

Ang sabi ni Zarate mukhang online “tokhang” na raw ang ginagawa ng pamahalaan dahil ipinagbabawal na rin ang kritisismo sa cyber space.

Sagot ng ating uzi, “Bobo! Iba ang kritisismo, iba ang pagbabanta, Kongresista ka pa naman, huwag kang tatanga-tanga.”

Ang kritisismo umano ay hindi labag sa batas subalit ang pagbabanta sa buhay ng tao ay may kaakibat na parusa sa ating Saligang Batas.

MAKAKALIWANG KAISIPAN

Maituturing nating balikwas ‘yung kaisipan ng mga taong nakuha pang gumawa ng kagaguhan sa panahon ng pandemiya tulad ng mga nagbabantang ito, kasama na rin ang mga kumukunsinte sa kanila na tulad ni Zarate.

Marapat lang siguro na solusyon sa kasalukuyang pandemya ang ginagawan ng paraan ni Zarate kaysa naman pagsisiga sa damdamin ng mga taong tuliro sa kasalukuyan dahil sa dinaranas sa COVID-19.

Para bang nananawagan ng rebolusyon ang kongresistang instigador para tuluyang magalit ang sambayanan sa pamahalaan.

Baligtarin kaya natin ang situwasyon at tayo ang manawagan na pagpapatayin ang mga makakaliwang tulad ni Zarate? Ano kaya ang kanyang magiging pakiramdam? Hindi ba’t masakit din, kongresman?

Kaya tama lang po ba, na huwag po natin gawin sa ating kapwa ang ayaw po nating gawin naman nila sa atin?

KULANG SA PANSIN

Sa kasalukuyang panahon ay para bang nawalan ng saysay ang pagiging “superman” o tagapagligtas ng mga makakaliwa sa mga naghihikahos nating taumbayan.

Una, takot ding lumabas ang mga ito baka nga naman tamaan ng COVID-19.

Ikalawa, wala naman silang maitutulong dahil wala naman silang kakayahan kundi ang gumawa lamang ng gulo sa pamamagitan ng pagra-rally o kilos-protesta na ipinagbabawal sa kasalukuyan dahil sa usaping social distancing.

Kaya kahit balagbag ang komento sa mga isyu ay hala sige na lang ng sagot ang mga makakaliwang mambabatas para lang mapansin sila.

Sa madaling salita, wala silang pakialam sa resulta ng kanilang sinasabi, ang importante lang ay makapang-insulto at mapansing “relevant” pa sila.

Meron nga tayong kasabihan para mapansin ka – kailangang “galaw galaw, baka pumanaw.”

Baka nga naman makalimutan na sila dahil wala silang nagawa sa kalagitnaan ng pandemya.

MABUTI PA ANG ADMINISTRASYON

Lahat ay ginagawa ng kasalukuyang administrasyon para maisalba sa pandemyang COVID-19 ang mga naipit nating kababayan sa siyudad partikular na sa Maynila.

Biglang ipinanukala ni Sen. Christopher Lawrence “Bong” Go ang matagal nang sinusubukang balik-probinsiya program na noon ay lagi namang pumapalpak dahil sa kakulangan ng suporta mula sa iba’t ibang sektor.

Pero ngayon sa ginawa ni Sen. Bong Go at sa tulong ni Executive Secretary Salvador Medialdea at NHA GM Marcelino Escalada, Jr., full force ang administrasyong Duterte na masigurong may uuwiang bahay at hanapbuhay ang ating mga kapatid na naipit sa hirap ng buhay rito sa Maynila.

Minamadali na ang unang batch na aabot sa 10,000 pamilya ang gagawan ng paraan para makabalik sa kani-kanilang lalawigan sa suporta ng nasyunal at lokal na pamahalaan.

TEAM PLAYERS

Ilan sa team players na nakita nating nagkukumahog na tumulong sa ating mga kababayan ang National Housing Authority, Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor, Department of Trade and Industry, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Health, Department of Interior and Local Government, National Economic and Development Authority, Maritime Industry Authority, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Budget and Management, etc.

Sa rami ng tutulong ay hindi po natin mailista lahat.

Kasama rin ang mga representante galing sa provincial governments at mga mayor na kanilang nasasakupan.

Anak ng pitong putakte! Kapag hindi pa naman naging matagumpay ito, ewan ko na lang.

Kitang-kita ang sinseridad nina Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte at Sen. Bong Go na maisalba ang ating mga kababayan.

Sabi nga ni Sen. Go, “Probinsiyano rin kami ni presidente, kaya ramdam namin ang nararamdaman nila sa nangyayaring COVID-19 pandemic na ito.”

Kaya rito lang sa administrasyon ni Pang. Rodrigo Roa Duterte natin makikita ang katuparan ng BALIK-PROBINSIYA, BAGONG PAG-ASA.

Nation springs back to life

Published 6 hours ago
on May 17, 2020 12:07 AM

By **Elmer N. Manuel** @tribunephI_Imer



Into the new normal People continue to observe social distancing as they enter SM Manila on the first day it opens after a two-month quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Only food stores were open for take-out only. PHOTOGRAPH BY BOB DUNGO JR. FOR THE DAILY TRIBUNE @tribunephI_bob

In what could be the first signs of life following a two-month hiatus, Filipinos woke up yesterday to find relaxed restrictions on travel, the partial return of malls and limited religious gatherings as the government gradually opened up the economy devastated so badly by a lethal virus that has likewise turned the world upside down.

The Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) on Saturday released the guidelines on travel as the country relaxed a two-month lockdown of Metro Manila and other areas to revive the shrinking economy due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

The IATF said that all cargoes by land, air or sea should be unhampered and workers in the logistics sector, such as cargo, trucking, courier delivery and port operations shall likewise be allowed to transit across areas placed under any form of community quarantine.

The agency added that a maximum of five personnel may operate delivery vehicles and noted that health workers, government officials and frontline personnel, those traveling for medical or humanitarian reasons, those heading to the airport for travel abroad and migrant workers returning to their residence are permitted to travel "within and across" any level of quarantine.

It also includes that other persons transported by the national government upon conduct of necessary quarantine protocols and in concurrence with the receiving local governments, while travel is also allowed for uniformed personnel and employees of official business with the corresponding travel authority.

Migrant workers, meantime, will be deployed abroad after declaring their understanding of the risks involved and they will have unhampered transit to and from government offices to process their requirements.

The guidelines also said that entry to areas under the strictest lockdown or enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) and the less stringent modified ECQ is prohibited except for those permitted to render work.

Modified lockdown

Business establishments, meantime, may provide point-to-point shuttle services or near site arrangements inside the modified lockdown areas like Metro Manila, Laguna, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Zambales and Angeles City.

The IATF stressed that non-essential exit is prohibited from areas under and modified lockdown and from Cebu and Mandaue Cities in the Visayas, which are under ECQ and those authorized to render work in ECQ areas can move across areas placed under any form of community quarantine.

Meantime, all other areas that are not under ECQ or modified lockdown will implement a general community quarantine (GCQ) that allows almost all industries to operate up to 75 percent except amusement and those with mass gatherings.

The movement of people in GCQ areas “for any purpose other than leisure shall be permitted.”

But what could be the most welcome development to most people locked up in their homes for two months is the partial reopening of malls in GCQ areas where hardware stores, clothing and accessories shops, bookstores, school and office supplies, baby care products, pet food and pet care services and the like will be made available.

More policemen will be deployed in malls and other places of convergence now that quarantine protocols have eased up around the country, according to Joint Task Force COVID Shield commander PLt. Gen. Guillermo Eleazar.

“This is not to restrict the public, but more for their safety and security,” Eleazar said as he conducted inspections in some quarantine control points at the borders of Metro Manila and Rizal Province as well as places of convergence such as malls and transport terminals.

Eleazar said that the added police deployment is for the expected influx of people in areas now under modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ) and GCQ particularly in malls and shopping centers.

Policemen will be assisting mall security personnel in implementing health protocols aimed at containing the spread of the coronavirus disease.

“We expect more people to be go out because more establishments will reopen and operate under modified ECQ at GCQ,” noted Eleazar, who is also the PNP Deputy Chief for Operations. He said they expect the result of the transition to be fully felt by next week.

Eleazar assured that the police will exert all efforts to ensure quarantine measures are strictly implemented to allay fears that the shift may result in a second wave of infections.

Limited mass gathering

The IATF said that while it discourages religious congregations, there could only be at least 10 people in a gathering to adhere to the prescribed minimum health standards in places across the country other than high-risk areas still under enhanced and modified lockdowns.

Metro Manila, Laguna province and several other “transitioning high-risk” areas in Central Luzon were placed under modified lockdown Saturday following two months of strict restrictions, restarting the economy by allowing almost all industries to operate up to 75 percent.

The IATF, meantime, noted that Cebu and Mandaue cities in the Visayas will stay under the strictest lockdown or enhanced community quarantine and stressed that areas under the modified lockdown will allow “highly restricted” religious gatherings “limited to not more than five persons.”

Religious gatherings, on the other hand, remain prohibited under ECQ.

The strictest lockdown, however, will allow the movement of pastors, priests, rabbis, imams and other religious ministers who will lead necrological or funeral rites.

“Immediate family members of the deceased from causes other than COVID-19 shall be allowed to move from their residences to attend the wake or internment of the deceased upon satisfactory proof of their relationship with the latter and social distancing measures,” said the IATF.

Leisure activities such as movie screenings, concerts, sports events and other entertainment-related activities are still barred in all lockdown levels.

Courts, too

The Supreme Court (SC) on Saturday announced that courts in areas under GCQ will open physically starting Monday, while those under the modified lockdown will remain closed. In a statement, the High Court said that from Monday until 29 May, the presiding judge of every court under GCQ will determine a skeleton staff who will report to work on a rotation basis, which is according to the SC’s guidelines.

The date — which falls on a Friday — is the last day before the end of the MECQ in certain areas that took effect on Saturday. The GCQ is one step below the ECQ, which has more restrictions, while the MECQ or transition phase before a downgrade to GCQ and a modified GCQ which will lead to a downgrade to the new normal with institutionalized post-pandemic health protocols.

The SC noted that courts in areas under a modified lockdown or MECQ will remain physically closed. The areas where the MECQ are in place are Metro Manila, Laguna, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Zambales and Angeles City.

It added that night courts and Saturday courts remain suspended in all areas, while all tribunals can be reached by phone, email or Facebook. A list of court hotlines and email is available on the SC website.

**with Kristina Maralit
@tribunephil_tina**

INFECTIONS STEADILY RISING | Philippines reports 214 new cases as it eases lockdown

May 16, 2020 , 04:50 PM

MAY, 16, 2020

By Manny Mogato, News5 editor-at-large

The Philippines on Saturday reported 214 new corona virus infections and 11 deaths as government allowed wide parts of the country to re-open gradually to stop the economy from further losses due to a two-month lockdown.

In its daily update, the health department said the total number of confirmed positive cases has reached 12,305 since the outbreak more than two months ago.

The first cases were detected in late January when two tourists from Wuhan got sick in the central Philippines.

This is the sixth straight day the Philippines reported more than 200 new infections.

Nearly 150 of the new cases are from the capital region Eleven fatalities were also reported bringing the tally to 817 people, te second highest in Southeast Asia next to Indonesia.

More than 2,500 infected persons have recovered from the highly contagious respiratory disease, including the latest 101 people who got well and discharged from the hospital.

The data from the health department are however three or four days old as it struggled to address a huge backlog in its testing capacity due to inadequate reagents, test kits and laboratory facilities to process the specimens.

Vince Dizon, an official in-charge with the government's testing, said he is not satisfied with the current capacity of less than 10,000 a day.

The government's target to test 30,000 a day by the end of may and plan to test 1-2 percent of the Philippines' 108 population.

Dizon said the country can lift curbs on movement and re-open the economy if the Philippines has done enough testing, increased the isolation facilities as well as intensive care system in tertiary hospitals.

The Philippines has decided to re-open partially the economy as the government can no longer support 18 million poor families who lost jobs and livelihoods dye to prolonged work stoppage, business closure and suspension of transportation.

Source: <https://news.tv5.com.ph/breaking/read/infections-steadily-rising-philippines-reports-214-new-cases-as-it-eases-lockdown?fbclid=IwAR2mcGd8VFKhZTfDA3v5MkvuvLrXgDNKLG0BxYPNdGJY40hEEE4A9MI-Zok>

DBM releases 90% of national budget

[Mary Grace Padin](#) (The Philippine Star) - May 17, 2020 - 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — The Department of Budget and Management (DBM) has released 90.1 percent of the 2020 national budget in the first four months of the year to support the operations of state agencies.

According to latest data from DBM, allotment releases from January to April has reached P3.69 trillion, accounting for 90.1 percent of the P4.1 trillion national budget for 2020.

This left P406.06 billion in funds that have yet to be released by the agency.

Allotment releases issued by the DBM enable agencies to incur obligations to finance the delivery of projects and services.

Of the total amount released, DBM said P2.07 trillion went to line agencies, including those in the executive branch, Congress, the judiciary and other constitutional offices.

Another P213.76 billion was released from Special Purpose Funds.

Releases for automatic appropriations reached P1.24 trillion, while other releases amounted to P167.87 billion.

Earlier, DBM reported that it released P1.076 trillion worth of notices of cash allocation (NCAs) last April, about 4.5 times larger than the P238.8 billion recorded in the same month last year.

This brought cumulative NCA releases to P1.73 trillion in the first four months of the year, more than two times larger than the P861.15 billion recorded a year ago.

Budget Undersecretary Laura Pascua said the increase in NCA releases was driven by expenses related to the fight against the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), as well as regular operational requirements.

However, DBM data also showed that of the total NCA releases in April, only 41.5 percent or P445.89 billion has been utilized, slower than the 91 percent NCA utilization rate exhibited in the same month of 2019.

Year-to-date, P1.087 trillion in NCAs have been used up, translating to a utilization rate of 63 percent, also down from 91 percent in the same four-month period last year.

Pascua explained that NCA utilization has been slower due to the implementation of strict quarantine measures in Luzon and other parts of the country.

Meanwhile, DBM earlier issued National Budget Circular 580, which ordered the adoption of economy measures in the government in light of the national health emergency due to COVID-19.

Under the circular, the DBM will no longer release 35 percent of programmed appropriations of agencies under the 2020 General Appropriations Act (GAA) effective April 1, 2020.

The DBM advised agencies that no allotments will be released for new programs, projects and activities which are not likely to be implemented within the current year.

Source: <https://www.philstar.com/business/2020/05/17/2014482/dbm-releases-90-national-budget>

Big cuts in infra, education budgets to fund COVID-19 dole outs, medical response

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May 17, 2020
DATE

Big cuts in infra, education budgets to fund COVID-19 dole outs, medical response

By: [Ben O. de Vera](#) - Reporter / [@bendeveraINQ](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 07:45 PM May 16, 2020

MANILA, Philippines — As the government scrambled to respond to the health and socioeconomic crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, budgets for education and infrastructure have been slashed to fund dole-outs and medical response, Department of Budget and Management (DBM) data showed.

The Bayanihan to Heal as One Act allowed the President to realign budget items, and of as end-April, the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) suffered the biggest cut of P121.9 billion, leaving its spending program for 2020 at a lower P458.9 billion from P580.9 billion previously.

The huge reduction in DPWH's budget seemed out of sync from the economic team's plan to ramp up infrastructure spending so that the economy could quickly recover post-pandemic.

First-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) declined by 0.2 percent, and economic managers had said that one way to post a "V-shaped" recovery after an ongoing recession during the first half will be through the ambitious "Build, Build, Build" infrastructure program, which the government was currently reviewing to immediately resume the "most impactful" flagship projects.

Next to DPWH is the budget of the Department of Education (DepEd) that was reduced by a hefty P21.9 billion to P499.5 billion, followed by the budget of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) that was cut by P13.9 billion to P32.9 billion.

State universities and colleges (SUCs), meanwhile, were inflicted with a P7.6-billion reduction in their 2020 allotments, to a smaller P66.1 billion.

These budget cuts on education agencies and institutions came at a time when public schools needed to adjust to online means of learning amid a "new normal" of social distancing before classes start by August.

DBM data as of April showed the following government agencies also had their budgets reduced: Department of Agriculture (P11.7 billion); Department of Environment and Natural Resources (P68.7 million); Department of Foreign Affairs (P378.8 million); Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (P250.5 million); Department of Information and Communications Technology (P6.2 billion); Department of the Interior and Local Government (P3.1 billion); Department of Justice (P78.6 million); Department of National Defense (P6.7 billion); Department of Tourism (P824.4 million); Department of Trade and Industry (P4.1 billion); Department of Transportation (P8.8 billion); National Economic and Development Authority (P484.3 million); Presidential Communications Operations Office (P25 million); and Commission on Human Rights (P37 million).

Big cuts in infra, education budgets to fund COVID-19 dole outs, medical response

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In all, government departments suffered a net cut of P5.3 billion in their budgets, even as four agencies in the frontlines fighting COVID-19, saw bigger 2020 allocations, namely: Department of Finance (DOF), with an additional P35.3 billion to P53.8 billion; Department of Health (DOH), additional P1.9 billion to P102.9 billion; Department of Labor and Employment (Dole), additional P1.5 billion to P18.9 billion; and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), with the biggest additional funds of P165.2 billion, more than doubling its budget for this year to over P329 billion from P163.8 billion originally.

These four departments and their attached agencies were implementing the social amelioration program (SAP) for vulnerable sectors such as poor families and displaced workers, wage subsidies for small businesses, as well as the healthcare response against the disease.

On the other hand, the Office of the President's P8.2-billion budget and the Office of the Vice President's P699.9 million were left untouched.

Other executive offices (OEOs) also got a total of P14.9-billion reduction in their 2020 budgets, of which the biggest was that of CHed's.

The other OEOs with budget cuts were Anti-Red Tape Authority (P80 million); Climate Change Commission (P50 million); Commission on the Filipino Language (P10 million); Dangerous Drugs Board (P71.8 million); Film Development Council of the Philippines (P70 million); National Commission for Culture and the Arts (a total of P297.9 million, of which P190.3 million was reduced from NCCA proper, P61 million from National Historical Commission of the Philippines, P35 million from National Library of the Philippines, and P11.7 million from National Archives of the Philippines); Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (P87.7 million); Philippine Racing Commission (P55 million); Philippine Sports Commission (P323 million); and Presidential Management Staff (P46.4 million).

The government also reduced budgetary support to government-owned and/or -controlled corporations (GOCCs) by P5.1 billion, such that subsidy and equity programmed to be infused into state-run firms this year will be down to P190.9 billion instead of P195.9 billion in the original 2020 budget.

From the reallocated money so far, P1.05 billion was lodged into the augmentation of funds for priority COVID-19-related programs, projects, and activities listed in Section 4 (v) of the Bayanihan to Heal as One Law.

The larger P9.3 billion in the realigned budget, meanwhile, went to the special account in the general fund, bringing it to a higher P21.8 billion compared to the P12.5-billion program for 2020.

As of April, P16.9 billion were already released from the special account, which the DBM defined as "a fund whereby proceeds of specific revenue measures and grants earmarked by law for specific priority projects are recorded"—in this case, the Bayanihan Law.

Besides budget realignment, DBM last month ordered all government entities in the executive branch to tighten their belts and defer non-essential spending in order to generate savings.

DBM had also included "for release later" items—legislators' alleged realignments worth at least P80 billion in the P4.1-trillion 2020 national budget for "pet projects" in their own congressional districts—in the savings pool.

Big cuts in infra, education budgets to fund COVID-
19 dole outs, medical response

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DBM had also included “for release later” items—legislators’ alleged realignments worth at least P80 billion in the P4.1-trillion 2020 national budget for “pet projects” in their own congressional districts—in the savings pool.

Also, the DBM-chaired Government Procurement Policy Board (GPPB) last May 7 ordered all procuring entities to “assess and review all of their planned and ongoing procurement for the fiscal year 2020 and identify which shall be discontinued or terminated” in line with the government’s budget-saving measures.

Solon bats for infectious diseases hospital, research center

Published May 16, 2020, 11:05 AM

By *Charissa Luci-Aitenza*

Bohol 2nd district Rep. Erico Aristotle Aumentado has sought the creation of a Philippine National Infectious Disease Hospital and Research Center (PNIDHRC) in all the 17 regions, in the wake of increasing COVID-19 cases in the country.



Bohol Rep. Erico Aristotle Aumentado (FACEBOOK / FILE PHOTO / MANILA BULLETIN)

The chairperson of the House Committee on Science and Technology filed House Bill No. 6648 seeking the creation of the proposed Infectious Diseases Hospital and Research Center that will act as the principal hospital and research facility responsible for the treatment, control, prevention, and research of highly communicable diseases in the Philippines.

“The pandemic has emphasized the importance of a dedicated hospital and research center catering to the treatment, prevention, control, and study or research of existing and emerging highly infectious diseases, whether from natural or man-made sources to better prepare us for the next deadly outbreak,” he said in his bill’s explanatory note.

He said the center will conduct research on various infectious diseases and advocate government actions and policies to solve medical problems.

“It will also seek to improve the management of infectious disease, including the ill-effects to the health of humans from various hazardous chemicals,” Aumentado added.

He proposed that hospitals and research centers conduct surveillance and clinical researches on important pathogens, including bacteria, mycobacteria, fungi, and viruses.

He said the PNIDHRC would also perform molecular epidemiology to investigate the mechanisms contributing to drug resistant pathogens.

“The proposed bill will address the lack of institutional capacity to implement comprehensive public health management programs to protect the public from serious health and Socio-economic problems brought about by fatal infectious diseases like COVID-19,” the House leader said.

HB 6648 allocates P20-billion funding for the initial operation and maintenance of the hospitals and research facilities of the PNIDHRC, including the land acquisition, construction and acquisition of hospital and research equipment, furniture and personnel services

Religious gatherings now allowed in areas under
TITLE: MECQ, GCQ

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Religious gatherings now allowed in areas under MECQ, GCQ

By Ruth Abbey Gita-Carlos [May 16, 2020, 10:36 am](#)



HIGHLY RESTRICTED. Photo shows the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene also known as Quiapo Church in Manila. Religious gatherings in areas under modified enhanced community quarantine may now resume but they would be highly restricted and limited to no more than five persons. This is according to guidelines issued by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases on Friday (May 15, 2020). *(File photo)*

MANILA – The Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) has allowed the conduct of religious gatherings in areas placed under modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ) and general community quarantine (GCQ).

Cebu and Mandaue cities will be placed under ECQ, while Metro Manila, Laguna, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva, Ecija, Pampanga, Zambales, and Angeles City will be under MECQ from May 16 to 31.

Other places nationwide that are not under ECQ or MECQ will be under GCQ.

Under the omnibus guidelines on the implementation of community quarantine in the country released on Friday, the last day before the transition, religious gatherings in areas under MECQ would be highly restricted and limited to not more than five persons.

While religious activities are not encouraged in areas placed under GCQ, the IATF-EID authorized such activities, so long as the maximum number of participants is 10.

People engaged in religious activities must observe minimum health standards.

Public gatherings that are “unauthorized, non-work essential, or are entertainment-related” remain prohibited in places where MECQ and GCQ are implemented.

In areas under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ), mass gatherings are still prohibited.

Mall operations

Limited operations in malls and shopping areas in places under MECQ and GCQ will be allowed, except for leisure establishments and services.

Pregnant women and individuals with health risks may not enter malls and shopping centers in areas under MECQ, “except when indispensable under the circumstances for obtaining essential goods and services or for work in establishments located therein.”

For areas under GCQ, individuals aged 21 years and below and 60 years and above may not enter malls and shopping centers, “except when indispensable under the circumstances for obtaining essential goods and services or for work in establishments located therein.”

Religious gatherings now allowed in areas under
TITLE: MECQ. GCQ

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Leisure activities not allowed in areas under MECQ

The new guidelines also prohibited the public in areas under MECQ from visiting tourist spots, such as water parks and other places that offer similar services.

Operations of entertainment industries, such as cinemas, theaters, and karaoke bars are also banned.

People are likewise not allowed to go to kid amusement establishments; libraries, archives, museums, and cultural centers; and gyms, fitness studios, and sports facilities.

They also cannot avail of personal care services from massage parlors, sauna, facial care, and waxing.

Public transportation

Mass public transportation in places where ECQ and MECQ are imposed remains suspended.

However, commissioned shuttle services for employees of permitted establishments, and point-to-point transport services for front-line workers are allowed to operate at reduced vehicle capacity to observe minimum health standards.

The IATF-EID also allowed exempted individuals to use private company shuttles and personal vehicles, as well as bikes and other non-motorized vehicles in areas under MECQ.

Meanwhile, the road, rail, maritime, and aviation sectors of public transportation in areas under GCQ are allowed to operate at a reduced operational and vehicle capacity.

A strict one-meter distance between passengers must be observed and appropriate engineering controls must be in place, according to the guidelines. **(PNA)**

QC sets localized guidelines for modified ECQ

By Susan G. De Leon Published on May 16, 2020

CALOOCAN CITY, May 16 (PIA) – Mayor Joy Belmonte has issued a memorandum prescribing localized guidelines that will be implemented in Quezon City as it shifted from the enhanced community quarantine into modified enhanced community quarantine starting Saturday, May 16.

“As we transition from ECQ to MECQ, we have crafted policies that will help our citizens adjust to the new normal and restart the city’s economy under the present condition,” Belmonte said.

Belmonte’s memorandum includes some localized strategies and initiatives to help stop the spread of COVID-19, on top of the MECQ guidelines earlier released by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases.

Among them is the continued implementation of the Special Concern Lockdown Areas, where select areas with high COVID-19 cases or high probability of virus spreading will be placed under strict containment.

In addition, the city also requires businesses with 10 or more employees to submit to the City Health Department their program for COVID-19 employee testing, at cost to the establishments.

While no public transportation is allowed, the city permitted establishments that are allowed to operate under MECQ to provide point-to-point private transport services or shuttles, including the hiring of public utility buses, public utility jeepneys, or high occupancy vehicles, for the exclusive use of their employees.

The local government also allowed tricycles to operate under strict health and safety condition and adherence to the route indicated in their franchise.

Belmonte encouraged all drivers concerned to submit themselves for COVID-19 checking in one of the city’s community-based centers.

The city government also plans to expand its current “Libreng Sakay” bus services to accommodate residents traveling to and from permitted establishments.

In an effort to encourage local residents to use bicycle as a mode of last-mile transport, Belmonte encouraged barangays to provide free bicycle parking spaces.

The directive also mandates all establishments in Quezon City to assign a Health and Safety Officer accountable to ensure that these guidelines are strictly implemented, in addition to compliance with the usual occupational health and safety standards and regulations.

As earlier directed by the IATF, businesses like manufacturers of food, water, and non-alcoholic beverage and medical and hygiene products, hospitals and clinics, essential retailers such supermarkets, grocery stores, markets, water refilling stations and drugstores can now fully operate under the MECQ.

"This is subject to compliance with thermal scanning, social distancing, hand washing, use of face masks, testing program and other applicable health measures," said Belmonte.

The local government also allowed other businesses to operate with up to 50 percent of their workforce on-site, including general manufacturing, office administration and support services.

The city will be releasing this weekend detailed guidelines to guide each sector like business sector, construction, waste management, environment, law and order, transport sector and others to avoid confusion and grey areas.

Those who will violate the guidelines could face charges of violation of Sec. 9 of Republic Act No. 11332, which penalizes non-cooperation of person or entities affected by a health event of public concern and/or 151 of the Revised Penal Code or Resistance and Disobedience to a Person in Authority.

Belmonte called on residents to fully abide by the guidelines set by the city government, saying their cooperation is instrumental in stopping the spread of COVID-19 in the city.

"Mahalaga ang kooperasyon ng bawat isa sa paglipat natin patungo sa MECQ. Kailangan natin ang tulong ng lahat para hindi na kumalat pa ang virus na ito," Belmonte said. (QC PAISD/PIA-NCR)



NEW NORMAL?

May 16, 2020 @ 3:49 PM 17 hours ago

Views: 86

Bagong normalidad? Bagong kalagayan, kalakaran o karanasan?

'Yan ang ating mga tanong sa pagpapalawig ng Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) na binago na rin sa General Community Quarantine (GCQ) simula sa susunod na buwan ng Mayo.

Ngunit hindi ito para sa lahat ng lugar o sa buong bansa, dahil ang ibang rehiyon ay nasa ilalim pa rin ng ECQ hanggang Mayo 31, gaya ng kalakhang Maynila o National Capital Region (NCR).

Kasama rito ang Laguna at Cebu City dahil nga mataas pa ang insidente ng COVID-19.

Ito ang ipinag-utos ng ating Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte base sa rekomendasyon ng Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) na naatasan magsawa ng mga pag-aaral paano labanan at sugpuin ang pagkalat ng virus na dala ng COVID-19.

At sa paliwanag ng Administrasyong Duterte ang mga lugar na isinailalim sa GCQ ay hindi ibinabalik sa dating normal na kalagayan, kalakaran, karanasan o nakagawian ng mga residente nito.

Ang GCQ na nga raw ang bagong normalidad o "new normal" na isasabuhay ng mga residente ng mga lugar na nasa ilalim nito.

Ibig sabihin ay hindi na gaya ng dating malayang pagkilos ng mga tao.

May mga limitasyon na at mga bagong patakaran na dapat sundin.

Tulad na lamang sa mga operasyon ng mall, ang nakagawiang pasyalan sa makabagong panahon.

Maari na ngang buksan ang ito kung ang lugar ay nadeklara nang nasa ilalim ng GCQ, ngunit hindi lahat ng tindahan sa loob nito ay maari ring magbukas, gaya ng tinatawag na mga leisure shops o mga nagtitinda ng mga hindi naman talagang kailangan.

Ang lahat din ng papasok sa mga mall ay kailangan pa ring may suot na face mask at inaasatasan ang mga namamahala rito na magsagawa ng temperature check upang masiguro na walang papasok na customers na may sakit.

Kailangan din silang wisikan ng alkohol ang bawat kamay ng papasok sa mall bukod sa pagtsi-check ng kani-kanilang gamit na ipapasok.

Maging ang bilang tao na papasok sa mall ay limitado na rin upang maisagawa ang 'social distancing' at kinakailangang ang mga may edad na 21 anyos hanggang 59 anyos ang papayagan lamang makapasok ng mall.

Sa larangan ng hanap-buhay, ang papayagan sa ilalim ng GCQ ay yaong mga essential din lamang gaya ng mga construction projects na dapat ay magpatupad din ng 'minimum health standards at physical distancing', at mayroon barracks para sa mga manggagawa nito.

Maging ang pagbabiyaha ng mga pampublikong sasakyan ay papayagan na rin, ngunit limitado ang mga taong makakasakay sa mga ito para maobserbahan ang social distancing.

Tunay na malaki ang magiging pagbabago sa unti-unti nating pagbabalik sa normal na kalagayan, kaya ito tinawag na "new normal" dahil ang lahat ay 'di na gaya ng dati.

Ito ay para pa rin sa ating pakikipaglaban sa kaaway ng ating kalusugan na 'di natin nakikita. At upang ang lahat ay hindi na balewalain ang pagpapahalaga sa ating kalusugan.

The new normal is digital

Published May 16, 2020, 11:00 PM

BETTER DAYS

By **FORMER SENATOR SONNY ANGARA**



Senator Sonny Angara

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that indeed, the online world is a powerful tool. Many have managed to work from home, or in some cases, have found new jobs through the Internet. Conference applications such as Zoom and WebEx are not only being used for office meetings, but also informal gatherings. And, of course, online shopping and app-driven delivery services are now becoming part of people's everyday habits.

But the digital world in the Philippines is reaching its limits. As of March, 2020, The Speedtest Global Index, which records the broadband speed around the world by country, put the Philippines at the 104th in the world, with a download speed of 23.80 Mbps. We rank even lower when it comes to mobile Internet, coming in at 116th place, with 14.24Mbps.

As we begin to rely more on the Internet and things online to ride out the COVID-19 outbreak—and, perhaps, to adapt to the post-COVID culture—we should enhance broadband Internet services around the country. We are already using online services and platforms to buy food, clothes, and other items. We can now go online to pay our bills and access other financial services. For our students, the pandemic has also opened the door to online education. With all this happening, our country's online capacity must be improved.

However, improving our Internet infrastructure's load capability is only part of the digital development our country needs. The draft [We Recover As One](#) document that is currently being formulated by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) as head of the IATF-Technical Working Group for Anticipatory and Forward Planning (TWG-AFP) has come up with many points of discussion on exactly how we should move forward with online services.

In education, for example, we should promote digital and alternative learning. This can be done through reduced Internet rates for students and faculty; loans, and subsidies for acquiring laptops, computers, and other equipment; and the creation of tutorial platforms. The Department of Education already has the DepEd Commons, an online educational resources platform that students across the country can use to get materials from their teachers.

E-commerce will also play a big role in our post-COVID-19 society. Surveys included in the TWG-AFP draft show that almost 80% of respondents in the business sector would have zero sales if the ECQ is further extended by another month. This is why the expansion and further development of cashless payment systems and other similar platforms will be a big boost for retail, information technology, and business process management companies.

The TradeNet project is another digital development that also needs to be fast-tracked. An initiative jointly led by the Department of Finance (DOF) and the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), TradeNet will be an online trade facilitation portal that will interconnect up to 75 trade regulatory agencies of government across 18 departments. Fronted by an integrated website, TradeNet will track real-time information on cargo, supply, production, and inventory. It will also assist in inter-agency operations during times of crisis.



Finally, the fast implementation of the Philippine Identification System (PhilSys) is sought, as mandated by RA 11055 which we co-sponsored in the Senate in the last Congress. The idea is that a unified government-issued identification card can be used not only as proof of identity, but also as a way of accessing digital payment systems to allow for the efficient transfer of government assistance in times of crisis, pandemics, and disasters.

The COVID-19 pandemic has indeed dealt us massive blows. But there are also lessons that we should learn, moving forward. As we start easing into the so-called “new normal” and continue preparing for future crisis events, developing digital services and systems will make our country more resilient and able to function even with large-scale economic disruptions. It is time for our country to have a serious discussion with all digital stakeholders on how to not only expand our broadband internet capability, but also what we can and should do to take full advantage of such digital infrastructure.

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Senator Sonny Angara has been in public service for 15 years—9 years as Representative of the Lone District of Aurora, and 6 as Senator. He has authored and sponsored more than 200 laws. He is currently serving his second term in the Senate.

An experience and a blessing

[BUSINESS MATTERS \(BEYOND THE BOTTOM LINE\)](#) - [Francis J. Kong](#) (The Philippine Star) - May 17, 2020 - 12:00am

Nobody knows! This should be the slogan of the times.

When will people be able to return to the office? Nobody knows. How much losses have we incurred since the lockdown began? Nobody knows. Let people go? Nobody knows although some are already doing it. COVID-19 continues to disrupt business, while the leaders continue to grapple with the unknown.

Well, since nobody knows so, I might as well tell my team, "I don't know! because that will be the safest answer, I can give." Whoa! Not so fast. You are a leader. You have a team of people under your care. You need to be in constant communication with them. Nothing causes more anxiety as being left out of the loop with nobody telling them what is going on. This is the worst time for you to go on "AWOL." This means: "Absence Without Leaders."

In my webinar-based leadership training, I have pointed out that people are anxious; they are worried about their company, their jobs, and their future. Leaders need to exhibit transparency and communicate truthfully. But the messages should always be wrapped with a sense of possibility and hope. In other words, you hope for the best, but you face and confront the brutal facts. Here are some ideas you might find useful:

1. Do not leave your people hanging

If you are the frontline manager, your most important objective is to make sure that you are the person your team will turn to for guidance and direction. Even if your knowledge is limited and you do not have the big-picture information (nobody does anyway), you need to be honest about what you know. Tell your team, "Guys, we do not know about this... but we do know about this... so we will have to make do with what we know now and try to close the gap."

2. Do not overwhelm your people

Your people are working from home. They have challenges they never had before. They have to do work and family at the same place and at the same time. People share their concerns with me in my webinars. They have not learned how to stop working and draw boundaries between work and personal life because they have never been trained to do so. They can get easily overwhelmed. Your team would want to know how and when you will be providing them with updates on the changing situation. Do not surprise them with unannounced meetings as these are only for emergencies.

3. Communicate. Communicate. Communicate

Communicate early and often, do periodic small meetings, conduct one-on-one meetings with your key people, provide them with a platform for airing out their anxieties and issues. This is time-consuming, but you are the leader and you have to do this. Show compassion and show empathy. Do not sugarcoat the news and do not speculate on what would happen because when you sugarcoat things, you will be perceived as dishonest, and when you speculate, know that your people need facts and not your opinions.

4. Be inspiring

Exhibit courage with humility. Speak the truth but offer hope. Be responsible for the information you should keep and the information you can share. Tell them, “things may be difficult, but we need to be strong together. And when we get through this, we will all emerge stronger.”

COVID-19 is not the first crisis we have ever experienced, and it certainly would not be the last. But do you know what you are doing? You are blessed with the opportunity to be teaching and training your people on how to succeed in times of crisis, and that is one of the most beautiful things that leaders can do for their people. Experience and enjoy the blessing.

(Connect with Francis Kong in www.facebook.com/franciskong2. Or listen to “Business Matters” Monday to Friday 8:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. over 98.7 DZFE-FM ‘The Master’s Touch’, the classical music station.)

In the time of COVID-19, how is Boracay doing?

Lory Joyce Andagan, Choose Philippines

Posted at May 16 2020 01:55 PM | Updated as of May 16 2020 02:40 PM



Photo courtesy of Tiffany Marie Somes

BORACAY -- Hailed as an island with one of the best beaches in the world, Boracay is surely a must-visit! Sadly, when COVID-19 started, the tourism industry was affected. Because of the pandemic, most canceled their reservations while many tourists were stranded on the island.

For an area that relies heavily on the influx of tourists, it was not easy for Boracay to cope, leaving many wondering: How is Boracay right now?

Before the enhanced community quarantine, tourist traffic on the island was already decreasing. As early as February, hotel management teams on the island were already mapping out coping strategies in order to mitigate the impact on their businesses. One hotel started to give voluntary leave for the staff.

“We continued to operate but with a skeletal staff. They are highly protected with a personalized mask matching their uniforms, strict thermal scanning, and sanitation,” said Tiffany Somes, operations manager.

When the community quarantine implemented, they called for a general meeting to ask the staff on their opinions and suggestions. The majority of the staff preferred to go home as soon as possible to be with their families. Eventually, the hotel decided to stop operations.

“We cannot risk having the remaining staff exposed. We asked our guests to transfer to other hotels. Our staff safety is our priority,” said Somes.

The remaining staff who were not able to go home chose to pray and conduct devotionals for the health and safety of their team members who opted to rejoin their families. They have also busied themselves while waiting for this crisis to end by repainting and repairing for the hotel in preparation for their reopening.



Photo courtesy of Tiffany Marie Somes

While most of the hotels tried to keep everyone safe, there are other vulnerable sectors greatly affected in this crisis like tricycle drivers and boatmen who depend on the tourists for their daily earnings. Some volunteers decided to give them relief goods and face masks, with immediate distribution planned as soon as possible.

The IP community in Boracay also decided to close their Ati Center as early as January for the safety of their community.

Boracay Island is no stranger to weathering storms, after recently facing the closure of the entire island for rehabilitation in 2018. With the current pandemic necessitating another lockdown of Boracay's famed sandy shores, hundreds of businesses will surely be affected once again.

Despite such a bleak situation, what is amazing that the locals still manage to retain a spirit of optimism, holding on to the saying: "A minor setback for a major comeback!" With this kind of positivity that abounds around the island, it is certain that Boracay will rise to boast of its picturesque beauty to the world again.

This article was originally published on the [Choose Philippines website](#).

Boracay sinks in pandemic

By: [Nestor P. Burgos Jr.](#) - Correspondent / [@nestorburgosINQ](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:00 AM May 17, 2020



PIECE OF PARADISE In this file photo, tourists enjoy Boracay Island's white sand beach and spend moments of silence as they watch the setting sun from this piece of paradise in Malay, Aklan. The coronavirus pandemic, however, has hit Boracay hard, as visitors, who fuel the local economy, stopped coming. —INQUIRER PHOTO

For the past weeks since Boracay began its lockdown, Kenwalt Talorong has been selling barbecues near the deserted beachfront. His earnings — P150 to P200 a day — sustain him and his partner.

"It's just enough for us to survive until the lockdown is over and we can go home," the 33-year-old breadwinner said. His 7-year-old twin sons and 3-year-old daughter are in Manila with his partner's family.

Less than two months ago, Talorong was head chef of a Japanese restaurant at Station 1, a busy tourist strip on the northern part of Boracay in Malay, Aklan. When the restaurant stopped operating on March 19 as cases of the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) started to climb in the country, he and other workers were stranded on the resort island due to travel restrictions.

"We have no income, but it would have been bearable if our family is together," he said.

The owner of the Japanese restaurant had told Talorong and the other workers that the establishment would unlikely to resume operations within the year due to the expected slump in tourism.

After 11 years of working in Boracay, Talorong said he planned to go back to Metro Manila if the situation would not improve.

Worse than 2018

The pandemic has hit Boracay, the country's prime tourist destination, hardest, with most establishments closed and swimming along its famous white sand beach banned.

"This is worse than the closure because back then, we knew that we will be back to normal after six months," said Elena Brugger, president of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry-Boracay.

Brugger was referring to the closure of the island to tourists from April 26, 2018 to Oct. 25, 2018, as Boracay underwent environmental rehabilitation.

She said losses to businesses had reached "billions of pesos," worsening the impact brought about by the 2018 shutdown, Taal Volcano's eruption in early January when fewer visitors came, and Typhoon "Ursula," which ravaged the island in December 2019.

"It's really bad. This time, nothing is certain until a [COVID-19] vaccine is developed. We don't know if travel will normalize in 12 months, two years, or more," she said.

Brugger said businesses, especially small establishments and their workers, desperately needed help as many of the 20,169 regulars had not received assistance from the Department of Labor and Employment's (Dole) COVID-19 Adjustment Measures Program (CAMP).

The Dole in Western Visayas reported that 153 establishments, with 4,864 employees, in Boracay had availed themselves of the P5,000 per worker in CAMP assistance. The agency, however, said it was unable to provide assistance to other workers due to depleted funds.

Tourism revenue from Boracay tourists reached P62.31 billion in 2019, according to data from the Department of Tourism (DOT). In 2017, P357 million, or about 90 percent of locally sourced revenue of Malay came from Boracay, comprising of fees from business and building permits, and environmental and terminal fees.

Tourist arrivals in Boracay reached 2,034,599 in 2019, including 1,037,619 foreigners. From 167,070 in January this year, the number dropped to 103,834, or 37.85 percent lower in February.



PICTURE PERFECT Boracay's white beach has been quiet in the past two months due to travel restrictions imposed by the government to stop the community transmission of COVID19. —JACK JARILLA/CONTRIBUTOR

Priority

Aklan province is among the areas categorized by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) as "low-risk" for coronavirus transmission. From May 16 until May 31, Boracay will be placed on general community quarantine.

Acting Malay Mayor Frolibar Bautista said the local government was still waiting for guidelines from the IATF-EID. "Leisure activities, including tourism, are the last to reopen. We cannot still say when we can allow tourists to go to Boracay," he said.

Even with the lifting of community quarantine measures, residents and business owners do not expect that they will recover soon.

Brugger cited the need for strategy so that Boracay could recover from mounting economic losses. "We are still waiting for guidance from the DOT and other government agencies, but our priority now is the health and safety of the community," she said.

Business operators are realistic in setting expectations.

"I don't think we will get any tourists soon. I have canceled bookings up to November and our focus is staying alive until December," said Julia Lervik, who co-owns a cafe and resort villas for rent.

She said that unlike in October 2018, when many tourists were excited and looking forward to go back to the island when it reopened, global travel restrictions and reduced earnings would continue to dampen tourism travel.

"People in general will still be afraid to travel [because of the absence of a vaccine]. We are figuring out how to keep our staff because we don't want to abandon them," she said.

According to Lervik, they will adopt reduced workdays and hours for their employees until tourists come back and their operations normalize.



Before the lockdown, the beach area near Willy's Rock on Station 1 attracted tourists for the perfect Boracay shot. —JACK JARILLA/CONTRIBUTOR

No alternative

She said the 1,032-hectare island had no real alternative if tourists would not return. While restaurants and other businesses are now relying on locals and stranded tourists to sustain their businesses through food deliveries and pickup, business operators see this as not enough. Many small establishments are expected to shut permanently.

Amid the lockdown, business owners and nongovernmental organizations on the island have been helping residents through food distribution activities.

“We are trying to help each other, but we cannot sustain our efforts if we do not earn,” Lervik said. Jose Clemente III, president of Tourism Congress of the Philippines, said the recovery of tourism activities in destinations like Boracay would depend on policies of local governments on health and travel restrictions. “Everyone is looking at the domestic market but it will take time for people to get comfortable, or feel safe. Tourists will consider safety and health measures adopted by establishments,” he said.

Longtime Boracay resident David Goldberg, who operates a deli with his business partners, said that with the lifting of quarantine measures, local tourists could be gradually allowed to come in.

But he said this must be premised on upgrading hospitals and health centers on the island with more isolation rooms, including the setting up of a subnational laboratory for COVID-19 tests.

“We all know the virus will not go away. We should have the capacity to conduct mass testing and tracing, and need not send test samples to [the capital town of] Kalibo and Iloilo City [in Iloilo province]. Otherwise, people will be hesitant and it will take only one infected person here to drive away tourists,” Goldberg said.



HELPING HAND Donors led by Villa Caemilla Hotel and the Philippine Red Cross distribute food aid to Boracay residents. — PHOTO COURTESY OF PHILIPPINE RED CROSS BORACAY-MALAY

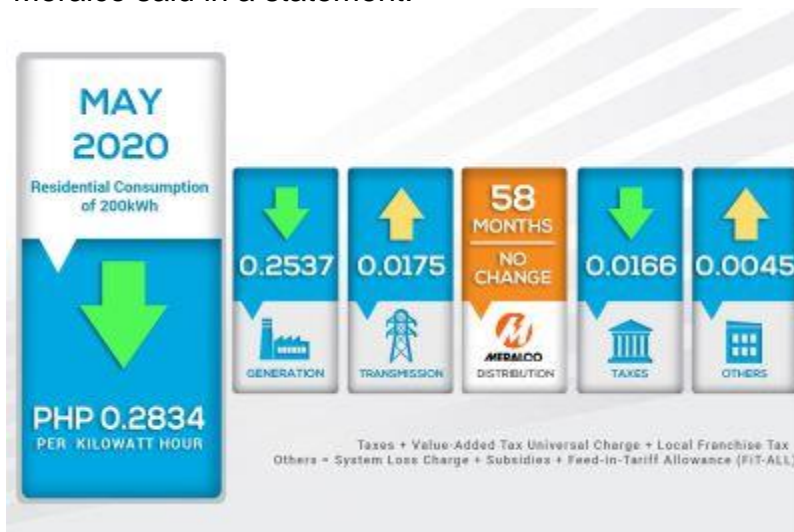
Meralco announces lower power rates in May

posted May 16, 2020 at 10:13 am

by [Manila Standard Business](#)

Manila Electric Company (Meralco) announced a P0.25-per-kilowatt hour (kWh) reduction in power rates in May.

"The downward adjustment this month equates to P50 in total savings for a typical household consuming 200 kWh," Meralco said in a statement.



Meralco power rates adjustments for May 2020

Meralco public information office head Joe Zaldarriaga said the overall rate reduction is primarily due to the invocation of the force majeure provision in its power supply agreements (PSAs) during the lockdown that had reduced fixed charges for generation capacity that would have been charged by the suppliers.

He said to help consumers this billing month, unpaid bills with due date from March 1 to May 15 (bill date from Feb. 21 to May 6) would be converted into four equal monthly installments.

For inquiries and clarifications on their bills, customers may visit Meralco's business centers, call its call center at 16211, or send messages to social media accounts on Twitter (@meralco) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/meralco).

Adjusted evacuation protocols during disasters being finalized –NDRRMC

Published May 16, 2020 10:31am

Adjusted protocols for the evacuation of families during natural disasters are being finalized, incorporating health and protection standards amid the COVID-19 threat, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said Saturday.

“Kasalukuyan po finalizing na po tayo sa adjusted protocols natin,” NDRRMC spokesperson Mark Timbal said in an interview on Dobo B sa News TV.

“More or less bago dumating ang panahon ng tag-ulan [sa Hunyo] ay naka-roll out na po ‘yan sa mga LGU (local government units),” Timbal added.

Adjusted protocols include minimum health standards as these were done during the evacuation of families affected by Typhoon Ambo.

“Basically ang pinaka punto ng protocols is i-incorporate ang protection measures laban sa COVID-19,” Timbal pointed out.

“Bago sunduin ang evacuees dapat na-identify na sino ang mga vulnerable like women, children, PWDs, people with special needs, tsaka mga senior, which is also part of our system.”

Timbal said that people who are sick will be separated from the rest of the evacuees. They can be in an isolation room or will be transported directly to a hospital for proper care.

“Dapat ang pagbibiyahe may social distancing. It can be arranged by schedule,” he added.

Disinfection of facilities such as classrooms used as evacuation centers will be conducted after the calamity so classes can resume safely.

To prevent the concentration of many families inside evacuation centers, the NDRRMC will also encourage those with sturdy houses to shelter some people in their homes temporarily for the duration of the calamity. —**Ted Cordero/LBG, GMA News**

Source: <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/738483/adjusted-evacuation-protocols-during-disasters-being-finalized-ndrrmc/story/>

Residents must do part in flood control

Published 5 hours ago
on May 17, 2020 01:20 AM
By **Pat C. Santos**



To avoid the clogging of the city's waterways brought about by the indiscriminate disposal of garbage, Mayor Francisco "Isko Moreno" Domagoso appealed to Manila residents to dispose of their trash, especially plastic, properly into bins.

In a public address, the mayor asked his constituents to show concern to address flooding in the city.

"If it's not a bother, perhaps I can ask you a favor. Please clean your surroundings and avoid littering. Wouldn't it be pleasant that as we clean your neighborhoods, you also take the initiative to clean your places," Domagoso said.

As Metro Manila transitions from enhanced community quarantine to a modified ECQ, the mayor assured Manileños that the city government continues to function fully.

In fact, he said the local government's concerned units, namely the City Engineer's Office under Engr. Armand Andres, the Manila Disaster Risk Reduction Management Office headed by Arnel Angeles, and the Department of Public Services under Kenneth Amurao, have been directed to undertake measures to address flooding that usually turns many Manila streets impassable during rains, even before a typhoon comes.

He said these actions include declogging creeks, canals, sewers and the like to ensure that flooding is either eliminated or at least reduced and that, if flooding cannot be prevented, the floodwaters will subside immediately.

Andres has prioritized identified areas that are clogged and flooded during the rainy season, as he had served under four mayors to date.

Signal no.1 remains over 4 areas as Ambo slows down

Published May 16, 2020 11:39pm

By JOAHNA LEI CASILAO, GMA News

Tropical Depression Ambo slowed down but continued to make its way across the Luzon Strait, PAGASA said Saturday in its severe weather bulletin.

At 10 p.m. on Saturday, Ambo was estimated to be 95 kilometers west of Calayan, Cagayan with maximum sustained winds of 55 kilometers per hour near the center and gustiness of up to 70 kph.

PAGASA reiterated that the tropical depression was likely to exit the Philippine Area of Responsibility by Monday afternoon.

Meanwhile, Tropical Cyclone Wind Signal (TCWS) No. 1 has been lifted from the northern portion of Apayao (Calanasan, Luna).

But Signal 1 remained raised over the following areas:

- The extreme northern portion of Ilocos Norte (Burgos, Bangui, Pagudpud)
- The extreme northwestern portion of mainland Cagayan (Santa Praxedes, Claveria)
- Babuyan Islands
- Batanes

The next severe weather bulletin will be issued at 2 a.m. on Sunday.

Heavy rainfall outlook

Ambo may bring light to moderate with, at times, heavy rain over Ilocos Norte, the northern portion of Apayao, the northwestern portion of mainland Cagayan, Babuyan Islands, Batanes, the eastern portion of Isabela, and the northern portion of Aurora in the next 24 hours.

PAGASA advised residents to take precautionary measures against flash floods and landslides.

Sea travel also remained risky for small seacrafts over seabords under TCWS no. 1. —
DVM, GMA News

Source: <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/scitech/weather/738531/signal-no-1-remains-over-4-areas-as-ambo-slows-down/story/>

Eastern Visayas reports P6-M in agriculture damage from Ambo

Published May 16, 2020 4:10pm

By JAMIL SANTOS, GMA News

The Eastern Visayas reported that Typhoon Ambo caused P6 million worth of agricultural damage across the region, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Saturday.

Interviewed on Dabol B sa News TV, Agriculture Secretary William Dar said that the Eastern Visayas (Region VIII) was the first to report on the damage they suffered, which included commodities like root crops, cassava, bananas, assorted vegetables, rice, and corn.

Dar said that some 176,000 hectares of rice and 90,000 hectares of corn were in Ambo's path, and farmers were advised to harvest their mature crops before the tropical cyclone struck.

The Agriculture Secretary expected other regions to report their damage this Saturday. — **DVM, GMA News**

Bicol suffers P79-M initial agri damage due to

May 17, 2020

TITLE: 'Ambo'

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Bicol suffers P79-M initial agri damage due to 'Ambo'

May 16, 2020, 7:20 pm

MANILA – Although Typhoon "Ambo" did not directly hit most of the Bicol provinces as initially forecast, it destroyed crops and livestock initially estimated at PHP79.9 million, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said on Saturday.

The DA Bicol said the approximate affected area in the six provinces was 3,885 hectares with production loss totaling 4,564 metric tons (MT).

Corn recorded the highest losses of 3,365 MT from 2,616 hectares damaged farms with production loss pegged at PHP52 million.

On the other hand, rice recorded an initial production loss of 1,149 MT from 1,067 hectares partially damaged rice areas with production loss recorded at PHP17.5 million.

For high-value crops such as fruits and vegetables, some 201 hectares were damaged with a production loss of 48 MT amounting to PHP10.01 million.

Meanwhile, initial damage to livestock was recorded at PHP101,500.

Masbate incurred the biggest losses in agriculture initially totaling PHP36.9 million.

A total of 1,124 hectares of corn areas in Masbate have been damaged with a production loss of 994 metric tons amounting to PHP16.8 million.

Rice farms in Masbate also suffered partial damages as 1,057 hectares were affected with a production loss of 1,141 MT pegged at PHP17.4 million.

Camarines Sur incurred an initial P33.1M loss in corn only in 1,379 hectares of corn areas damaged where the volume of production loss was recorded at 2,225 metric tons.

Albay followed with PHP4.5 million initial total production loss in corn, high-value crops, and livestock.

A total of 144 hectares of corn areas were damaged with a production loss of 144 MT amounting to PHP2.06 million.

For high-value crops, an initial 115 hectares were damaged with a production loss of 31 MT amounting to PHP2.5 million.

Catanduanes reported an initial of 15 hectares of high-value crops damaged with a production loss of 1.94 MT amounting to PHP2.5 million.

In Camarines Norte, some 6.69 hectares of corn areas were damaged with a production loss of 1.03 MT amounting to PHP85,450.

In Sorsogon, some 54 hectares of rice and corn were damaged with production loss totaling PHP2.6 million.

Ambo, the first typhoon to enter the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) in 2020, was packed with maximum sustained winds of 165 kph near the center and gustiness of 200 kph as it brought violent winds and heavy rains to the Bicol provinces which were placed under Storm Signal No. 3 on May 14.

Bicol suffers P79-M initial agri damage due to

May 17, 2020

TITLE: 'Ambo'

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Seeds for rice and corn as well as drugs and biologics for livestock and poultry were distributed to and prepositioned in the DA RFO 5 Research Outreach Stations in the six provinces before the onslaught of typhoon Ambo.

The DA Bicol has also prepositioned some 6,618 bags of corn seeds (both white and yellow corn, conventional and GMO varieties); 4,611 bags of hybrid rice seeds and 55,491 bags of inbred rice seeds which are awaiting delivery.

Seeds of vegetables such as okra, hot pepper, eggplant, mungbean, tomato, squash, chili pepper, pole sitao, radish, ampalaya, watermelon, cucumber, pechay, patola, and lettuce are also ready for distribution to affected farmers. (**PR**)

'Parang buhawi': Ilang estruktura, kabuhayan

TITLE: pinadapa ng bagyong Ambo

PAGE 1/ 1/2

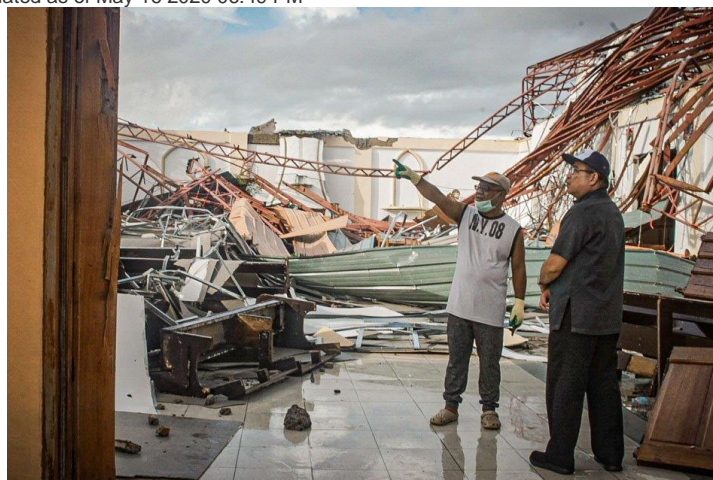
May 17, 2020

DATE

'Parang buhawi': Ilang estruktura, kabuhayan pinadapa ng bagyong Ambo

ABS-CBN News

Posted at May 16 2020 05:28 PM | Updated as of May 16 2020 06:49 PM



Isa ang St. Ramon Nonatos parish sa mga estrukturang napatumba ng bagyong Ambo. Apat na ang naitalang patay sa bagyo. *Alren Beronio, ABS-CBN News*

MAYNILA - Aabot na sa apat ang naitalang patay sa pananalasa ng bagyong Ambo, na nagdulot ng landslide, baha, at iba pang pinsala sa iba ibang parte ng Luzon at Visayas sa loob ng ilang araw.

Anim na oras binayo ng bagyo ang Eastern Samar, na unang dinaanan ni Ambo. Nawalan ng kuryente at nakaranas ng pinsala sa mga estruktura gaya ng kanilang mga simbahan.

Anila'y parang buhawi ang pagdaan ng bagyo, ayon kay Fr. Guido Ditalo, parish priest ng San Ramon Nonatos parish na pinabagsak ng bagyo sa Eastern Samar.

Pinadapa rin ng bagyo ang bahay ng ilang residente.

Binaha rin ang bayan ng Jipadpad dahil sa tubig na galing sa kabundukan. Tinuklap din ng bagyo ang bubong ng ilang bahay.

Tatlo ang naitalang patay, habang 25 ang nasugatan sa Eastern Samar.

Tinatayang nasa 100 bahay naman sa bayan ng San Francisco sa Quezon ang nasira.

Isa rito ang pamilya Salvador, na nakatira sa Barangay Kawayan Uno. Parang dinaanan daw sila ng dambuhalang buhawi.

"May kulay itim sa langit. Tapos sumigaw ako ng dapa! Yan kaya po nasira bahay namin, talaga pong washout ang aming bahay," ani Ron Salvador, na ika-2 beses nang nasiraan ng bahay matapos ang bagyong Tisoy.

"Parang helicopter po talaga naugong talaga ang lakas ugong, tapos nabomba ang aming bahay, naganyan oh kaya po kami ay natakot na," ani Girlie Salvador.

Isang senior citizen naman ang naitalang patay matapos mabagsakan ng gumuhong pader sa bayan ng Catanauan, Quezon.

Aabot sa 20 bayan sa Quezon ang nawalan ng kuryente dahil sa bagyong Ambo.

Sa Atimonan, Quezon, naapektuhan ang hanapbuhay ng mga magniniyog ngayong pinadapa ng bagyo ang kanilang mga puno.

Kasabay nito, nabagsakan din ang ilang bahay malapit sa mga puno.

Ayon sa Quezon disaster office, matinding naapektuhan ang agrikultura sa kanilang lugar, partikular na ang pagniniyog kung saan kilala ang Quezon. Aabot aniya sa halos P2 bilyon ang naging pinsala sa agrikultura sa Quezon.

‘Parang buhawi’: Ilang estruktura, kabuhayan
pinadapa ng bagyong Ambo

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“Kung matatandaan December 2019 tinamaan kami ng Tisoy na malakas at ngayon ay buwan ng Mayo so supposedly ‘yung niyog namin regenerated na tapos tinamaan na naman so kung i-compute ang damage sobrang laki ng epekto sa Quezon,” ani Melchor Abenilla, disaster mitigation chief ng Quezon.

Isa sa mga naapektuhang manggagawa si Joel Meude, isang magniniyog.

Sa Real, Quezon, naiulat ang dalawang landslide at may mga bahay na nawasak dahil sa nagtutumbahang mga puno.

Isa sa mga nasirang bahay ang bagong-gawang bahay ni Ariel Villegas. Lumambot kasi ang lupa at nabagsakan ng mga puno ang kaniyang bahay.

Isa rin sa napinsala ang bahay ni Rogelio Beguia. Pero sa kabutihang palad, wala namang nasaktan.

Laking pasasalamat niyang hindi sila nasapul lalo’t bed-ridden ang kaniyang asawa.

“Ang hangin parang umiikot, malakas, di ako makapaniwala; salamat sa Diyos at niligtas ang pamilya ko,” ani Beguia.

Nagpapatuloy sa ngayon ang damage assessment sa lugar.

Sa bayan ng Casiguran, Aurora, binaha ang may 11 barangay pero humupa na ito makalipas ng ilang oras.

Hinihintay pa ngayon ng mga awtoridad kung may naitalang pinsala sa mga estruktura sa Casiguran, ayon kay municipal disaster mitigation chief Jaimar De Leon.

Samantala sa Metro Manila, nawalan ng kuryente sa ilang lugar at may mga nagsibagsakang estruktura sa ilang siyudad.

Sa Barangay San Antonio sa Pasig, bumagsak ang isang estruktura na pinangasalo ng debris pero wala namang nasaktan.

Nabuwal naman sa Makati ang isang malaking puno dahil sa lakas ng hangin.

-- Ulat nina **Ranulfo Docdocan, Andrew Bernardo, Jeff Canoy, Kevin Manalo, Dennis Datu, at Jervis Manahan, ABS-CBN News**

PAGASA: Typhoon “Ambo” to affect Cagayan Valley

Published May 16, 2020, 12:44 AM

By **Liezle Basa-Iñigo**

CAGAYAN – The Regional Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (RDRRMC) in Region 2 has called on all local government units to be on alert for the possible effects of Typhoon “Ambo” in the region.



Maintenance team from Isabela Fourth District Engineering Office prepares for Typhoon Ambo. (DPWH Region 2)

Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) weather specialist Romeo Ganal said strong rains with strong winds maybe experienced over Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino and the western part of Isabela starting Friday (May 15), while the typhoon may be felt in the entire Isabela and Cagayan area on Saturday.

“Maaring maranasan ang hanggang signal number 3 sa ating lugar kung kaya’t kailangan paghandaan ito ng ating mga kababayan,” Ganal said.

(Signal No. 3 might be experienced in our area, so our countrymen should prepare for this.) Ganal said that while the heavy rains brought by Ambo will be of big help to the farmers in the area, as well as the Magat Dam, he also warned everyone that if the rains are continuous, this may cause flooding in the area.

In PAGASA’s latest forecast, storm signal No. 2 has been raised in the provinces of Nueva Vizcaya and Quirino, while signal No. 1 has been raised over Isabela and Cagayan including Babuyan Islands.

Ganal advised everyone to be on alert for updates about the typhoon’s movements.



EDITORIAL - A pressing need

(The Philippine Star) - May 17, 2020 - 12:00am

The passage of off-season Typhoon Ambo, downgraded to a storm as it moved away from the country, highlighted a problem that should have been addressed a long time ago: the inadequacy of evacuation facilities.

Public schools and their gymnasiums have always been used as evacuation centers. Education officials have long complained about this, pointing out that it disrupted classes long after the disaster is over.

There have been proposals to build facilities dedicated to evacuation purposes, but opponents say the need is seasonal and the country has other funding priorities. In fact the country faces the threat of natural calamities all year round, which could call for the evacuation of communities.

With the archipelago situated in the Pacific Ring of Fire, earthquakes can strike any time – including the “Big One” in Metro Manila that seismologists have been warning about. Volcanoes dot the islands, and they erupt without warning – as Taal Volcano did in January, disrupting flights in Manila and forcing the evacuation of entire towns.

A looming humanitarian crisis in the evacuation centers for the volcano victims was averted only because Taal’s activity mercifully subsided and the evacuees were sent home.

With torrential monsoon rains, storm surges and an average of 20 typhoons hitting the country every year, spawning ruinous floods and killer mudslides, the country should have had facilities dedicated to disaster evacuation a long time ago. Even the onslaught of Super Typhoon Yolanda in 2013, however, failed to lead to the necessary reforms.

With the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, during which facilities used as evacuation centers have been turned into isolation and quarantine areas for COVID-19 cases, local governments dealing at the same time with Ambo are now facing what one of them has described as a “nightmare.”

The national government is currently reviewing infrastructure priorities as the impact of COVID-19 on public health and the economy is assessed. The World Health Organization has warned that the COVID virus may never go away. Clearly, you can’t have quarantine areas functioning at the same time as evacuation centers in a pandemic. It’s time to take a closer look at the need to set up decent evacuation centers.

Source: <https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2020/05/17/2014521/editorial-pressing-need>



EDITORIAL - Social distancing sa evac centers

(Pilipino Star Ngayon) - May 17, 2020 - 12:00m

Marami pang nasa evacuation centers sa kasalukuyan dahil sa pananalasa ng Bagyong Ambo noong Biyernes. Maraming nawalan ng tahanan kaya pansamantalang dinala sa evacuation centers. Ang iba, inilikas dahil sa pagtaas ng tubig. Unang nanalasa si Ambo sa

Eastern Samar noong Huwebes ng gabi bago nagtungo sa Bicol Region, Masbate, Quezon, Laguna, Mimaropa at Metro Manila. Isa ang naitalang namatay. Maraming nasirang pananim sa Bicol at Quezon. Pati mga poste ng kuryente ay bumagsak kaya marami pa umano ang walang kuryente.

Pinakamabigat na problema ay ang pagdami ng mga tao sa evacuation centers at hindi na naipatupad ang social distancing. Nagsiksikan ang mga tao na karamihan pa ay mga bata. Ayon sa report, umabot sa 140,000 ang nasa evacuation centers.

Sa isang evacuation centers sa Gumaca, Quezon, hindi na talaga naipatupad ang social distancing at marami rin ang walang face mask. Hindi na ito naipasunod dahil na rin sa dagsa ng mga lumilikas sa center. Biglang buhos ang mga tao. Karamihan sa mga lumikas ay mga bata at mga matatanda. Karamihan ay galing sa mga mabababang lugar at gumuguho ang lupa.

Nakapagtataka naman kung bakit tila atrasado na ang lokal na pamahalaan sa paglilikas gayung ilang araw nang nagbabala ang PAGASA na may paparating na bagyo. Kung kailan nandiyan na ang bagyo, saka lamang nagkukumahog. Hindi na natuto sa mga nakaraang bagyo na humagupit sa bansa na nag-iwan ng pinsala.

Dahil atrasado na sa pag-e-evacuate, hindi na naipatupad ang pag-iingat sa COVID-19. Nalimutan na ang mga dapat gawin na dapat ay huwag magdikit-dikit at magsuot ng face mask. Ngayong patuloy pa sa pagdami ang mga kaso ng COVID-19, maaaring madagdagan pa dahil sa mga nagtipong tao sa evacuation centers. Ito sana ang unang ginawa ng mga awtoridad para hindi na kumalat ang sakit.

Portugal suspends foreign trash imports to cope with own increased waste

Published May 17, 2020, 2:28 AM

By Reuters

LISBON – Portugal, which usually attracts huge mounds of rubbish from other European states because of its low waste management fees, has suspended imports of trash until the end of 2020 to protect domestic landfill capacity, the government said on Saturday.



FILE PHOTO: Imported waste is seen piled at the port of Leixoes in Matosinhos Portugal, January 8, 2020. Picture taken on January 8, 2020. (REUTERS/Rafael Marchante/MANILA BULLETIN)

“This decision is intended to ensure we have sufficient national capacity in waste processing facilities,” the government said in a statement.

The country has already blocked 246,000 tonnes of trash from entering since the start of the year, the statement said, and no new imports will be accepted.

The country charges 11 euros to process a tonne of trash, considerably below the European average of 80 euros.

The coronavirus pandemic has seen an increase in plastic waste in many countries – ranging from medical workers’ protective gear such as aprons and gloves to takeaway boxes, as people under lockdown order food to their homes.

The government is due to revise its laws on landfills and waste management this summer, as its waste reduction and recycling targets become harder to attain due to the pandemic.

Portugal has already limited its recycling efforts for the duration of the pandemic due to concerns over the health risk to workers coming into contact with contaminated plastic waste.

Some 330,000 tonnes of foreign trash, including waste containing hazardous substances, arrived from other countries in 2018, the government’s environment agency APA said.

110,000 tonnes ended up in the 11 landfills in the country authorized to receive trash from abroad. Portugal has so far reported 28,810 cases of the new coronavirus, and 1,203 deaths.

Source: <https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/05/17/portugal-suspends-foreign-trash-imports-to-cope-with-own-increased-waste/>

Innovating for impact: Dealing with a mountain of medical waste

By [Trista Bridges](#)

May 15, 2020

As countries scramble to procure personal protective equipment, another quickly accelerating problem sits on the back end: the disturbingly massive amount of medical waste of all types that must be disposed of.



A doctor donning her personal protective equipment. The current pandemic has created a massive increase of biohazard medical waste, begging the question of the most effective ways to dispose of them. Image: [Hilary Schwab, CC BY-NC 2.0](#)

As has been widely reported, protocols regarding the usage of personal protective equipment (PPE) have evolved as cases have rapidly escalated around the world.

For example, [Britian's guidance](#) is that healthcare workers should replace their gowns and aprons after treating each patient and face masks after each shift. Other countries initially had similar guidelines in place; however, as in the case with Britain, started to relax them, given PPE shortages.

The growth in and deployment of technologies to decontaminate and reuse certain types of PPE has also witnessed an impressive uptick in recent months.

However, even with these changes in how PPE is used and managed, treating such a large number of COVID-19 patients and, particularly, those with serious cases, creates a tremendous amount of biohazard medical waste.

For example, Hubei province, which was the epicenter of the outbreak, has [already reported a 6-fold increase in its medical waste](#), while the virus may be leaving major Southeast Asian cities with an [additional 1,000 tonnes of medical waste per day](#).

However, hopefully, this crisis will yield new ideas and inventive approaches to tackling the medical waste and other long-standing public health and environmental challenges that this pandemic has exacerbated.

Of course, there is a vast global medical waste sector with several well-established, well-equipped players, including Veolia Environmental Services, Stericycle, Suez Environmental Services, and Waste Management Inc. among others.

They often manage outsourced solutions for hospitals and other healthcare facilities. There are signs, however, that even these large, well-resourced corporations are facing challenges in handling the volume. In fact, this [piece from France 24](#) captures the scale of this problem well.

And, of course, the treatment and disposal processes, which often include incineration and landfill (post-treatment), can also raise concerns regarding eventual negative climate and other environmental impacts, particularly in situations where less professional and well-resourced actors do not comply with local guidelines and regulations.

When examining this problem, one can see how a myriad of innovations could help to address this issue.

On the front end, as mentioned earlier, there are a growing number of innovations that involve the reuse of PPE equipment, particularly to address the N95 mask shortage.

One example that received fast-track approval last month from the FDA is the [Battelle Critical Care Decontamination System](#), which can decontaminate thousands of N95 respirators at a time through a process that uses concentrated, vapor-phase hydrogen peroxide.

To address the construction of the mask itself, there is the [MakerMask Initiative](#), the first open-source 3D printable respirator-quality mask approved by the National Institute of Health (NIH) that can be reused when coupled with proper sterilization procedures, which presents a very interesting concept.

There is also [A Mask For All](#), a US, Argentinian, and European citizen-driven initiative, and provides an alternative 3D-printable, decontaminable mask solution.

Even if we can significantly reduce the number of disposed masks, there are countless other types of disposable PPE and medical waste that will remain.

Fortunately, there are some interesting emerging innovations to address that challenge, all of which are designed with sustainability at the core of their approach. They aim to achieve this, firstly, through on-site medical waste treatment solutions and leveraging technologies that do not rely on incineration.

One example is Israel-based [Envomed](#), whose Envomed 80 machine shreds and sterilizes up to 80 liters of sharps (e.g., needles, syringes, etc.) and infectious waste, and converts it to non-toxic residue that can be safely disposed of as municipal waste.

Ireland-based Technopath Clinical Diagnostics' solution, the [Envotec 200](#), also uses a non-thermal process with no dangerous chemicals to shred and disinfect medical waste on site, with the end product being equivalent to household waste. It is gaining traction in the US, where it is now being used by Northwell Health, New York's largest healthcare provider.

Finally, another interesting innovation is one that is in its final stages of development here in Japan. The "SmartContainer" is a 40-ft onsite container that will enable hospitals to process up to 20 tons of medical waste per day.

What makes this solution particularly interesting is that it draws on existing pyrolysis technology currently being deployed to address our colossal plastic waste problem. By using plasma pyrolysis technology, the unit can safely kill thermally-stable bacteria and limit toxic gases to well within emission standards.

Medical systems will ultimately need to assess the costs of these new innovations compared to the status quo. However, hopefully, this crisis will yield new ideas and inventive approaches to tackling the medical waste and other long-standing public health and environmental challenges that this pandemic has exacerbated.

Source: <https://www.eco-business.com/opinion/innovating-for-impact-dealing-with-a-mountain-of-medical-waste/>

Spraying disinfectants can be 'harmful', says WHO

Updated May 17, 2020, 5:28 AM

By Agence France-Presse

Spraying disinfectant on the streets, as practised in some countries, does not eliminate the new coronavirus and even poses a health risk, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned on Saturday.



Firefighters spray disinfectant to sanitize a road as a preventive measure against the coronavirus in Colombo, Sri Lanka on May 10 (AFP Photo/ISHARA S. KODIKARA)

In a document on cleaning and disinfecting surfaces as part of the response to the virus, the WHO says spraying can be ineffective.

“Spraying or fumigation of outdoor spaces, such as streets or marketplaces, is... not recommended to kill the COVID-19 virus or other pathogens because disinfectant is inactivated by dirt and debris,” explains the WHO.

“Even in the absence of organic matter, chemical spraying is unlikely to adequately cover all surfaces for the duration of the required contact time needed to inactivate pathogens.”

The WHO said that streets and pavements are not considered as “reservoirs of infection” of COVID-19, adding that spraying disinfectants, even outside, can be “dangerous for human health”.

The document also stresses that spraying individuals with disinfectants is “not recommended under any circumstances”.

“This could be physically and psychologically harmful and would not reduce an infected person’s ability to spread the virus through droplets or contact,” said the document.

Spraying chlorine or other toxic chemicals on people can cause eye and skin irritation, bronchospasm and gastrointestinal effects, it adds.

The organisation is also warning against the systematic spraying and fumigating of disinfectants on to surfaces in indoor spaces, citing a study that has shown it to be ineffective outside direct spraying areas.

“If disinfectants are to be applied, this should be done with a cloth or wipe that has been soaked in disinfectant,” it says.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus, the cause of the pandemic that has killed more than 300,000 people worldwide since its appearance in late December in China, can attach itself to surfaces and objects.

However, no precise information is currently available for the period during which the viruses remain infectious on the various surfaces.

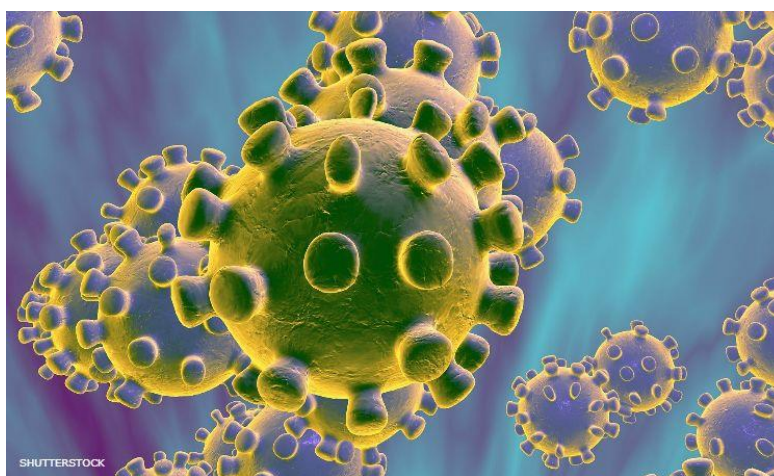
Studies have shown that the virus can stay on several types of surfaces for several days. However, these maximum durations are only theoretical because they are recorded under laboratory conditions and should be “interpreted with caution” in the real-world environment.

Source: <https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/05/17/spraying-disinfectants-can-be-harmful-says-who/>

WHO says it is 'essential' to learn more about coronavirus-related inflammatory syndrome in children

By Jacqueline Howard, CNN Health

Published May 16, 2020 8:34:03 PM



(CNN) — The World Health Organization (WHO) on Friday released a scientific brief on the multisystem inflammatory syndrome seen in some children and teens with COVID-19.

The brief described how clusters of children with the condition have emerged in Europe and North America, but an "urgent need" remains to collect additional data on the syndrome's clinical presentations, severity, outcomes and epidemiology.

"It is essential to characterize this syndrome and its risk factors, to understand causality, and describe treatment interventions. It is not yet clear the full spectrum of disease, and whether the geographical distribution in Europe and North America reflects a true pattern, or if the condition has simply not been recognized elsewhere," according to the brief.

The brief also provided a preliminary case of definition for the condition, noting that it is typically seen in children up to 19 years old who have a fever for at least three days and who have some symptoms including rash, hypotension or shock, myocardial dysfunction, diarrhea, vomiting or elevated markers of inflammation.

The brief also notes that cases would have no other microbial causes of inflammation, such as a bacterial infection, and that there would be evidence of Covid-19 or contact with someone with Covid-19.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus called on clinicians worldwide to "be on the alert and better understand this syndrome in children," in a post on Twitter on Saturday, which shared a link to the scientific brief.

US-China war of words clouds WHO meet focused on pandemic

posted May 16, 2020 at 01:41 pm

by [AFP](#)

As the World Health Organization prepares to host its main annual meeting next week, fears abound that US-China tensions could hamper the strong action needed to address the COVID-19 crisis.

The UN health agency, which for months has been consumed by the towering task of trying to coordinate a global response to the novel coronavirus pandemic, will for the first time invite health ministers and other dignitaries to participate virtually in its annual meet.

The World Health Assembly, which has been trimmed from the usual three weeks to just two days, on Monday and Tuesday, is expected to focus almost solely on COVID-19, which in a matter of months has killed more than 300,000 globally, and infected nearly 4.5 million.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said Friday the event would be "one of the most important (WHAs) since we were founded in 1948".

But the chance of reaching agreement on global measures to address the crisis could be threatened by steadily deteriorating relations between the world's two largest economies over the pandemic.

- 'Politicisation' -

"Of course I am concerned at the politicisation of the WHA and the risk of its failure," Gian Luca Burci, an adjunct professor at the Geneva Graduate Institute's Global Health Centre, told AFP.

US President Donald Trump this week threatened to cut ties with China, where the outbreak began late last year, over its role in the spread of COVID-19, and has repeatedly made unproven allegations that the virus originated in a Chinese lab.

He has also suspended funding to the WHO over allegations it initially downplayed the seriousness of the outbreak, and was kowtowing to Beijing.

Despite the tensions, countries hope to adopt by consensus a resolution urging a joint response to the pandemic.

Consultations around the resolution, tabled by the European Union, concluded this week after "tough" negotiations, according to Nora Kronig, who heads the international affairs division of Switzerland's public health office.

"One challenge was that it is almost impossible to negotiate in a virtual fashion. That makes it more complicated to build consensus in small groups," she told AFP.

But after several days, a tentative agreement was reached to approve the resolution, which among other things calls for more equitable access for tests, medical equipment, potential treatments and a possible future vaccine.

- 'Ambitious' -

An EU source hailed the draft as "ambitious", and pointed out that if it does indeed pass by consensus as expected, it would mark the first time a global forum achieves unanimous support for a text on the COVID-19 response.

The source said countries had not shied away from thorny topics, including a call for more WHO reform after determining that its capacities "have proven insufficient to prevent a crisis of this magnitude."

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While diplomats have agreed in principle on the draft resolution, observers voiced concerns that in the current politicised atmosphere, some countries might still choose to break the consensus next week.

"My hope is that we will be able to join consensus," US Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva Andrew Bremberg said Friday.

The United States and Europe are at loggerheads over future vaccine access, while Washington has also accused China of trying to steal US immunisation research.

And Washington is also leading a number of countries in demanding that the WHO end its exclusion of Taiwan -- considered by Beijing to be part of its territory -- and allow it to access next week's assembly as an observer.

- Taiwan participation a 'minimum' -

"While this has been an ongoing concern for several years, this has taken on a heightened attention this year in response to the global pandemic," Bremberg said.

"Allowing for some sort of meaningful participation would seem to be the minimum that the WHO could do."

The UN health agency has, however, insisted that such a move would require a resolution by member states, who in 1972 decided Beijing was China's sole legitimate representative.

It has also suggested it can only issue an invite with Beijing's blessing.

Taiwan was invited to attend the WHA for a number of years as an observer, but that stopped in 2016, with the entrance of a new Taiwanese president, Tsai Ing-wen, who refuses to recognise the concept that Taiwan is part of "one China".

The United States, which will be represented during the assembly by Health Secretary Alex Azar, is meanwhile not among a group of more than a dozen countries who have called for a vote on allowing Taiwan to participate.

Several diplomatic sources cautioned that putting this issue to a vote even under normal conditions would be a drawn-out process, and that doing so during a short, virtual meeting would be an unsurmountable logistical challenge.

It would "torpedo" the entire assembly, one diplomatic source warned.

Remote working set to stay post pandemic

posted May 16, 2020 at 01:35 pm

by [AFP](#)

An explosion in remote working owing to the coronavirus pandemic could see companies slash office space, saving them money but not necessarily improving productivity among staff, according to experts.

Businesses allowing staff to work from home on a permanent basis, even as lockdowns ease worldwide, calls into question the future of skyscrapers used by multinationals which are seen as symbols of modern capitalism.

Major financial districts, such as London's Canary Wharf and La Defense in Paris, remain extremely quiet, even as governments lift restrictions on social distancing and travel by public transport.

Jes Staley, chief executive of British bank Barclays, has said "the notion of putting 7,000 people in a building may be a thing of the past".

"We will find ways to operate with more distancing over a much longer period of time," he added.

French car giant PSA, which makes Peugeot and Citroen vehicles, now sees remote working as a benchmark for tens of thousands of its office-based staff.

Twitter has indicated that some of its employees could do their jobs from home on a permanent basis.

- 'Work revolution' -

"The revolution is going to come with a mindset shift," said Cydney Roach, global chair of employee experience at US consultancy Edelman.

"Companies have been debating on the future of work for 10 years, but people were really not very keen to pull the trigger and commit to it fully," she told AFP, adding that the "pandemic has proven that the technology is supportive of this kind of remote working".

Roach said "flexibility is going to take on a bigger meaning", adding that bosses should listen to employees' views on the matter.

Already, around 95 percent of 107,000 staff at British advertiser WPP are working remotely.

Real estate developer Land Securities last week estimated that only 10 percent of its office space was being used.

- Negative effects -

"There will never be a back-to-normal," said Alex Ham, joint chief executive at brokers Numis.

"It would be a great shame if, having been through this virtual working that we were thrust into, we didn't make some permanent changes to the way we work."

A recent survey by real estate consultancy Cushman & Wakefield of 300 companies worldwide showed 89 percent of them believed remote working would continue beyond the pandemic.

In a recent blog, professors Clare Lyonette and Beate Baldauf pointed out the advantages of home working.

In a recent blog, professors Clare Lyonette and Beate Baldauf pointed out the advantages of home working.

"The majority of research highlights positive organisational outcomes... including cost savings, better productivity, improved recruitment and retention and reduced absenteeism," said the academics from the University of Warwick in central England.

But they cautioned: "Employers should be aware of the potentially negative effects this may incur over the longer-term.

"For example, reduced wellbeing and loyalty to the organisation may lead to reduced productivity, which will serve to deplete any savings made from reduced office space and resources."

According to Roach, "real estate is one of the areas that cost businesses the most" but "just because of real estate exigencies in small spaces like Manhattan, skyscrapers will never go away".

Corporate giants may however be tempted to reduce the number of their buildings to slash costs following the economic shock caused by COVID-19.

According to VPN provider NordVPN, some remote employees are working longer hours than they would in an office, affecting their work-life balance while not necessarily making them more productive.

NordVPN said US employees were on average working three hours a day longer.