

P3.4-M worth of illegally cut lumber, equipment confiscated in Northern Samar

By 803 Infantry Brigade, 8ID Published on May 24, 2020

CATARMAN, Northern Samar, May 24 -- Troops of the 43rd Infantry (WE SEARCH) Battalion of the 8th Infantry Division, Philippine Army, together with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the First Northern Samar Provincial Mobile Force Company (FNSPMFC), recently conducted operations resulting to the confiscation of some 69,672.56 board feet of illegally cut lumber, boat keels and chainsaw worth P3,483,628.10 at Sitio Km. 18 in Brgy. Happy Valley, San Isidro, Northern Samar on May 6 and May 8.



Lieutenant Colonel Raymundo Picut, battalion commander of 43rd IB, commended the recent accomplishment of the inter-agency operations.

"Illegal logging is one of the major sources of the New People's Army (NPA) to continue their atrocities. Illegal loggers serve as couriers of food supply to the rebel group. On the other hand, the NPA extorts huge amount of money from illegal logging financiers used in procuring firearms and materials for bomb manufacturing in lieu of the permit to conduct illegal logging activities that cause destruction to the natural resources of Northern Samar," Picut said.

"To Nortehanons, preventing illegal logging activities is tantamount to protecting and preserving the environment as well as eradicating the continuous existence of NPA terrorists in Samar Island," Picut concluded. (803 Infantry Brigade, 8ID)

Source: <https://pia.gov.ph/news/articles/1042748>



Palawan Council for Sustainable Development

May 23 at 7:32 PM · 🌐

ISANG CHAINSAW UNIT NAKUMPISKA SA BGY. KEMDENG, SAN VICENTE PALAWAN

Nakumpiska ang isang (1) unit ng chainsaw sa Bgy. Kemdeng, San Vicente, Palawan, ika-22 ng Mayo 2020, matapos matuklasan na hindi rehistrado ang naturang chainsaw o walang Certificate Of Registration (COR).

Ang chainsaw ay nakumpiska mula sa may-ari na si G. Raul G. Edu Sr. at kasama nyang si G. Mario Busaing, parehong residente ng So. Maningning, Bgy. Kemdeng, San Vicente, Palawan.

Ang operasyon ay naisagawa sa pamamagitan ng magkasanib na pagpapatupad ng Peace and Order Program (POP) ng Provincial Government of Palawan (PGP), 33rd Marine Brigade at ng Palawan Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) Enforcement Team.

Isinasaayos na ang kaso laban sa dalawang residente dahil sa paglabag ng RA 9175 (Chainsaw Act) at PCSD Administrative Order No. 7, as amended.



👍 32

4 Comments



Source:

https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10158829722751977&id=116724526976&fs=0&focus_composer=0



Palawan Council for Sustainable Development

21 hrs · 🌐

NATAGPUANG PANGOLIN SA BATARAZA, PALAWAN, AGAD NAI-TURN OVER SA PCSDS

Isang Pangolin o Balintong (Manis Culionensis) na may sukat na 2 ft. (Haba) at 4 inches (lapad) ang agad nai-turn over sa Palawan Council for Sustainable Development Staff (PCSDS), matapos itong i-rescue ng PCSDS-Wildlife Traffic Monitoring Unit (WTMU) sa Bataraza, Palawan.

Ang buhay-ilang ay nakita ni Mr. Anthony Vergara, residente ng Poblacion, Bataraza, Palawan, kahapon, Mayo 23, 2020.

Malugod na pinasasalamatang PCSDS ang concerned citizen na ito, na labis nagbigay halaga sa Pangolin nating lubos nang nanganganib (Critically Endangered).

Kung sakaling may ganitong insidente sa pangkasalukuyan, agad itong ipaalam sa aming tanggapan na may hotlines numbers, 0935 116 2336 (Globe/ TM) at 0948 937 2200 (Smart/ TNT).

Maraming Salamat!



👍❤️😱 309

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COA hits delays in Digos City's landfill, public market projects

By [Peter Tabingo](#)

-May 25, 2020



GOVERNMENT auditors want the Digos City government to explain delays and procedural violations in a P30-million sanitary land fill project and a P12.26-million public market building.

The 2019 audit on the city released last May 15 noted that the landfill project has been discontinued due to the failure of the contractor to comply with the timetable, incurring negative slippage totaling 63.47 before the contract was eventually terminated.

The contract, funded from a long-term loan drawn from the Development Bank of the Philippines, was awarded on October 12, 2018 to AGRF Builders and Supply with the completion date pegged at September 3, 2019.

With an unfinished landfill on one hand and tons of rotting garbage on another, the city government was left with no recourse but to continue operating a dumpsite located in a six-hectare property in Purok Maligaya, Barangay Lungag.

The COA said the practice is contrary to the provisions and the implementing rules and regulations of RA 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Law.

During a site inspection, auditors reported that the dumpsite was poorly maintained, making it a potential health risk to communities and establishments nearby.

“Foul odor was widespread in the dumpsite thus posing hazards on the health of the employees in workplaces situated in the same location and to people coming to and from the area,” the audit team reported.

It said the dumpsite is infested by clouds of flies that are “potential carriers of contagious diseases.” Likewise noted was the absence of proper drainage and runoff control.

Acting community environment and natural resources officer Allen Melendrez informed the auditors that the local government has approved a “safe closure and rehabilitation plan” for the dumpsite but it would cost another P9.86 million.

Before that can happen, however, the LGU must first find another contractor that can continue the unfinished work on the landfill project. The CENRO gave assurances that the city will have a working landfill before the end of 2020.

COA hits delays in Digos City's landfill, public

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“With due consideration on the City’s efforts in the eventual establishment of the facility, (it) should be reminded that the operation of an open dumpsite is nevertheless a clear violation of Republic Act 9003. Aside from violating the law ...the controlled dumpsite poses inevitable serious impacts on the environment while exposing the constituents to health risks,” the COA pointed out.

The audit team recommended that the city impose liquidated damages totaling P476,855 against the contractor of the P12.26 million public market building (dry section phase 1) due to delays in the construction and delivery of the structure.

Auditors noted that the local government granted five extensions to the contractor but failed to protect the interest of the city by exercising its right under RA 9184 or the Government Procurement Reform Law.

They noted that the contract was awarded to Kriz Karlo Construction on February 9, 2018 with a completion target within 180 days or up to Aug. 18, 2018.

However, the target completion date was moved five times to Oct. 7, 2018 (50 days), Dec. 20, 2018 (75 days), Feb. 3, 2019 (45 days), Feb. 10, 2019 (7 days), and June 30, 2019 (140 days).

Among the grounds cited in the requests for extension were lack of skilled workers, scarcity of sand and gravel, inclement weather, and losing workers to bigger companies.

Auditors noted that even after the delivery of the structure, it remained unusable because it was only in the first phase and another contractor needs to work on plumbing, electrical installations, and other facilities.

The city government responded that it will implement the COA’s recommendation to impose liquidated damages which was already provided in the contract and may be deducted from the contractor’s collectible from the LGU.

Malampaya backs Sea Rangers protecting vital ecosystem

posted May 24, 2020 at 07:50 pm

by [Manila Standard](#)

Along the coasts of Northern Palawan, Oriental Mindoro, and Batangas City, where Malampaya Foundation Inc. (MFI) forged community-based marine biodiversity conservation partnerships, deputized volunteer sea rangers or “bantay-dagat” continue their enforcement duties to protect natural coastal resources despite the difficult circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 lockdown.



Bantay Dagat volunteers from Barangay Pili in Oriental Mindoro excitedly hold up food from the MFI package.

“Guarding the marine protected areas is crucial at this time to conserve marine resources as some fishermen may try to come in and fish illegally in the area,” said Gorgonio Polilan, a Bantay dagat from Coron, Palawan.

“It needs continuous management and protection for the recovery and replenishment of fish stocks and others.” The community enforcers are supported by MFI as part of its conservation agreement commitment to strengthen the protection of marine-protected areas (MPAs) and enforcement of environmental and fisheries laws in the different areas.

Approximately 60 percent of Filipinos live in coastal zones, and marine resources form a critical part of their sustenance and livelihood. But harmful fishing practices and unregulated exploitation put these resources at risk.

Since the implementation of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), the Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DA-BFAR) and its partners in the Philippine Coast Guard and the Philippine National Police (PNP) have reported several apprehensions of violators, the most common violation being the use of an illegal type of fishing net.

In June of last year, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) estimated that the Philippines loses almost P68.5 million annually to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

A total of over 140,000 hectares of community-managed MPAs and an estimated economic value of P1.6 billion in marine resources are under the watchful eye of the bantay-dagat volunteers and their partners in the Provincial Agriculture Office, the LGUs, MPA and Enforcement networks.

Partners include national agencies like the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, the PNP-Maritime, and the Philippine Coast Guard.

At the onset of the ECQ, MFI immediately deployed food support to the bantay-dagat consisting of a 25-kilogram sack of rice each, fresh and processed meats, and fresh vegetables.

With the food support, MFI was able to help 365 families of the environmental frontliners in Palawan, Oriental Mindoro, and Batangas.

Bantay-dagat from Oriental Mindoro, Marites Asi, 47, shared: “MFI has extended immediate support to us sea rangers especially now. They have been extremely helpful to us.”

Malampaya backs Sea Rangers protecting vital

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“Being a part of the skeletal force during this pandemic is not an easy task. Conducting patrols, responding to environmental threats, and helping the community while abiding by the rules and regulations of the ECQ are a tough challenge,” said El Nido National Park ranger Hero Jeff Isidro.

“The support provided by the MFI, such as the rice subsidy and groceries, is a great help during these challenging times, especially to those whose means of livelihood are heavily affected by the lockdown,” Isidro adds.

“The trainings and seminars hosted by MFI also boosted our knowledge to further enhance our services for environment protection.”

The bantay-dagat are regularly supported by MFI with other conservation incentives annually such as insurance, livelihood support, annual rice provisions, and vocational scholarships for qualified family members.

The foundation forged individual conservation partnerships with the provincial and local government units, and different communities from 2013 onwards to launch community-based actions in the establishment of new and expansion of existing MPAs and Fisheries Management Areas, MPA councils.

These partnerships have been responsible for the implementation of responsive MPA management plans, rehabilitation of degraded coastal species-forming habitats, regular monitoring, socio-economic support to fisher families, and education drives.

Since 2013, 18 out of 35 MPAs covered by the conservation partnerships have been recognized as Best-Managed MPAs at the local, regional, and national levels.

The MPAs have seen increasing fish abundance and reef recovery with several areas exhibiting a return of endangered species after years of absence, such as the napoleon wrasse, sea cow, and apex predators like the black-tip shark.

MFI is the social arm of the Malampaya Joint Venture partners formed in 2005 to work with communities and implement social development and environment conservation programs in the operating areas of the Malampaya Deepwater Gas-to-Power project.

Shell Philippines Exploration BV operates the Malampaya Deep Water Gas-to-Power project on behalf of the SC38 consortium.

NEDA backs House bill on green public procurement

Published May 24, 2020, 10:41 AM

By **Charissa Luci-Atienza**

The National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) has rallied behind a bill seeking to require all government departments, offices, and agencies to establish their respective Green Public Procurement Program.

NEDA Director Nieva Natural said they threw support to House Bill No. 6526 or the proposed Green Public Procurement Act, principally authored by Deputy Speaker and Camarines Sur 2nd district Rep. Luis Raymund "LRay" Villafuerte.

"We support the bill. The bill will strengthen the implementation of the roadmap with the existing Executive Order 301. We think that the law will further strengthen its implementation," she said during the recent virtual hearing of the House Committee on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on HB 6526.

She was referring to EO No. 301 directing the establishment of a Green Procurement Program for all departments, bureaus, offices, and agencies of the Executive branch of the government. The EO was issued by former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo on March 29, 2004.

Natural asked the panel to take a second look at the provision of HB 6526 that calls for establishment of the specifications and requirements for products of services to be considered sustainably advantageous, and for the development of programs for suppliers of sustainable products and services.

"However, we need to clarify and revisit this provision including the intent to develop programs for suppliers of sustainable products and services on Section 4B. It is suggested to mandate the formulation of common or standardized procurement guidelines leading to documents and relevant technical specifications on SPP (Sustainable Procurement Program) among others instead of having separate agency programs to promote efficiency and austerity in government spending," she said.

Natural relayed to the panel that NEDA recommended that the SPP be implemented by phases to provide leeway to the suppliers to comply with the requirements of the proposed Green Public Procurement Act.

"In addition, a phased approach to sustainable public procurement implementation should be considered since not all suppliers are ready at this time and have the capacity to comply with the bill requirements," she said.

"It is recommended to refer to the existing Philippine Green Public Procurement Program Roadmap published by GPBB (Government Procurement Policy Board) in identifying priority item categories for the initial and succeeding phases of implementation," she added.

The NEDA official said they support the provision of a bill that calls for adoption of lowest life-cycle cost of products and services.

"We support the intent of the bill to take into consideration the lowest life cycle product and services. However, in view of the cost of undertaking, a life cycle assessment, we deem it is necessary to clarify if the bill intends for it to be part of the minimum requirements for sustainable public procurement or other sustainability parameters will be adopted as the criteria to assess products procured by the government," Natural said.

Under HB 6526, the proposed Sustainable Procurement Program shall take into consideration the "lowest life-cycle cost" of products and services and include a coding system for packaging materials and products to facilitate waste recycling and reuse.

Lowest life-cycle cost means the lowest total cost of owning, operating and maintaining a product or service over its useful life, including fuel and water, energy, labor, and replacement components, determined on the basis of a systematic evaluation and comparison of alternative products and services.

During the virtual hearing, Villafuerte asked his colleagues to pass his bill, citing the need to implement such program “geared towards responsible and sustainable consumption and production with the end view of having a fully circular economy.”

“Considering that the title of the bill really and the intent is just to establish a green procurement program. Wala po itong appropriation (This does not have appropriation) , walang tax exemption (no tax exemption), it is just institutionalizing a program, walang (no) controversial provision,” he said.

“In fact, the GPPB has confirmed they already have a roadmap. I am just earnestly requesting our colleagues to approve this measure. If you will look at it is just establishing a program, institutionalizing program and the Procurement Board is more than happy to say that they are happy to institutionalize [it],” he said.

In his bill’s explanatory note, the House leader explained that under the concept of sustainable procurement or green purchasing, public organizations meet their needs for goods, services, works and utilities in a way that benefits not only the organization, but also society and the economy, while minimizing damage to the environment.

“Through this policy, governments can drive innovation and provide the industry with incentives to develop green products and services,” he said.

He noted that studies have shown that green public procurement may provide financial savings for government purchasers considering the full life-cycle costs of a procurement contract.

He said in Europe, public procurement criteria have already began adopting life-cycle costing or a method of considering all the costs that will be incurred during the lifetime of a procured product, work or service.

Life-cycle costs may also include the cost of externalities such as greenhouse house emissions associated with the product, he said.

“As party to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopting a sustainable public procurement legal framework concretizes the country’s commitment to the ideals of Sustainable Development Goal No. 12 on Responsible Consumption and Production,” Villafuerte said.

He said the “green purchasing” aims to promote the culture of making sustainable and informed decisions in government, especially in the purchase and use of different products.

Under HB 6526, all agencies are mandated to submit their respective Sustainable Procurement Programs to the GPPB within six months from the effectivity of the proposed Act.

Such programs will be fully implemented within six months from the effectivity of the proposed Act. The GPPB is expected to submit a regular report to the Congress of the Philippines on the performance and compliance of the different agencies with the proposed Act.

The measure directs the GPPB to appoint a third-party verifier of claims of sustainability of products and services while establishing capacity-building program for all government agencies.

Under HB 6526, the third-party verifier shall provide a list of all certified sustainable products, which shall be updated regularly to reflect additions or deletions based on criteria to be established by the GPPB.

Within 30 days from the effectivity of the proposed Act, the GPPB shall promulgate and issue the implementing rules and regulations of the proposed Act.

PRRD to Muslim Filipinos: Be living examples of Islamic faith

By Azer Parrocha May 24, 2020, 1:51 pm



President Rodrigo R. Duterte (*Presidential photo*)

MANILA – President Rodrigo Duterte enjoined Muslim Filipinos to be “living examples” of Islamic faith as the world celebrates Eid’l Fitr while grappling with the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) health crisis.

“As you celebrate the Breaking of the Fast, may the clarity of thought and wisdom that you have attained from this undertaking inspire you to be the living examples of what is best in the Islamic faith,” he said in a statement.

Duterte expressed hope that the month-long Ramadan fasting has helped the Muslim community nourish their inner strength and fortitude to stay true to the goodness of humanity and at the same time shun evil.

He also remained hopeful that they would further carry out their roles as stewards of peace, love and understanding.

“I trust that you will remain committed in breaking down barriers that divide and further estrange us from one another,” Duterte said.

Duterte also urged them to be “agents of change in our communities” by harnessing the best of their capabilities and perspectives.

“It is only in our everyday lives that our religious doctrines find meaningful relevance as it is through our actions and deeds that we attest to the benevolence and grace of the Creator,” he said.

Eid’l Fitr is celebrated for three days on different dates each year, depending on the sighting of the new moon in the 10th month of the Islamic calendar. This year, the celebration of Eid’l Fitr is set on Sunday (May 24).

Duterte has declared May 25 as a regular holiday for the observance of Eid’l Fitr through Proclamation No. 944.

“In order to bring the religious and cultural significance of Eid’l Fitr to the fore of national consciousness, it is necessary to declare Monday, 25 May 2020, a regular holiday throughout the country,” the proclamation read.

The proclamation also reminded the Muslim community to observe community quarantine and safe physical distancing measures amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

PRRD to Muslim Filipinos: Be living examples of

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"The entire Filipino nation should have the full opportunity to join their Muslim brothers and sisters in peace and harmony in the observance and celebration of Eid'l Fitr, subject to existing community quarantine and social distancing measures," it read.

Muslims traditionally gather in mosques to pray on the first day of Eid'l Fitr, however, since public gatherings remain banned due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they will have to celebrate inside their respective homes.

Mindanao, home to majority of Muslim Filipinos, is currently under a less restrictive general community quarantine (GCQ).

Metro Manila, Laguna, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga and Zambales are under a modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ) while only Cebu and Mandaue cities were placed under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) from May 16 to 31. **(PNA)**

Be stewards of peace, Rody urges Muslims

May 24, 2020 | Filed under: [Headlines, News](#) | Posted by: [Tempo Desk](#)



DUTERTE (Jansen Romero)

In observance of Eid'l Fitr that marks the end of the month of Ramadan, President Duterte has urged the Muslim community to continue to be “stewards of peace, love, and understanding.”

The President extended his greeting on a solemn and blessed occasion and expressed hope the Muslim brothers and sisters will be inspired to be “living examples” of the Islamic faith and help “break down the barriers” that divide the nation.

Today has been declared by the President as a regular holiday across the country in celebration of Eid'l Fitr.

“As you celebrate the Breaking of the Fast, may the clarity of thought and wisdom that you have attained from this undertaking inspire you to be the living examples of what is best in the Islamic faith. It is likewise my hope that your time in prayer has nourished your inner strength and fortitude to stay true to the inherent goodness of humanity as we shun the evils that permeate our society,” the President said.

“As you further carry out your role as stewards of peace, love and understanding, I trust that you will remain committed in breaking down barriers that divide and further estrange us from one another,” he said.

Duterte also wished peace, mercy, and blessings of Allah to the Muslim community as they conclude the holy month of Ramadan.

He also called on the public to be “agents of change” in their communities. He noted that religious doctrines find relevance only in everyday lives through “actions and deeds that we attest to the benevolence and grace of the Creator.”

“Harnessing the best of our capabilities and perspectives, let us be agents of change in our communities as we contribute to the enlightenment of our nation,” he said.

In Proclamation No. 944, the President said it was necessary to declare May 25 a regular holiday to bring to religious and cultural significance of Eid'l Fitr to the fore of national consciousness. (Genalyn Kabling)

Gov't eases quarantine restrictions to help more businesses resume operations

By: [Leila B. Salaverria](#) - Reporter / [@LeilasINQ](#)

[Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) / 05:22 AM May 24, 2020

MANILA, Philippines — The Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) on Saturday eased some quarantine restrictions to allow more businesses to resume full operations, according to presidential spokesperson Harry Roque.

Roque said in a statement on Saturday that the IATF issued Resolution No. 38, generally maintaining restrictions in areas under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) and general community quarantine (GCQ) but easing some prohibitions in areas under modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ).

Most of the country was placed under GCQ on May 1 except for Metro Manila, Laguna, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga and Zambales, which were placed on MECQ. Cebu and Mandaue were asked to remain under ECQ because of their high number of coronavirus infections.

Most economic activities are allowed under GCQ, subject to public health precautions and local regulations intended to prevent more cases of the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19). ECQ and MECQ allow economic activities only to the most essential and limits the nonessential movement of people.

Full operation

But the new guidelines now allow the full operation of public or private hospitals; health and emergency front-line services; and manufacturers of medicines, medical supplies, devices and equipment in areas under all quarantine categories.

Resolution 38 also allows industries in agriculture, forestry and fishery as well as delivery and courier services for food, medicine and other essential goods to resume full operations in all quarantine categories.

For other industries, the previous ECQ rule on companies running at half capacity remains but those involved in the provision of essential goods and services, media entities, establishments offering utility relocation work and specified limited works are now allowed to resume full operations in MECQ areas.

The same will apply to medical, dental, rehabilitation and optometry clinics; pharmacies and drug stores; veterinary clinics; banks and money transfer services; capital markets, water supply, and sanitation services and facilities; energy and power firms; telecommunications companies; airline and aircraft maintenance in MECQ zones.

Gatherings

The IATF also allowed the full operation of manufacturing companies; state-run Philippine Postal Corp. and the Philippine Statistics Authority; business process outsourcing and export-oriented businesses; essential projects and funeral and embalming services.

The new guidelines also allowed gatherings for the provision of critical government services and authorized humanitarian activities, subject to prescribed health standards, in MECQ areas.

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For areas under GCQ, the IATF also expanded the outdoor activities that people could undertake.

These include noncontact sports and other forms of exercise such as, but not limited to, walking, jogging, running, biking, golf, swimming, tennis, badminton, equestrian and skateboarding. Minimum health standards must be followed.

Operation of relevant clubhouses or similar establishments would be limited to basic operations. The IATF issued the new rules as it prepared to meet on Monday and Wednesday to discuss the quarantines that were set to expire on May 31.

Roque said officials were still studying the matter but he described initial data as “encouraging.” “I don’t want to say that that is a certainty because the data still has to be looked at. But it is encouraging because I read a [University of the Philippines] research showing that in many areas of the country, the doubling rate is now longer,” he said in an interview with dzBB radio.

“But we still have to look at the data of the [Department of Health],” he added.

Testing not required

As the government eased restrictions on business establishments, Interior Secretary Eduardo Año clarified that workers in the private sector should not be required by local authorities to get tested for coronavirus prior to being allowed to return to work.

He said the IATF, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Labor and Employment, did not issue any directive imposing COVID-19 testing.

“To [local government units] that are issuing executive orders requiring companies or offices to subject their employees to tests, we have not issued anything that sanctions that,” he said.

Año, however, said companies may require their employees to undergo rapid antibody tests but they, not their workers, should shoulder the costs.

Tests would only be necessary, he said, if an individual had traveled to a coronavirus-hit country, had COVID-19 symptoms, or was exposed to a confirmed positive case.

Government agencies, local governments and even private companies can conduct “screening or diagnostic tests” in lieu of the mandatory COVID-19 testing, Año said.

He said, however, that “hasty testing” was not encouraged as that they were not practical due to the limited availability of test kits.

Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III earlier said employers were not obliged to have their employees tested for COVID-19, more so, shoulder the expenses for the tests.

Only workers manifesting COVID-19 symptoms must be tested, Bello said.

—*WITH A REPORT FROM MELVIN GASCON*

Source: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1280045/govt-eases-more-restrictions#ixzz6NOwF4Vnb>

Metro Manila mayors favor easing restrictions to

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Metro Manila mayors favor easing restrictions to jumpstart economy

By [CNN Philippines Staff](#)

Published May 24, 2020 5:21:59 PM



Metro Manila (CNN Philippines, May 24) — Some Metro Manila mayors are proposing to ease lockdown restrictions in the region after May 31 in order to prop up the ailing economy.

With one week left before the modified enhanced community quarantine ends, Parañaque mayor and chairman of the Metro Manila Council Edwin Olivarez said the capital is now ready to be placed under general community quarantine.

According to Olivarez, the national government's efforts against the coronavirus disease have already helped slow the rate of infection, allowing local government units to better handle the situation should restrictions be eased.

The Metro Manila Council is set to meet on May 27, Wednesday, to come up with a single recommendation on whether or not to downgrade the community quarantine status in the area.

The council is composed of all mayors of the capital's 16 cities and the municipality of Pateros.

"Ibabalanse natin eh. Mai-open natin ang economy, at the same time, hindi natin nape-prejudice ang ating healthcare," Olivarez said. "Yung sa aming report ng aming city health office, itong past 10 days halos nagfa-flatten kami."

[Translation: We will balance it. We will open our economy, while at the same time ensuring that it will not prejudice our healthcare. In our city health office's report, our (COVID-19 curve) is almost flattening these past 10 days.]

Both Valenzuela mayor Rex Gatchalian and Navotas mayor Toby Tiangco echoed this view, adding that they're already preparing for Metro Manila's possible transition to GCQ.

Gatchalian also said that with constant testing, tracing and isolating, local chief executives can reopen the economy while at the same time stem the spread of the virus.

However, San Juan City mayor Francis Zamora expressed caution, noting it might be better for the modified ECQ to be extended for another two weeks to see if the downward trend in COVID-19 cases is sustained.

"I'm in favor of doing this slowly but surely," he said. "In short, 'wag na muna agad agad GCQ sana. Sana we can observe first the trend of the number of cases."

[Translation: I'm in favor of doing this slowly but surely. In short, let's not place Metro Manila under GCQ right away. Hopefully, we can observe first the trend of the number of cases.]

"We also have to consider the data and statistics of other cities," Zamora added.

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Targeted lockdown?

COVID-19 response chief implementer Carlito Galvez Jr. earlier mentioned the possibility of targeted lockdowns after May 31, with only certain zones — instead of whole cities — being placed under community quarantine.

Olivarez is in favor of this proposal, saying: “Hindi dapat ‘yung buong city mag-sacrifice kasi wala nang cases doon sa iba-iba nating barangays sa area. Kung saan na lang merong cases at clustering, ‘yun na lang ang ating i-ECQ.”

[Translation: The whole city should not be sacrificed, because there are no more cases in other barangays in the area. Where there remains to be cases and clustering, that’s only where we should implement the ECQ.]

Placing specific zones on quarantine may also be more practical, said Tiangco.

While Zamora and Gatchalian expressed support for the ‘targeted lockdown’ plan, they said there might not be any need for select areas in their cities to be placed under lockdown, as the spread of COVID-19 in San Juan and Valenzuela has been contained.

Metro Manila, along with Bataan, Bulacan, Laguna, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Zambales, has been placed under the modified ECQ until the end of May. Meanwhile, Cebu City and Mandaue City continue to be under the stricter ECQ.

The rest of the country is now under general community quarantine.

To date, there are [over 14,000 confirmed cases](#) of the viral disease in the Philippines, with over 800 deaths and more than 3,000 recoveries.

CNN Philippines’ Xianne Arcangel and Kristel Limpot contributed to this report.

DND Sec. Lorenzana: Quarantine protocols to be maintained

May 24, 2020

National Task Force Against COVID-19 Chairperson and Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Delfin Lorenzana pointed out that while the number of COVID-19 positive cases may not be too high, quarantine protocols must be maintained for the public to get used to the "new normal."

"Hindi pa tayo makakapag-loosen up completely dahil ang purpose natin dito although `yung ating cases ng COVID, hindi na tumataas, we would like to impose to our people `yung self-discipline (We cannot loosen up completely because our purpose here, although our number of COVID-19 cases is not increasing, we would like to impose self-discipline on our people)."

Sec. Delfin Lorenzana added that the quarantine protocol in areas with high numbers of COVID-19 positive will stay strict.

National Action Plan Chief Implementer Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr. initially said that a zoning concept may be implemented, where only zones or clusters with high COVID-19 positive cases will implement strict quarantine measures.

Meanwhile, Sec. Lorenzana stated that he understands the complaints of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) due to the delayed results of their COVID-19 tests.

"Since Monday, nakapagpadala na tayo sa probinsya ng almost six thousand so tuloy-tuloy yan. Ang target natin is towards the end of, siguro next week. (Since Monday, we have sent almost 6,000 back to the provinces so it is now ongoing. Our target is towards the end of, maybe, next week.)"

He guaranteed that the procedures will be stringent for OFWs who will return to the Philippines to ensure that they are clear of the virus. – *Report from Bea Bernardo*

Source: <https://ptvnews.ph/dnd-sec-lorenzana-quarantine-protocols-to-be-maintained/?fbclid=IwAR2RcxUKjklJWlBaHZgIHYYa0iZOBbLa8WEon42wrtEbG5zix6Rv3hZqxJg>

'Granular' approach on lockdowns

[COMMONSENSE](#) - [Marichu A. Villanueva](#) (The Philippine Star) - May 25, 2020 - 12:00am

More likely than not, another wave of speculations on whether or not there would be a fourth round of extension on the lockdown will surface. Currently, various parts of the country are under varying degrees of community quarantine to stop the spread of the deadly coronavirus disease 2019, or C19 for short.

The Inter-Agency Task Force on the Management of Emerging and Infectious Diseases (IATF-MEID) in charge of quarantine guidelines is expected to review anew the lockdown areas in their regular meeting today at Malacañang. After the IATF meeting, President Rodrigo Duterte is expected to deliver his address to the Filipino people usually aired late nights over state-owned PTV-4.

The third extension of lockdown is due to lapse this May 31. After the month-long lockdown in the entire Luzon provinces that started last March 15, the IATF has been doing 14-day quarantine period review. In the latest IATF review, areas were reclassified into three categories of lockdown depending on the risks of resurgence of the C19 contagion.

The cities of Cebu and Mandaue, both in the province of Cebu, remain under stringent enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) being classified as "high-risk" areas. The entire Metro Manila, Angeles City (Pampanga), and six other provinces in Luzon classified as "transitioning high-risk" areas were placed under modified enhanced community quarantine (MECQ).

The other parts of the country, not identified in the same IATF Resolution, have been classified "low-risk" areas that were downgraded to general community quarantine (GCQ). The IATF came up with these new categories after several local government units (LGUs) appealed for the retention of lockdown for fear of a resurgence of C19 contagion in their areas.

Department of Health (DOH) Secretary Dr. Francisco Duque III, as chairman of the IATF, apparently could not agree more. Duque believes the Philippines remains vulnerable to possible spike again of the C19 infection. Quoting epidemiologists and medical experts of the DOH, Duque cited the country is, in fact, already on the second wave of the C19 contagion.

In the process, Duque got himself into another round of tirades from Senators and administration critics over this assertion he made before the Senate committee of the whole virtual hearing last week. They argued the "second wave" comes in only after there was already the so-called "flattening of the curve," or sustained decline of C19 cases.

At the outset, Duque clearly stated the point of reckoning of the DOH on the "first wave" came from the three Chinese nationals who came here infected with C19 last January. It was not until March when the country started to record cases of local community transmissions of C19 infection. Since there were no cases yet reported in February, the graph consequently showed the rise of the curve by March. In between these months, there was "flattening of the curve" when plotted in the graph.

"There are those who agree with you and those who vehemently disagree with you... I will listen to the conflicting claims. But in the end, it is the Secretary of Health who decides. His – your word is the law here because we are not," President Duterte declared this at the IATF meeting with Duque last May 4. It was a few days after 14 Senators signed a Resolution calling for the DOH Secretary to resign for his perceived mis-handling of the public health crisis on C19 pandemic.

Obviously differing from the point of timelines, it is pointless to belabor whether our country is in the second, or even third wave already of the C19 pandemic.

But this has set the tone for the adoption of “localized” lockdowns henceforth as announced already last week by the National Task Force chief implementer Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr. Concurrently the presidential adviser on the peace process, Galvez disclosed the government is undertaking a “granular approach” to prevent the resurgence of the contagion all around the country while “ramping up” medical and health facilities to “test, trace and treat” C19-infected people.

“Granular” is noticeably the newest favorite buzzword of our Philippine government officials.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “granular” as consisting, or appearing to consist of granules – small particles, especially one of the numerous particles forming a larger unit – an adjective meaning finely detailed. From the root word “granule” that is synonymous to scientific terms atom, molecule, particle; or, equivalent to bit, crumb, morsel, speck, among them.

The first time I’ve heard it was from Duque last Feb. 14. “Blindspots here continue to characterize this virus and the efforts to familiarize ourselves with this virus is ongoing. Science has never been more active than it is today precisely to continue to characterize the very granular aspects of this virus,” Duque explained. It was during a press briefing at Malacañang while the World Health Organization (WHO) still referred to this flu-like disease first traced in Wuhan, China as “novel coronavirus,” or nCoV-19.

Duque used again the same word a few days later when he replied to a reporter’s query on Filipino seamen tested positive on C19-infection: “I don’t have the very granular details, so we will just have to wait.”

Lately it is being mouthed by others like Galvez to describe the upcoming new IATF quarantine plans. “We are seeing a good option to have what we call as ‘granular approach’ or selective approach or surgical approach,” Galvez announced during the “Laging Handa” virtual presser at Malacañang last May 22.

Galvez explained the new local zoning system of lockdown: “We are doing at present is what we call granular analysis and we saw that our next approach as a better way of doing it by clusters.”

From science-based and medical data to contain the C19 contagion, Galvez promises us “granular approach” on lockdowns dashed with military tactics and strategy. Such “granular approach” should hopefully cause the least economic dislocation but produce the safest methods to protect Filipinos from themselves once lockdowns are eventually lifted.

Go seeks creation of medical reserve corps

By [Bernadette Tamayo](#)

May 25, 2020

SEN. Christopher Lawrence “Bong” Go has sought the creation of a medical reserves corps (MRC) to enhance the country’s capability to respond to national health emergencies.

The senator filed a bill that seeks to assemble a group of medical and health-related professionals, who will help the government respond to medical and healthcare needs during a national crisis.

He recently filed Senate Bill (SB) 1451 or the “Medical Reserve Corps Act of 2020,” which aims to establish an MRC composed of persons who have degrees in the field of medicine, nursing, medical technology, and other health-related fields but have yet to have their respective licenses to practice for reasons such as, but not limited to, not having taken and/or passed the licensure examinations in their respective professions.

Go, chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, made the move as the country’s need for medical personnel grows because of the increasing number of coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) cases.

He said the rising Covid-19 cases “overwhelmed both private and public hospitals in the country and their medical personnel are strained by the number of Covid-19 patients and persons under investigation in their facilities.”

“The lack of medical personnel in the midst of pandemic hinders the State’s capacity to combat the disease immediately and effectively,” Go said.

The senator raised the need for the military and health sector to collaborate during pandemics.

He said SB 1451 aims to uphold the role of medical and health-related personnel in nation-building; promote and protect their physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social well-being; further inculcate in them patriotism and nationalism; and encourage their involvement in public and civic affairs.

If passed into law, the MRC may be mobilized to assist the national government and the local government units when addressing the medical needs of the public in times of national emergencies.

Go said SB 1451 would complement the government’s BalikProbinsya, BagongPag-asa Program, as the proposed MRC will be designed “to become responsive to the needs of all Filipinos, wherever in the country they may be.”

“This measure seeks to help local government units all over the country in need of assistance. Kaya namanpo (That’s why) the bill proposes for the creation of mobilization centers in each province and city as many as needed based on the number and geographical distribution of the Corps, where they will report in case of deployment,” he said.

“Bibigyan din ponito ng oportunidadang mga Pilipino, lalonaangating mga healthcare professionals, namagserbisyo sa kanilang kapwa Pilipino at makapagsilbi sa kanilang bayan (This will give Filipinos, especially our healthcare professionals, to serve their fellow Filipinos and serve their country),” Go said.

The mobilization will be initiated by the secretary of Health, in coordination with the secretaries of National Defense, Education, and the Interior and Local Government.

The bill also provides for retraining the members of the MRC to maintain and enhance the level of competence and have them ready for mobilization.

Go said in case of a declaration of a state of war, state of lawless violence or state of calamity, the Department of Health may also recommend to the President the mobilization of the MRC.

The Chief Executive is empowered to order the mobilization of the corps to respond to national or local contingencies related to external and territorial defense, internal security and peace and order and/or disaster risk reduction management.

Mobilization centers will be set up in each province and city according to the number and geographical distribution of the MRC, where they will report in case of deployment.

As for MRC members who have regular jobs already, their deployment will not be a ground for dismissal or diminution of any benefit they enjoyed prior to their deployment.

The MRC members will also be entitled to regular wage or salary during the period of their deployment, should they be employed at the time of deployment.

Under SB 1451, a Medical Reserve Corps Fund will be established for the operation of MRC. The Office of the President will monitor and evaluate the activities and the balances of the fund.

The Health department is tasked to regularly publish an annual report containing a list of its accomplishments, status of its operations, number and demography of the MRC, assessment of readiness for mobilization and the incidence and details of each mobilization for the year concerned.

Phl ready for COVID vaccine trials

As of 5 May, eight possible vaccines have advanced to the testing phase while over a hundred more are under pre-clinical evaluations, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Published 12 hours ago
on May 24, 2020 05:55 PM
By [Francis Wakefield](#)



AT least eight candidate vaccines are already undergoing clinical evaluation. W. Commons

President Rodrigo Duterte has expressed optimism Sunday over the news of clinical trials for candidate vaccines against the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

As of 5 May, eight possible vaccines have advanced to the testing phase while over a hundred more are under pre-clinical evaluations, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Presidential spokesman Sec. Harry Roque said they expect the Philippines to have some involvement in the trials by the last quarter of 2020, with the Department of Science and Technology (DoST) taking a lead role.

The DoST will collaborate with the WHO and the country's Department of Health (DoH) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Roque said.

He added the DoST, DoH and FDA will oversee the creation of a guideline on vaccine clinical trial, identify the test sites, the local institutions and Filipino researchers to be involved.

"The President wants to save the life of every Filipino, and thus places great interest on these clinical trials," Roque said.

He added Resolution No. 39 of the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) approved the DoST recommendation for the country's participation in the trials.

The groups currently undertaking clinical tests on candidate vaccines include Adimmune Corporation and Academia Sinica, with headquarters in Taiwan; the Chinese Academy of Science-Guangzhou Institute of Biomedicine and Health and the SinoPharma; Wuhan Institute of Biological Products and Beijing Institute, both based in China.

Roque said the President will review the recommendations of the DoST to establish the Pharmaceutical Development Center and the Virology Science and Technology Institute of the Philippines, already approved by the IATF on 22 May.

"If and once approved by PRRD, both can start in 2020, with the Pharmaceutical Group and the Virology Research Group evolving out of DoST's Industrial Technology Development Institute (ITDI)," Roque said.

"We understand that the DOST has included the establishment of the aforesaid research centers in its 2021 Budget Proposal," he added.

Source: <https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/05/24/phl-ready-for-covid-vaccine-trials/>

Malacañang expects coronavirus vaccine trials by Q4

By [CNN Philippines Staff](#)

Published May 24, 2020 6:38:33 PM



Metro Manila (CNN Philippines, May 24) — The Philippines is expected to take part in the clinical trials for coronavirus vaccine by the last quarter of the year, said Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque on Sunday.

The government earlier approved the country's participation in the vaccine trials, with the Department of Science and Technology leading the sub-technical working group responsible for coordinating with the Department of Health, World Health Organization, and Food and Drug Administration on related matters.

According to Roque, the DOST-led group has been tasked to provide guidelines on vaccine clinical trials, identify the sites as well as the local institutions and Filipino researchers who will be involved, and assist local participating institutions in their proposals and budgets, among other things.

Roque also said President Rodrigo Duterte will review the recommendations of the DOST to establish the Virology Science and Technology Institute, and reactivate the Pharmaceutical Development Unit at the DOST-Industrial Technology Development Institute.

The two research centers "can initiate and strengthen local vaccine development," according to the IATF, which already approved the recommendations on Friday.

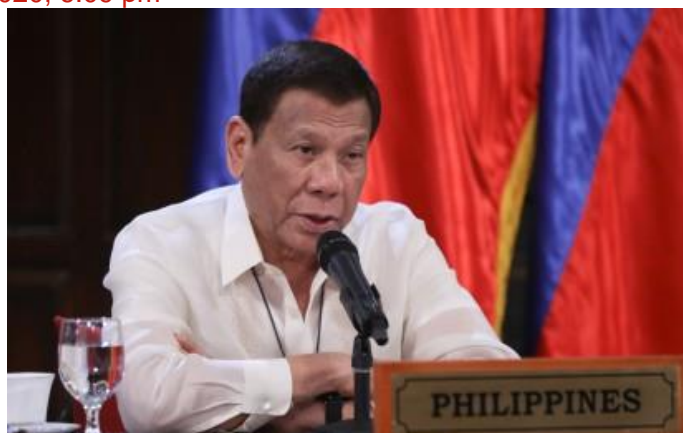
The task force added that the Philippines will be collaborating with the Chinese Academy of Sciences, China National Pharmaceutical Group or Sinopharm, as well as Taiwan's Adimmune Corporation and Academia Sinica.

Nations across the world are conducting their own clinical trials to find a vaccine for the viral illness, which so far has infected over 5.3 million people and killed some 340,000 globally. The World Health Organization said that a vaccine for COVID-19 may be available in 18 months.

The Philippines is also part of the WHO's solidarity trial, a global effort to find a cure for the viral illness.

PRRD to study DOST proposal to create a virology institute

By Azer Parrocha May 24, 2020, 6:09 pm



President Rodrigo Duterte

MANILA – President Rodrigo Duterte will study the proposal of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) to reactivate the pharmaceutical development unit at DOST-ITDI (Industrial Technology Development Institute) and establish a virology institute in the country, Malacañang said Sunday.

In a statement, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque made this remark after the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) approved the DOST proposal for possible legislation.

“The President will review the recommendations of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) to establish the Pharmaceutical Development Center and the Virology Science and Technology Institute of the Philippines (VIP), which have already been approved by the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) last Friday, May 22,” he said.

Roque said that if Duterte approves the proposal, the establishment of both research centers could commence this year.

“If and once approved by PRRD, both can start in 2020, with the Pharmaceutical Group and the Virology Research Group evolving out of DOST’s Industrial Technology Development Institute (ITDI),” Roque said.

He also acknowledged that the DOST has included the establishment of the research centers in its 2021 budget proposal.

Earlier, DOST Secretary Fortunato dela Peña said the pharmaceutical development unit at DOST-ITDI may be reactivated as a Tuklas Lunas Center for pharmaceuticals development.

Dela Peña, in a Facebook post, also said the agency has submitted a proposal for possible legislation in order to establish the VIP in New Clark City.

He said the institute is envisioned to be the premier research institute in the field of virology encompassing all areas in viruses and viral diseases in humans, plants and animals.

The establishment of the VIP would also be for the development of vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics, he added.

“It will conduct innovative scientific research on viral agents requiring high or maximum containment (biosafety level-2 to biosafety level-4) following the World Health Organization’s guidelines on the establishment of a virology laboratory in developing countries,” he said.

The DOST’s proposed creation of research centers is expected to initiate and strengthen local vaccine development toward the country’s vaccine self-reliance and self-sufficiency. **(PNA)**

Source: <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1103807>

Duque excess baggage

Published 5 hours ago
on May 25, 2020 01:10 AM
By [Hananeel Bordey](#)



The crisis posed by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has become more difficult for the government with Francisco Duque III as head of the Department of Health (DoH). Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon pointed out Duque III adds to the nation's burden instead of easing the load from the pandemic.

"You know, particularly on Duque, the way I see it is that he is an unnecessary weight in the campaign against COVID-19," Drilon said in a radio interview on Sunday.

Duque along with Philippine Health Insurance Co. (PhilHealth) President and CEO Ricardo Morales are also liable due to the overpriced packages for COVID-19 testing.

Drilon added the need for a major reorganization of PhilHealth as he said he was convinced that there was a "prima facie" evidence that will suggest anomalies inside PhilHealth.

He explained Duque's latest gaffes have eroded the public's trust in the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF) response against the deadly virus. Duque is chairman of the IATF.

"Public confidence is important so that all IATF directives are followed. If you do not have confidence on those issuing the directives, how would you follow?" he pointed out.

Majority of the members of the Senate have filed a resolution asking Duque to step down from his post due to his failure of leadership, lack of transparency, and misguided and flip-flopping policies which President Rodrigo Duterte did not agree with.

Drilon said it is in the hands of the Chief Executive to fire Duque or not but the lawmaker explained Duque serves as an alter-ego of the President in the government's moves to address the health crisis.

"The President is the elected political leader while Cabinet members are his representatives. It is his call but he should attend to this problem," he added.

As a result of President Duterte's decision, Senator Ronald de la Rosa said senators renewing their call for Duque's resignation will be a lost cause.

"No more (of further calls for Duque's resignation) since it becomes humiliating for the Senate if the Health Secretary ignores the call for the second time. Plus the fact that he is being backed up by the President," De la Rosa said.

Gaffes all too frequent

Just last week, Duque has pronounced an inconsistent stand on the situation of COVID-19 in the country.

During the Senate's Committee of the Whole's hearing on government's strategies against the COVID-19 health crisis last week, Duque said the Philippines is already experiencing the second wave of COVID-19 in the country.

Citing epidemiologists' observations, Duque said the first wave happened when the Philippines reported the first three COVID-19 cases.

His statement drew the ire of the public and even Malacañang was quick to contradict the Health Secretary's statement.

Aside from that, Duque also told the Senate panel that asymptomatic patients cannot transmit the virus to other people.

This was contrary to the World Health Organization's (WHO) reports which stated that: "some reports have indicated that people with no symptoms can transmit the virus. It is not known yet how often it happens."

WHO's April 2 bulletin also stated that "there are few reports of laboratory-confirmed cases who are truly asymptomatic, and to date, there has been no documented asymptomatic transmission. This does not exclude the possibility that it may occur."

Presumption of trust

Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said if a Cabinet official has not yet been removed from his post, the presumption is he still commands the full trust of the President.

Roque made the remark when asked during a radio interview why Duque, despite his shortcomings, he still remains in Mr. Duterte's official family.

This despite the fact that in previous occasions he has sacked a number of government officials due to corruption or negligence.

"I honestly do not know but that is a decision reserved for the President, let us not second guess him. What can I say about the President is that he is updated of the news and he acts fast when needed," Roque said during an interview over radio station DZBB on Saturday.

"The rule of thumb is that if a secretary who serves at the pleasure of the President remains in his post, he still enjoys his trust," he added.

Roque, in the same interview, maintained that the reason why Duque stated during a Senate hearing that the country is already in the second wave of the pandemic was due to the opinion of health experts who he consulted.

He added that just like lawyers, doctors have one science, one data but different opinions.

In the same interview, Roque said the IATF is currently looking at the latest data on whether it will retain or not the MECQ or modified enhanced community quarantine in the National Capital Region.

To ensure that we can defeat the virus, people should recognize the new normal by wearing mask, frequent washing of the hands and the practice of the minimum health standards, according to Roque.

Duque, Morales may face raps

Earlier, PhilHealth's Morales justified the packages for COVID-19 testing saying the P8,150 rate was set last March as there were still limited supplies of test kits available in the country. However, Drilon said PhilHealth officials should have immediately reviewed the packages, emphasizing that the Philippine Red Cross was able to set the price of testing at a lower price.

"They failed to exercise due diligence of the good father of a family," he said.

Last 22 May, PhilHealth has chopped the cost of the packages for COVID-19 testing.

From P8,150, the cost of the package is now pegged at P4,200.

The DoH is also getting the flak for price controls it suggested on medicine which the industry said would mean P28 billion in potential lost revenues.

Executive Order (EO) 104 will take effect in June and will slash the prices of medicines from the manufacturers' level but not all prices will be reduced for patients and consumers.

The industry projects its sales to drop by P57 billion from P200 billion once the full price control plan of the DoH is fully implemented.

Projected government revenue losses are broken down into P4 billion in foregone customs duties; P7 billion in lost value added tax (VAT); and P17 billion in corporate taxes.

"The EO does not benefit the public in the end because of the formula used to compute the price adjustments. We appeal that the measure be withdrawn until further studies especially at this time when the government needs funds to fight COVID-19," the Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines said.

with Francis T. Wakefield
@tribunephil_FTW

13% in Metro eyed for tests

Published 6 hours ago
on May 25, 2020 12:30 AM
By **Michelle R. Guillang**



The Philippine Red Cross (PRC) will undertake the nearest equivalent of mass testing as it increases its daily capacity to 16,000 checks of individuals by June, PRC Chairman and Senator Richard Gordon said on Sunday.

About 16 additional polymerase chain reaction machines are scheduled to arrive in the country, he shared.

The machines will be installed in the molecular laboratories in Mandaluyong and Manila.

“Our target is to test 13 percent of Metro Manila,” Gordon indicated.

At the same time, the PRC will upgrade its online system to avoid possible data errors in the future.

Right now, Gordon said there has been a delay in the release of COVID-19 test results because of bad data being fed in the system.

There are 180 to 300 volunteers working 24/7 to fix the wrong encoded data, he said.

Gordon shared one thing that makes the task even harder for encoders is that there were individuals who have written incorrect personal information which affected data processing.

Data errors

“Some people wrote that they were born in 2020 when they are already in 40s,” Gordon said. Sometimes names were spelled wrong and no addresses were indicated in the online forms.

He added the PRC is very careful in releasing test results since these are very sensitive data.

Before they can release the test results, thousands of online forms have to be cross-checked with the results first by the volunteer encoders.

However, the real problem lies when inaccurate personal information was encoded in the online form.

This means they still have to search for the right form among thousands of other forms and correct the information in there to deliver the results to the correct individuals.

About 50,000 repatriated overseas Filipino workers will be arriving in the following days and will be tested at the testing centers of PRC, he disclosed.

This indicates that about 50,000 more forms will be dealt by the volunteers.

Regular tests for medics

Dr. Evelyn Reside, Chief of the Quirino Memorial Medical Center (QMMC), thanked Gordon and the PRC for facilitating the regular testing of their healthcare workers as QMMC is a referral center for COVID-19 testing.

About 1,000 doctors and nurses of QMMC were tested last two weeks and will be tested again this week, she said during the TeleRadyo program.

She also expressed her appreciation for the group as it has always been ready to help since the measles outbreak.

Reside said the PRC has provided them a medical tent which they are using as an extension to their emergency room to isolate patients who are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms.

“It improves how we serve the patients,” Reside said, noting that they have about over 1,000 suspects for COVID-19 and 120 positive patients who came from different parts of Luzon.

Reside also noted how willing the PRC volunteers are to work late at night to extend the help to them promptly.

Gordon said about 42 medical tents have been provided to different hospitals to help them accommodate more patients considering the increasing number of COVID-19 positive individuals in the country.

Bike lane sa edsa, inihahanda na — MMDA

May 24, 2020
V. Reyes



Sinimulan na ngayong araw ng Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) ang dry run ng itinalagang bike lane sa EDSA sa harap ng ipatutupad na "new normal" dahil sa banta ng Coronavirus Disease 2019.

Nilagyan na ng traffic cones sa bahagi ng EDSA mula sa kanto ng White Plains Avenue hanggang sa kanto ng Colonel Bonny Serrano Avenue na magsisilbing harang para sa bike lane.

Ayon kay MMDA EDSA traffic czar Bong Nebrija, gagawin nitong segments o baha-bahagi ang paglalagay ng bike lanes.

Ang hakbang ng MMDA ay tugon sa mga grupong nagtutulak na maglagay ng protektadong bike lanes sa EDSA at sa iba pang lansangan ng Metro Manila.

Sa gitna ng pag-iral ng new normal, inaasahan nang magiging limitado pa rin ang pampublikong transportasyon dahil sa mahigpit na implementasyon ng physical distancing.

Hinimok ni Nebrija ang mga biker na magsuot pa rin ng protective gear para sa kanilang kaligtasan.

Romero ipinanawagan ang mas maayos at ligtas na bike lanes para sa mga magbibisikleta

(Pilipino Star Ngayon) - May 25, 2020 - 12:00am

MANILA, Philippines — Ang pagkakaroon ng mas maayos at ligtas na kalsada para sa promosyon ng pagbibisikleta sa pagpasok ng ‘new normal’.

Ito ang ipinanawagan kahapon ni Deputy Speaker Mikee Romero (1-Pacman Partylist) sa mga national at local executives kung ipapatupad ang ‘cycling to work’ slogan sa pagharap sa coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

“The surest and practical way to reach your destination now is to renew our love affair with our bikes,” wika ni Romero sa pagkatig niya sa panawagan ng mga cycling stakeholders na gawing bagong paraan ng transportasyon ang pagbibisikleta.

Idinagdag pa ng dating Philippine Cycling Federation president na mas mabilis at mas matipid na mararating ng mga daily commuters ang kanilang mga paaralan o trabaho kung gagamit ng bisikleta.

Noong nakaraang linggo ay iginiit nina Bert Lina (Le Tour) ng Lina Group of Companies at Moe Chulani (Ronda Pilipinas) ng LBC ang paggamit ng bisikleta na angkop sa social distancing laban sa COVID-19.

Bagama’t mayroon nang mga bike lanes sa ilang lugar ay sinabi ni Romero na dapat proteksyunan ang mga bike users laban sa mga kotse, trak at bus sa pamamagitan ng paglalagay ng mga protective barriers.

“It’s scary to see a speeding car or a 10-wheeler truck runs over a biker. That could be tragic,” sabi pa ng national polo player at majority owner ng AirAsia Philippines.

I.C.E. – Three Challenges to a cycling culture

Published May 24, 2020, 11:11 PM

#ASKGOYO

By ATTY. GREGORIO LARRAZABAL

Atty. Gregorio Larrazabal

Cycling as a means of transportation is being talked more often these days, and we see more and more people using bicycles. We hear from bicycle shops that entry-level bicycles, some of which cost P8,000, are flying off their shelves. There is momentum in the push for a cycling culture in the Philippines. But there are still challenges (which can be overcome). I've tried to divide the challenges into three.

Infrastructure

I've discussed this several times already. Infrastructure is very important. But it includes both PUBLIC and PRIVATE infrastructure. Public infrastructure is what everyone talks about. Bike lanes, bike routes, public barriers to protect cyclists, pedestrians, and motorists. Many focus their discussion on these things. However, the private infrastructure modifications are equally important. These include: safe parking spaces for bicycles (there is a real fear of bicycles being stolen when you park it and leave them there for 30 minutes or hours) in workplaces, malls, office buildings, hospitals / medical facilities, and other places; shower facilities for employees to use when they get to the office; lockers to store their bags, cycling apparel, and other belongings. There's a responsibility not only with the government, but the private sector as well, to ensure the infrastructure and facilities are in place to encourage people to use a bicycle as a means of transportation.

Culture/mindset

This is the biggest challenge which could take some time to change. People just aren't used to bicycles as a means of transportation in the Philippines. For many, riding a bicycle means you don't have enough money to buy a motorcycle or car to use. In short, you're riding a bicycle because you're poor. THAT'S WRONG. That has to change. But it will take time to change that. It's not something you can simply wish for it to happen. It has to be a collective effort to make it happen by doing it constantly and consistently. Sooner or later, it becomes a habit, and more and more people will get to accept it, understand it, and respect it.

With many prominent scientists predicting the virus being here to stay for some time, physical distancing will be a way of life. Let's all work together to make cycling culture as part of our way of life. It's one of the tools to helping us win the battle against SAR-CoV-2 and its possible mutations.

Environment

As compared to countries in Europe where cycling is a way of life and cycling to work is normal even for elected officials, in the Philippines, it's much hotter. Even in Vietnam where a lot of people cycle to work, the weather is cooler, compared to the Philippines. So that's the first complaint of people who are considering cycling to work. It's either that, or they're afraid of the typhoon season when they'll get wet.

But there are ways around it. Apparently, if you ride a bicycle to work and get in the office before 7:30 a.m. (when the sun is up), you'll not sweat as much. So that's a good thing. When you get to the office, you can park your bicycle, take a shower, and change, and by 8:00 a.m., you'll be ready for a full day of work.

One thing a friend pointed out is that most of the people who've been commuting by bicycle for years are physically fit. Many of those who are just starting to ride a bicycle, or get back to cycling, might be a tad bit overweight. So, expect to sweat more than those who've been doing it regularly. The upside to it though, is that by doing it regularly, albeit instead of just cycling to the office, cycling around the village, you'll be healthier and shed some excess weight.



As a rule, I encourage people to hydrate often while riding a bicycle. Regularly take sips of water every 10-15 minutes. Not one big gulp, at one time.

One thing which is extremely important: PLEASE get used to wearing a mask while doing strenuous activity. For those getting into cycling, or will be doing it more regularly, your body is not used to you cycling, so you'll need more air. Wearing masks restrict air flow, and it may feel that you'll be gasping for air when you're cycling while wearing a mask. I rode a bicycle to a meeting last week, and what should have been a leisurely ride, turned out to be quite painful because I was using an N95 mask. I had to stop regularly to catch my breath. If you feel some difficulty in breathing while cycling using a mask, feel free to stop often (where there are no people beside you) and lift out your mask to allow yourself to breathe. It will take time to adjust and remember not to push it. If in doubt, stop. ***Personally, I think a good option is to wear a cloth mask or surgical mask while cycling and have an N95 mask in your bag to use when you meet people or you're already in your office.*** You're not going to be near anyone while cycling, and it is VERY IMPORTANT to be able to breathe comfortably while cycling.

Just remember ICE as we move into the cycling culture.

Tags: [Atty. Gregorio Larrazabal](#)

WWF-Philippines raise funds to support Donsol's 'butanding' tourism workers, community

Published May 24, 2020, 5:29 PM

By *Ellalyn De Vera-Ruiz*

The World Wide Fund for Nature-Philippines (WWF-Philippines) is asking the public to help them raise money for Donsol's whale shark or butanding tourism frontliners whose livelihoods have been severely affected by the coronavirus crisis.

An online fundraising campaign has been established by WWF-Philippines to help around 40 to 50 Butanding Interaction Officers (BIOs) "rise above the crisis."

The group considers the BIOs as frontliners of Donsol's whale shark tourism, acting as both tour guides and life guards that ensure order and safety during whale shark interactions.

"What was once considered as thriving months for tourism have now been turned into periods of quarantine, which has affected not only the whale shark tourism operations but the entire economy of the Donsol community," WWF-Philippines said.

"Because of the lack of tourism income, they have been struggling to feed their families and to provide for their daily basic needs," it added.

The group's goal is to help not only the families of the BIOs, but also a total of 200 families in the community by providing them with food assistance.

Meanwhile, the BIOs will be given new equipment such as swimming masks, snorkels, fins, and rash guards.

"With your help, we can provide these materials needed by our BIO so they can recover and rebuild their livelihoods after the crisis and continue providing quality service to support the economy of the Donsol community," WWF-Philippines said.

Donsol is a third class municipality in the province of Sorsogon, with a population of 49,711 according to the 2015 Census.

The municipality is popular among local and international tourists because of whale shark interactions, a common sight during the months of March and April.

The presence of whale sharks, locally known as butanding, has contributed to the improvement of Donsol's economy, improving the livelihoods of many people.

Save sea turtles in Turtle Tale, a Pinoy-made game for

May 25, 2020

TITLE: Android devices

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Save sea turtles in Turtle Tale, a Pinoy-made game for Android devices

Published May 24, 2020 5:46pm

By [MICHAEL LOGARTA](#)

“Turtle Tale,” an educational Pinoy-made game about saving endangered sea turtles, is now available on Android devices.

Developed by Team Meowfia and published by Philippine game studio Senshi.Labs, “Turtle Tale” puts players in the shoes of a volunteer for the Turtle Conservation Society on Pawikan Island.

You’ll explore a small town, talk to the locals and other volunteers, and complete various tasks designed to save sea turtles (pawikan) by fighting plastic pollution.

“Save turtles, segregate waste, and upgrade island facilities!” says Team Meowfia.

“Turtle Tale” can be downloaded from its [Senshi.Labs page](#).

Video game vs. plastic pollution

Plastic pollution is a global issue affecting all of marine life. Its effects on pawikan were on the minds of the Team Meowfia members when they were brainstorming thesis project ideas for their Interactive Entertainment and Multimedia Computing (IEMC) course at De la Salle-College of Saint Benilde (DLS-CSB).

“When we were discussing what topic we should use for our thesis, we suddenly remembered this video of a turtle with a straw in its nose,” said “Turtle Tale” Lead Designer Neal Patrick Padama.

At first, the team considered “making a game where plastic falls from the sky, and you (a turtle) have to avoid being hit by the debris,” said Artist Trina Pagtakhan.

The team eventually settled on the turtle conservation idea after their thesis adviser, DLS-CSB professor and Senshi.Labs founder Dr. Beatrice M. V. Lapa, expressed her approval of it.



In line with its central theme, “Turtle Tale” goes into some of the reasons why plastic is dangerous to pawikan. In one of the mini-games, players have to go diving for plastic bags, which the creatures often mistake for one of their favorite foods, jellyfish.

Save sea turtles in Turtle Tale, a Pinoy-made game for

May 25, 2020

TITLE: Android devices

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[According to conservation organization WWF](#), eating plastic can choke, seriously injure, and even kill sea turtles. It can also “create pockets of air in their gut, making diving difficult.”

Around 52% of the world’s sea turtles have ingested plastic. A turtle has a 22% chance of perishing if it consumes a single piece of plastic. If 14 plastic items end up in its stomach, this likelihood increases to 50%. This is all the more troubling considering a majority of sea turtle species are endangered.

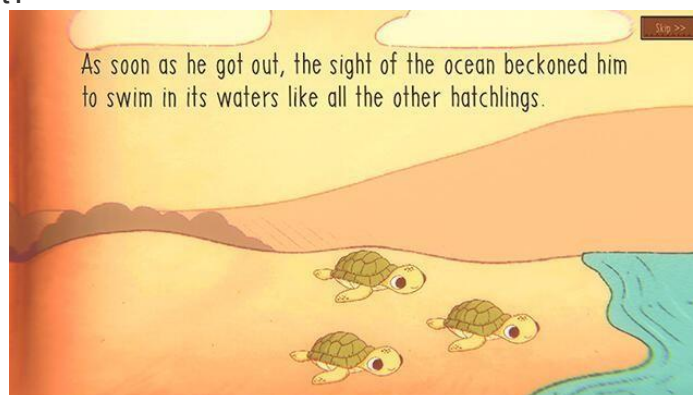


Team Meowfia hopes the game will “raise awareness about the issue of plastic pollution in a way that is simultaneously informative and entertaining,” said Sound Designer Maria Angelica Canta. “The team thought to utilize the immersive characteristic of the videogame medium to help facilitate deeper and more impactful learning.”

Launching ‘Turtle Tale’

Team Meowfia is happy with “Turtle Tale’s” launch.

“Honestly, we were all so excited and nervous (about the launch),” said Padama, adding that he couldn’t help but entertain thoughts such as “Is the game running as it’s supposed to be?” and “How would everyone react to it?”



“It was a challenging journey for everyone, so we’re all glad that we can finally show everyone what we’ve been working on for the past year!” said Pagtakhan.

“‘Turtle Tale’ is the team’s first published game, so we feel incredibly proud to be able to share our work with the public,” said Canta. “We’re grateful to have had the opportunity to publish our game with the help of Senshi.Labs, as well as all the people that have helped along the way.”

Team Meowfia and Senshi.Labs plan to make “Turtle Tale” available on the Google Play Store.

[At GDAP’s Game On 2019](#), “Turtle Tale” won the School Track awards for Best Mobile & Handheld and Best Game Art. — **LA, GMA News**

Source: https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/scitech/technology/739561/save-sea-turtles-in-turtle-tale-a-pinoy-made-game-for-android-devices/story/?fbclid=IwAR3bpn_JUzmUtJUscigHHL-GhEZCcQPHWOQRKpwT0mssnH5OvpT_mnVm0TY

Tarlac shelter intensifies online adoption as it struggles to feed over 100 dogs

Published May 24, 2020, 7:38 PM

By **Gabriela Baron**

An animal shelter in Capas, Tarlac is resorting to online solutions as it struggles to feed over 100 rescued dogs.

The Animal Kingdom Foundation (AKF) is intensifying its online adoption campaigns and has been utilizing live streams to promote its rehoming program. To date, the shelter was able to give ten of its rescued dogs new homes.



(Photo courtesy of Animal Kingdom Foundation)

“We are pleasantly surprised that there were families that adopted our rescued dogs amidst the pandemic,” it said in a newsletter.

AKF also expressed concern over diminishing funds following the three-week extension of enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) in Tarlac and other provinces last month.

“Our rescued dogs do not know it, but [the] more than three weeks’ quarantine extension has greatly affected our operation as shelter. We are now realizing the effect of this pandemic as we continue into the unknown,” it added.

The animal rescue and rehabilitation said that monetary donations are diminishing as well as fundraising events, corporate partnerships, and volunteer tourism.

“What will happen in the coming months, we dread to think. As we have been saying all along, every centavo of your donations count. [But] as long as we have dogs in our care and supporters reporting activities of dogs slaughter, AKF will never abandon the advocacy,” it added.

The animal foundation is currently fostering 140 dogs.

Source: <https://news.mb.com.ph/2020/05/24/tarlac-shelter-intensifies-online-adoption-as-it-struggles-to-feed-over-100-dogs/>

Iloilo's new power firm begins system upgrade

By [JIM PILAPIL](#)

May 25, 2020

Iloilo City's new power utility, More Electric and Power Corp. (MORE Power), has upgraded 51 distribution transformers, replaced 51 broken electric poles and fixed 97 hotspot connectors in two months as part of its program to upgrade its distribution system.

MORE Power President and Chief Operating Officer Ruel Castro on Sunday said the utility allotted P1.8 billion to complete the rehabilitation program in the next three years to improve electricity supply, lower the monthly bill and improve the company's capacity to handle bigger demand.

With the upgrades, systems losses, which reached 9.03 percent in 2019, will be lower. Regular customers pay 6.5 percent of such losses.

Castro said technical experts suspected that a high systems loss of 9.03 percent could mean there were 20,000 illegal connections.

The new utility took over from Panay Electric Co. (PECO) after getting its congressional franchise early this year.

Castro said the immediate preventive maintenance works were advised by Miescor, a sister company of PECO, which conducted a technical study.

It was found out that many pieces of equipment are manually operated because these were installed during the 1950s to 1960s.

Miescor's findings showed 9,000 hotspot connectors need upgrading or replacement. Four of the five power substations were found to carry over 90 percent load, a dangerous level that could cause damage to the distribution lines and safety switches as the safe level allowed is between 70 percent and 80 percent load capacity.

"If we will not do anything to fix these substations, one day one of them will fail and may cause a bigger problem," Castro said in a radio interview.

So far, MORE Power has replaced all the switchboards and transformers in all the five sub-stations, almost 400 distribution transformers, thousands of poles and 15,000 electric meters in all residences and business establishments.

The company will put up two new substations and a mobile substation to meet the projected increase in electricity consumption.

The maintenance work on Sunday on the Jaro Substation was done in line with the Miescor findings and was completed ahead of the 13-hour schedule.

It was a reaction to calls by an ally of PECO for a congressional investigation of the recent power outage that lasted several hours.

Castro said MORE Power is committed to bring down the amount of electricity lost through pilferage as it has launched a program to trace the 20,000 illegal connections.

Source: <https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/05/25/news/regions/iloilos-new-power-firm-begins-system-upgrade/726963/>

Roxas City sizzles with 46 degrees Celsius heat index

By: [Krissy Aguilar](#) - Reporter / [@KAguilarINQ](#)

[INQUIRER.net](#) / 08:52 PM May 24, 2020

MANILA, Philippines — The highest heat index forecast in the country for Sunday was recorded in Roxas City, Capiz at 46°C, the state weather bureau said.

PAGASA-DOST @dost_pagasa

TINGNAN: Top 6 PAGASA Synoptic Stations na may pinakamataas na kalkuladong heat index ngayong Linggo, 24 Mayo.

PANGANIB (41-54°C na heat index): Posible ang heat cramps at heat exhaustion na maaaring mauwi sa heat stroke kapag tuluy-tuloy ang physical activity.

PAGASA STATIONS WITH THE HIGHEST COMPUTED HEAT INDEX		
SUNDAY, 24 MAY 2020		
ROXAS CITY	46°C	2:00 PM
CATBALOGAN CITY	45°C	2:00 PM
SANGLEY POINT, CAVITE CITY	45°C	2:00 PM
ALABAT, QUEZON	44°C	5:00 PM
CALAPAN CITY	44°C	2:00 PM
ZAMBOANGA CITY	44°C	11:00 AM

40 7:01 PM - May 24, 2020

23 people are talking about this

The temperature was recorded at 2:00 p.m., data from the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) showed.

Catbalogan City in Samar and Sangley Point in Cavite also experienced a hot afternoon at 45°C. Alabat in Quezon, Calapan City in Oriental Mindoro and Zamboanga City, meanwhile, all experienced 44°C each.

Pagasa defines heat index as a “human discomfort index that gives the ‘apparent’ temperature or what humans perceive or feel like the temperature affecting their body.”

Heat indices ranging between 41 to 54°C are already considered as “dangerous,” and may cause many health risks such as heat cramps and heat exhaustion, Pagasa warned.

/MUF

Source: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1280270/roxas-city-sizzles-with-46-degrees-celsius-heat-index#ixzz6NP1HCMYe>

Heat index hits 46°C in Roxas City

Published May 24, 2020 8:08pm

By MA. ANGELICA GARCIA, GMA News

Roxas City in Capiz on Sunday recorded the day's hottest heat index, with the human-perceived temperature rising to 46°C, according to PAGASA.

PAGASA-DOST @dost_pagasa

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The weather bureau said this was followed by Catbalogan City and Sangley Point, Cavite City with 45°C, while Alabat in Quezon, Calapan City, and Zamboanga City all recorded 44°C each.

PAGASA warned that a heat index ranging from 41°C to 54°C could lead to heat cramps and exhaustion.

Heat stroke was also possible during continuous physical activity, the weather service warned.

Meanwhile, the PAGASA station at the Science Garden in Quezon City recorded a heat index of 41°C at 3 p.m.

PAGASA-DOST @dost_pagasa

34.4°C ang naitalang pinakamataas temperatura sa Science Garden, Quezon City kaninang 3:00 PM ngayong Linggo, 24 Mayo. Sa parehong oras, nakalkula ang 41°C na heat index o alinsangan.

Stay home, stay hydrated, and stay safe po!

HEAT INDEX TODAY
41°C
3:00 PM 24 MAY

Computed by 34°C air temperature and 64% relative humidity

**MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE IN THE PAST FIVE DAYS
SCIENCE GARDEN, QUEZON CITY**

Date	Maximum Temperature (°C)
20 May	35.0
21 May	35.4
22 May	35.0
23 May	34.4
24 May	34.4

20 7:00 PM - May 24, 2020

See PAGASA-DOST's other Tweets

A maximum temperature of 34.4°C was also recorded in the area at the same time. —
DVM, GMA News

Bayan sa Negros Occidental, inulan ng yelo

Martian Muyco, ABS-CBN News

Posted at May 24 2020 11:03 PM



Larawan kuha ni Silva Fernando Joemon

Nakuhaan ng netizen na si Silva Fernando Joemon ang pagpatak ng ulan na may kasamang yelo sa kanilang bahay at sa bubong ng kanilang mga kapitbahay sa bayan ng La Castellana sa Negros Occidental, Linggo ng hapon.

Sabi ni Joemon sa simula'y natakot sila dahil sa laki ng mga yelo pero sa hili ay ikinatuwa naman ito ng mga kabataan sa kanilang bahay.

Ayon kay Zeaphard Caelian, head ng Provincial Disaster Management Program Division sa Negros Occidental, tinatawag itong hailstorm.

Ang hailstorm umano ay bunga ng hindi kompletong pagkatunaw ng ice particles na kadalasang dala ng pagkidlat.

Pinapalalahan ng PDMPD ang publiko na pag may mangyaring hailstorm, dapat ay pumasok sa loob ng bahay o magpasilong dahil minsan ay malalaking yelo ang pumapatak at posibleng magdulot ito ng pagkasugat sa tao.

Wuhan lab had three live bat coronaviruses

By [Agence France-Press](#)

May 25, 2020

BEIJING: The Chinese virology institute in the city where the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) first emerged has three live strains of bat coronavirus on-site, but none match the new contagion wreaking chaos across the world, its director has said.

Scientists think Covid-19 — which first emerged in Wuhan and has killed some 340,000 people worldwide — originated in bats and could have been transmitted to people via another mammal.

But the director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology told state broadcaster CGTN that claims made by United States President Donald Trump and others the virus could have leaked from the facility were “pure fabrication.”

In the interview filmed on May 13 but broadcast Saturday night, Wang Yanyi said the center has “isolated and obtained some coronaviruses from bats.”

“Now we have three strains of live viruses... But their highest similarity to SARS-CoV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2) only reaches 79.8 percent,” she said, referring to the coronavirus strain that causes Covid-19.

One of their research teams, led by Professor Shi Zhengli, has been researching bat coronaviruses since 2004 and focused on the “source tracing of SARS,” the strain behind another virus outbreak nearly two decades ago.

“We know that the whole genome of SARS-CoV-2 is only 80 percent similar to that of SARS. It’s an obvious difference,” she said.

“So, in Professor Shi’s past research, they didn’t pay attention to such viruses which are less similar to the SARS virus.”

Conspiracy rumors that the biosafety lab was involved in the outbreak swirled online for months before Trump and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo brought the theory into the mainstream by claiming that there is evidence the pathogen came from the institute.

The lab has said it received samples of the then-unknown virus on December 30, determined the viral genome sequence on January 2 and submitted information on the pathogen to the World Health Organization on January 11.

Wang said in the interview that before it received samples in December, their team had never “encountered, researched or kept the virus.”

“In fact, like everyone else, we didn’t even know the virus existed,” she said. “How could it have leaked from our lab when we never had it?”

Wuhan lab's bat coronaviruses don't match COVID-

TITLE: 19 virus-Chinese state media

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May 25, 2020

DATE

Wuhan lab's bat coronaviruses don't match COVID-19 virus —Chinese state media

Published May 24, 2020 7:55pm



This aerial view shows the P4 laboratory (C) on the Wuhan Institute of Virology campus in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province on May 13, 2020. Opened in 2018, the P4 lab, which conducts research on the world's most dangerous diseases, has been accused by top US officials of being the source of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hector Retamal/AFP

BEIJING — The Chinese virology institute at the center of US allegations that it may have been the source of the COVID-19 pandemic has three live strains of bat coronavirus on-site, but none match the new global contagion, its director has said.

Scientists think COVID-19—which first emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan and has killed more than 340,000 people worldwide—originated in bats and could have been transmitted to people via another mammal.

But the director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology told state broadcaster CGTN that claims made by US President Donald Trump and others the virus could have leaked from the facility were "pure fabrication."

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Wuhan lab's bat coronaviruses don't match COVID-

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Plans for more labs

Conspiracy rumours that the biosafety lab was involved in the outbreak swirled online for months before Trump and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo brought the theory into the mainstream by claiming that there is evidence the pathogen came from the institute.

The United States and Australia have called in recent weeks for an investigation into the origins of the pandemic.

Chinese scientists have said that the virus first emerged at a market selling live animals in Wuhan, though officials in Beijing more recently cast doubt about its origins.

Chinese Foreign minister Wang Yi on Sunday blasted what he called efforts by US politicians to "fabricate rumors" about the pathogen's origins and "stigmatize China."

He said China would be "open" to international cooperation to identify the source of the novel coronavirus, as long as any investigation is "free of political interference."

The World Health Organization has said Washington offered no evidence to support the "speculative" claims about the Wuhan lab.

The Wuhan lab has said it received samples of the then-unknown virus on December 30, determined the viral genome sequence on January 2 and submitted information on the pathogen to the WHO on January 11.

Wang Yanyi said in the interview that before it received samples in December, their team had never "encountered, researched or kept the virus."

"In fact, like everyone else, we didn't even know the virus existed," she said. "How could it have leaked from our lab when we never had it?"

At a press conference Sunday, Zhao Chenxin, deputy secretary-general of the National Development and Reform Commission, said every Chinese prefecture must have its own P3 laboratory to ramp up preparations against infectious diseases.

Apart from the P3 lab plans—the second-highest biosafety classification for labs handling pathogens—Zhao said each city should also have a lower-level P2 laboratory so they could "quickly respond in a major epidemic."

The Wuhan institute has both P3 and P4 labs. — **Agence France-Presse**

Thailand begins coronavirus vaccine trials on monkeys

Published May 24, 2020 9:37am

BANGKOK - Thailand on Saturday began testing a vaccine against the coronavirus on monkeys after positive trials in mice, an official said.

Thailand's minister of higher education, science, and research and innovation, Suvit Maesincee, said researchers had moved testing of the vaccine to monkeys and hoped to have a "clearer outcome" of its effectiveness by September.

"This project is for the human race, not just Thais. The prime minister (Prayuth Chan-ocha) has outlined a policy that we must develop a vaccine and join the world community workforce on this," Suvit told reporters on Saturday.

Thailand announced on Wednesday that it was developing a vaccine — one of at least 100 potential vaccines in the works worldwide — and [hoped to have it into production by next year](#).

Suivit said that Thailand has started reserving two manufacturers for its vaccine for COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

Since the new virus emerged in China late last year, COVID-19 has spread around the world, infecting more than 5 million people and killing more than 300,000.

The Thai vaccine uses messenger RNA, which prompts body cells to produce antigens, molecules on the surface of viruses, that spur the immune system into action.

The Thai vaccine is being developed by the National Vaccine Institute, the Department of Medical Science and Chulalongkorn University's vaccine research center. —Reuters

Lab primates

posted May 24, 2020 at 10:48 pm

by [AFP](#)



Laboratory monkeys with their babies sit in their cage in the breeding center for cynomolgus macaques (longtail macaques) at the National Primate Research Center of Thailand's Chulalongkorn University. Thai scientists from the center have begun testing COVID-19 vaccine candidate on monkeys, the phase before human trials.

Alligator that survived Berlin WWII bombing dies at 84 —Moscow Zoo

Published May 24, 2020 6:01pm



Saturn the alligator. Screenshot from Moscow Zoo handout provided to Reuters

MOSCOW — An alligator that survived a bombing raid on the Berlin zoo in 1943 and ended up east of the iron curtain after World War II has died of old age at 84, the Moscow Zoo said.

Saturn's demise marked the "end of an era," the zoo said in a statement Saturday, and 84 was "a respectable age" for a Mississippi alligator, a species that rarely makes it past 50 in the wild.

Born in the United States in 1936, Saturn was moved to the Berlin zoo where he escaped on November 23, 1943, after a bombing raid that killed several of his fellow reptiles.

In 1946, he was found by British soldiers who handed him over to the Soviet authorities.

His whereabouts during the intervening three years are "a mystery," the zoo said.

When Saturn was brought to Moscow in July 1946, rumours began circulating that he had been part of Adolf Hitler's personal collection, the zoo said.

Keeping Saturn, who was a picky eater and liked being massaged with a brush, had been an "honor," the zoo said.

"He came to us after the victory" over Nazi Germany, it said, "and celebrated the 75th anniversary of that victory with us."

It had been "a great joy" to spend all these years with Saturn, the statement said, adding: "We hope we didn't disappoint him." — **Agence France-Presse**

Source: <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/scitech/science/739562/alligator-that-survived-berlin-wwii-bombing-dies-at-84-moscow-zoo/story/>

Japan govt gives boost to MPIC biogas project

By [Jordeene B. Lagare](#)

May 23, 2020

THE biogas project of Metro Pacific Investments Corp. (MPIC) with Dole Philippines Inc. has received a subsidy from the Japanese government, the first in the country to secure such assistance from its Asian counterpart.

In a disclosure, the Pangilinan-led company said the biogas project of MPIC's wholly owned subsidiary METPower Venture Partners Holdings Inc. (METPower) received the first tranche of the subsidy.

The project was recognized as a joint crediting mechanism (JCM) model project by Japan's Ministry of the Environment, making it the first eligible biogas project in the Philippines under JCM.

With that, the project, registered as Biogas Power Generation and Fuel Conversion Project in Pineapple Canneries, was approved for the maximum subsidy of 50 percent for the qualified capital cost of the project from the Japanese government.

The Japanese government provides subsidy for low-carbon projects that can deliver carbon credits for the achievement of Japan's and partner countries' greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction target.

METPower is expecting further cash distributions from Japan's Ministry of the Environment in 2021.

In November 2018, METPower and Dole Philippines signed an accord to develop the integrated waste-to-energy facilities to compliment Dole's canneries in South Cotabato.

Biogas facilities process organic fruit waste and harnessing biogas to produce 5.7-megawatts (MW) equivalent of clean renewable energy. It reduces GHG emissions by approximately 50,000 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year from fossil fuel substitute.