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DENR

IN THE NEWS

Strategic Communication and Initiative Service



GSIS tells LLDA: We don't pollute Manila Bay

BY REA CU [@ReaCuBM](#)

THE Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) on Tuesday maintained that it is compliant with the Laguna Lake Development Authority's (LLDA) regulations in meeting the standards of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on the discharge of its wastewater.

In a news statement, the GSIS said that it has been compliant with LLDA regulations and has been consistent in submitting quarterly self-monitoring reports, and urged the LLDA to revoke the notice of violation accusing the agency of contributing to the pollution of Manila Bay.

"In the interest of fairness, we are requesting LLDA to revoke the notice of violation issued to GSIS at the height of the Manila Bay cleanup drive. It turns out that the basis of this alleged violation was the test where LLDA representatives used water samples taken from the inlet of the last stage of treatment and not at the exit stage of our sewage treatment plant [STP]," GSIS President and General Manager Jesus Clint O. Aranas said.

The GSIS also said that it is a staunch advocate of environment protection as shown in its corporate social responsibility projects which include its support to the rehabilitation of Manila Bay.

Meanwhile, the GSIS sent its recommendation to President Duterte in line with increasing the minimum basic pension of its old age and disability pensioners to P6,000 earlier this month.

The GSIS said that in its recommendation, the increase of P1,000 in the minimum pension should be effective by February this year, with the proposal benefiting around 67,201 old age and disability pensioners.

The GSIS law or Republic Act 8291, provides that the basic monthly pension may be adjusted upon the recommendation of the president and general manager of GSIS, and approved by the President of the Philippines.



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No to Manila Bay's further reclamation

Much has been said about the impending reclamation of 26,230 hectares of Manila Bay. One administration reelectionist lawmaker said the bay cleanup would be useless if it would be "cemented" for the reclamation. In a hearing at the House of Representatives, a party-list congressman reportedly "fumed" when an official of the Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA) admitted that reclamation would result in adverse environmental effects, but the plan would proceed nevertheless because "the developers are instituting systems to mitigate these effects." ("Gov't processing 22 Manila Bay reclamation projects," 2/12/19).

In a *teleradyo* program interview, a newbie government official dismissed such apprehensions, saying these were part of a "left-leaning" propaganda. A YouTube reporter also slammed "left-leaning" organizations for expressing wariness about the bay's cleanup as this might only be a prelude to massive reclamation.

This is a valid concern. I think of hundreds of poor Filipino residents, such as former fishermen in the area, who lost their livelihood when the toxic level of the ocean heightened. Unfortunately, "left-leaning" has become a convenient scapegoat for certain people who just want to evade an issue not to their liking.

The Makabayan bloc has filed House Bill No. 9067 declaring the bay a reclamation-free zone, but the lawmakers will be back in session only after the May elections, while three pending applications are nearing approval. When Congress resumes, the Makabayan lawmakers would likely have a hard time getting their bill ap-

COMMENTARY

JOEY C. PAPA

proved by "vested" interests among their colleagues. And the bill will still have to pass the Senate. By then, it could be "all systems go" for the reclamation.

"Three geological reasons make near-shore reclamation a very bad idea that poses lethal risks to many people: land subsidence, storm surges, and earthquake-induced enhanced ground-shaking and liquefaction," said professor Kelvin Rodolfo, an internationally reputable geologist, in his article, "On the geological hazards that threaten existing and proposed reclamations of Manila Bay." He bewailed how "the ongoing rush to execute several of these projects is alarming in how little its proponents seem to understand the littoral environment, and their seeming indifference to the hazards it poses."

Subsidence or sinking of coastal areas due to overuse of groundwater and sea-level rise due to the "uneven heating of the oceans" is aggravating flooding in Metro Manila. (We have seen this happen on Roxas Boulevard, while the reclamation of Dagat-dagatan has caused intermittent flooding in Navotas, Malabon, Valenzuela, Caloocan and Obando.) Storm surges and storm waves riding on these surges wreak much havoc, but reclamation proponents do not show how the affected areas will be protected against these dangers.

Decisive action is urgently needed. A presidential executive order will suffice

until a law banning reclamation is enacted, and before the initial horror starts: heavy equipment and voluminous debris from the reclamation destroying what remains of the marine habitats, including the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Eco-tourism Area; massive quarrying from mountains and the sea for sand, gravel and earth; and the possible dumping of all sorts of mixed wastes.

A massive education campaign and the sustained encouragement of best practices among the people on ecological waste management—something hardly addressed by the local governments—will ensure that, after the initial rehabilitation efforts and with the rains back, no garbage will return to Manila Bay. With a sincere leadership and the people's cooperation, not only in carrying out ecological waste management but also in bringing about an ecological lifestyle, we could look forward to the genuine transformation of the cities along the bay and, who knows, maybe throughout the country.

We must also work for environmental justice for poor Filipinos, the stark majority in this country. They do not need solar cities or casinos where only the rich locals and foreigners can flaunt their wealth. We do not need to reclaim land from the sea to achieve productivity, creativity, genuine progress. What we need is to reclaim our seas, mountains and forests from foreign interests and their local cohorts.

Ban sea-grabbing, and ban reclamation.

Joey C. Papa (bangonkalikasan@yahoo.com) is president of Bangon Kalikasan Movement.



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THE LEGAL FRONT

Government by the people, our elections, and Manila Bay

By **JUSTICE ART D. BRION (RET.)**

WE shall once more elect our representatives and local leaders who shall join the government in leading the nation in the next three years. This coming election is not a novel experience for us, but the complexion of our elections has been changing over the years; our election norms and practices have been evolving, though not necessarily towards our originally envisioned ideal.

Changes have come, dictated by new challenges and issues confronting the nation; by the candidates, their methods and moralities; by the political parties and their supporters; and, very often overlooked, by the people themselves.

Issues and the acceptability of candidates lie at the core of our electoral exercise and are for the candidates, their parties, and supporters to fully explain and justify to the people. Our freedoms of assembly, speech, and association hopefully ease the way for the full communication of these issues and the candidates' positions.

Obscured but not made any less important by the election noise are the "people" who exercise the power of choice that the elections embody. Very few inquire on who they are; on what they want; and on the direction their collective choice would lead the nation.

Many times, these concerns are simplified into an idealized stock reply: the people aim to elect a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, borrowing President Abraham Lincoln's immortal words.

While this simplified aim is interesting to discuss, this is neither the time nor the occasion to dwell on detailed answers. I find it enough for now, largely due to space limitations, to ask the question:

Do the voters understand that other than voting, they have continuing roles to play and obligations to fulfill to give flesh to the idealized principle that the resulting government is "of the people, by the people, and for the people?"

I may be rash in my judgment but I believe that only a very small minority fully grasp the people's continuing

obligations in a working democracy: to vote and thereafter, to continually participate as an obligation. After voting, they cannot simply extend their hand to government in supplication and ask for what is due them as entitlements.

I pointedly verbalize my question for I believe that without the governed doing their part, no government can be effective. When the government is not effective, then neither can the nation attain progress however hard the elected government might try.

I cite as example the degraded condition of our once beautiful Manila Bay. Years and layers of misuse and abuse have reduced the bay to what it is today – a foul-smelling open cesspool that only select and hardy aquatic life can inhabit and that now poses a health hazard to people.

A silent battle now rages for the future of the bay. The rich among us want to create more wealth for themselves and their kind by further reclaiming and commercially using parts of Manila Bay. They profess that reclamation would be an economic advancement that will benefit all and should accompany the Bay's clean up.

Many of the non-rich, on the other hand, largely do not care, happy to enjoy the polluted air at sunrise and at sunset, and their swim at the bay, unmindful of health hazards. They feel content to simply wait for the results of the government's clean up and for the promised better times at the Bay.

Between these two extremes, a small but noisy handful argue for the welfare and protection of the bay as a natural resource. They openly voice out their opposition to reclamation, and their demand for the complete and continuing clean up of the bay.

But this middle group only consists of a very small minority; beyond them are the silent majority – from both the rich and the poor – who simply want to live life as they have habitually done, throwing their filth and unmentionables into their sewage systems and esteros that all empty into the bay.

This impassive group should be motivated to act as a matter of civic obligation; they cannot only choose to vote.

Woe to the nation if the puny voices of reason would be disregarded and further reclamations would be

launched to achieve greater "economic progress." For, history and experience tell us that such "progress" cannot be without its costs. The bay, to be sure, would bear the brunt of development which cannot but worsen into further degradation once previously imposed strict measures are loosened as administrations change.

Woe, too, to the nation if people's ways would remain uncurbed and unchanged; this can only mean that the easy path to degradation remains open and inviting.

Lack of care for the upstream sources of degradation via the continued denudation of upstream forest areas will lead to the erosion of upstream soil into surrounding waters and waterways, and eventually into the Bay. This is one of the causes of our annual flooding, many of them needless and avoidable.

Continuation of people's ways in using their sewage systems and esteros means that these waterways shall continue to be the repository of discarded wastes and refuse that have made Manila Bay the open cesspool it is today. These pollutants have killed aquatic life and will continue to lessen the livelihood sources of fisher folks, while leaving the bay waters a health hazard to people.

I do hope that in the coming elections the people shall elect officials with the courage to halt bay reclamations and support the continuing clean up of all our water resources. I hope, too, that the government shall apply measures that will lead the people, rich and poor alike, to change their ways in dealing with the bay and with our other natural resources.

I do hope that these changes, if they happen, would become our new and customary ways of protecting our natural resources and the environment. In short, I pray for a cultural change that will stay with us despite changes in administrations.

I am sure that – given the political will it has demonstrated at Boracay and in combatting illegal drugs – all these the present government can do through reasonable measures consistent with the ways of the law.



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Who's not a Manila Bay polluter?

THE LAST MOHICAN



By **MARIO FETALINO JR.**

ASIDE from the good looks it has brought to the city of Manila, the Manila Bay clean-up has renewed hopes for a better surrounding -- greener cities, fresher rivers, clean air and more.

Most importantly, it somehow made many of us

more responsible with nature. Regulators are now vigilant against violators of environmental laws. We could only hope this will continue without corruption.

For the violators, the Manila Bay clean-up is a strong message to 'stop' their wrongdoing. Actually, stopping is not enough. They should compensate for the damage they brought to the bay and to us.

I'm referring to the establishments identified by regulators as having no sewage treatment plants, many of which are food and hotel businesses near the Manila Bay.

Reputable names are behind these companies and it's a shame they're raking in profits at the expense of our environment. That's why I'm not surprised some figures, including a government institution, wrongfully dragged into the issue are out to explain.

In the case of the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), it said a recent laboratory test conducted by the Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) showed the agency is compliant with the standards of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on the

discharge of its wastewater.

This disproves the previous report that GSIS is contributing to the pollution of Manila Bay.

"In the interest of fairness, we are requesting LLDA to revoke the notice of violation issued to GSIS at the height of the Manila Bay clean up drive. It turns out that the basis of this alleged violation was the test where LLDA representatives used water samples taken from the inlet of the last stage of treatment and not at the exit stage of our Sewage Treatment Plant (STP)," GSIS President and General Manager

Jesus Clint Aranas said.

He said that after the alleged violation had been refuted by the results of the retest of LLDA, the immediate revocation of the notice imposing penalty is necessary.

"Be that as it may, we have been evaluating the operations of our STP. We have also been meeting with several service providers to rehabilitate our treatment plant," Aranas said.

Aranas explained that GSIS regularly monitors the water samples from its STP by having it tested by a DENR-accredited laboratory.

"In the last three

months, the results provided by Mach Union Laboratory, Inc. showed that the total coliform level in water samples from our STP was way below the allowable limit. Thus, the violation notice from LLDA came as a surprise to us considering that in previous years, LLDA had bestowed various awards on GSIS for exceptional environmental performance including the "Diwa ng Lawa" award," he said.

"This award was given to us after obtaining a 'Green' rating for three consecutive years (2010-2012) equivalent to a level of per-

formance which is 'better than applicable standards' and compliant with LLDA regulatory requirements." Aranas added.

He stressed that GSIS has been compliant with LLDA regulations and has been consistent in submitting quarterly self-monitoring reports.

Moreover, the GSIS is a staunch advocate of environment protection as shown in its corporate social responsibility projects which include its support to the rehabilitation of Manila Bay, he said.

For comments, please call or text 09055080126 or email lastmohican2004@yahoo.com.



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Dalampasigan tinabunan ng lupa, inireklamo kay Digong

Mahigit 100 residente ng Brgy Lucap, Alaminos City, Pangasinan ang pumalag matapos na ilegal umanong tabunan ng lupa ang kanilang dalampasigan at tayuan ng mga commercial establishments na pag-aari umano ng kanilang mayor at mga alipores nito.

Nagsampa ng reklamo laban kay Alaminos City Mayor Arthur Celeste ang may 138 na mangingisda sa naturang lungsod, sa mga tanggapan nina Pangulong Rodrigo Duterte; DENR Sec. Roy Cimatu at DILG Usec. Martin Diño dahil sa labis umanong naapektuhan ng reklamasyon ang kanilang kabuhayan. Hindi na makadaong umano sa dalampasigan ang kanilang mga bangka para maghatid ng mga turista sa Hundred Islands.

Ang bagong restaurant umanong itinayo roon ay pag-aari ni Brian Celeste, anak ng kanilang mayor. Gayundin ang isa pang cafe na itinayo ay pag-aari naman umano ni Bani mayor Gwen Yamamoto.

"Bakit inapakan ni Mayor Celeste ang aming mga karapatan, pinalayas nila ang mga tindera at bangka sa dalampasigan, tinabunan, para lamang sa kapakanan ng pamilya Celeste at mga alipores nila?" pahayag ng mga residente na lumagda sa reklamo.



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Panukalang pagpapasara sa Boracay 'once a month,' ikinokonsidera – DENR

PINAG-AARALAN pa ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ang panukalang ipapasara ang Boracay sa loob ng isang buwan kada taon o gawin itong partial upang bigyang-daan ang paglilinis.

Ito ay kasunod ng kumpirmasyon ni DENR Undersecretary Sherwin Rigor na magkakaroon ng clean-up activity sa isla ngayong taon.

Maari aniyang gawin ito tuwing lean season o kakaunti ang bumibisita ng turista sa isla.

Sinabi ni Rigor na sa halip na buong isla ang isara kagaya ng nangyari noong nakaraang taon,

may mga panukala na gawin na lamang ito ng "by section."

Layunin aniya nito na maipakita sa mga turista na tuloy-tuloy ang kaniyang rehabilitasyon at upang hindi na maulit pa ang nangyaring anim na buwang Boracay closure na nagsimula noong Abril 2018.

Samantala, patuloy ang inspeksyon sa mga establishment sa isla upang masiguro na mga compliant establishments lamang ang nag-o-operate.

Kamakailan, 10 establishment ang nabigyan ng babala dahil sa pag-operate na walang kaukulang compliance certificate.



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DENR, MILITARY JOIN FORCES VS ILLEGAL LOGGING IN CAGAYAN VALLEY

TUGUEGARAO CITY, Cagayan: To improve environmental law enforcement from deterrence, investigation, arrest and searches to the prosecution, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has partnered with law enforcement agencies against illegal logging in Cagayan Valley (Region 2). A memorandum of agreement was signed for institutional cooperation between the DENR in Region 2

and the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police (PNP) to provide a quick response to verified reports of environmental violations within the region. Antonio Abawag, DENR Region 2 executive director, had asked the assistance of law enforcement agencies in the apprehension of illegal transport of mineral products during the Regional Anti-Illegal Logging Task Force meeting held at the DENR regional office here. Abawag also ordered the Provincial and Community Environment and Natural Resources Officers to closely coordinate with the battalion and unit commanders of the Army and the PNP in conducting anti-illegal logging operations.

LEANDER C. DOMINGO



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Water in Angat enough for Metro

Supply to last till end of dry season, NWRB official assures

By **ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ, BEN R. ROSARIO, and HANNAH L. TORREGOZA**

The water level in Angat Dam remains sufficient to supply the domestic requirements of Metro Manila residents during the dry season.

National Water Resources Board (NWRB) Executive Director Seville David Jr. gave the assurance Tuesday, stressing that the water regulator has in fact increased al- **►10**

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Water in Angat...

location for the domestic water needs of Metro Manila residents, amid the dwindling water level of La Mesa Dam, which is now down further to 68.85 meters as of Tuesday.

"So far, we can maintain the maximum water allocation coming from Angat Dam because there is still sufficient water supply that can last until the end of dry season," David said.

"We are prioritizing the requirements for domestic water supply for Metro Manila by providing the maximum allocation from the Angat Dam," David said, pointing out that about 97 percent of Metro Manila's domestic requirements are sourced from Angat Dam.

The NWRB, an attached agency of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, is in-charge of the allocation of water supply from the Angat Dam to the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) for the irrigation of farmlands in Bulacan and Pampanga, and Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) for the water requirements of households in Metro Manila.

It is currently implementing 48 cubic meters per second (cms) allocation for the domestic water supply of residents in Metro Manila, up by two cms from February's 46 cms.

The current allocation coming from Angat Dam is distributed by the MWSS for water concessionaires Maynilad and Manila Water.

Although down from 200.59 meters last Monday to 200.28 meters on Tuesday, Angat Dam's water level remains above its 180-meter minimum operating level.

He also pointed out that only a portion of water is allocated for irrigation, "but if this affects the water security of households in Metro Manila, we would likely reduce the water allocation for irrigation."

The NWRB chief also noted that they are working with MWSS for the identifica-

tion of deep wells and other groundwater sources to augment the supply of water in areas affected by the low water level of La Mesa Dam.

David is hoping that the identification process can be completed on Tuesday or Wednesday (March 12 or 13) to immediately address demand in areas experiencing water interruptions for the past few days.

New water sources needed

Former presidential political adviser Francis Tolentino called on the government to seriously consider tapping Wawa Dam in Rodriguez, Rizal, as this is the fastest and more economical way of averting water crisis in Metro Manila and adjoining localities getting water.

"Iyong Wawa should be fast-tracked, matatagal na nasa pipeline iyan," Tolentino, who is running for senator in the 2019 mid-term elections, told reporters during an interview.

On the other hand, House Minority Leader Quezon Rep. Danilo Suarez said projects proposing to optimize Metro Manila water supply coming from the Umiray River in Aurora-Quezon should be immediately implemented.

Re-electionist Sen. Juan Edgardo Angara urged the government to roll out an "El Niño action plan" in food-growing areas in the country before the drought caused by the weather phenomenon unleashes its full brunt on farmers who are also grappling with low prices of rice and coconut.

"A man-made disaster over a natural disaster is a double whammy that will leave less food on the table for families and less income for farmers," said the senator, who is running under the platform "Alagang Angara."

"There are threats to agriculture in multiple fronts. Government should help farmers battle the many crises they are facing," he added.

The lawmaker from Aurora said the

government can help by "flooding areas hit by drought or prone to El Niño with assistance."

"Timely aid is one way of preventing farmers' anger from boiling over. El Niño can also ignite dissatisfaction," Angara said.

"Ang init ng panahon ay nagpapataas din ng galit, (The heat also increases anger) Angara said, referring to the 2016 El Niño episode when the government "came too late, too little."

Sources of funds

Angara, chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means and vice chair of the Senate Committee on Finance, said there are at least four sources of government funds which can be merged to fund El Niño mitigation measures.

These are the Calamity Fund, or what is officially called as the National Disaster Risk Management and Mitigation (NDRMM) Fund; the budget of agriculture agencies like the NIA; the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund under the recently passed Republic Act 11203 or the Rice Tariffication Law; and the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) funds to aid distressed families.

According to Angara, the P20-billion NDRMM fund can finance preparatory activities in anticipation of an imminent disaster, while the P36-billion NIA fund can be used for water-saving measures in government-managed irrigation systems.

He pointed out both can be implemented through a work scheme that will tap farmers as laborers, "thus providing income to people who would work on infrastructure that will benefit them."

Another funding that can be front-loaded for El Niño mitigation, he said is the P10 billion for safety nets mandated under RA 11203.

Angara also said that under the DSWD budget for 2019 are several assistance programs that can be harnessed to shield farmers from the effects of the forecasted dry spell.



Metro Manila water supply remains sufficient – officials

The water level in Angat Dam so far remains sufficient to supply the domestic water requirements of Metro Manila residents during the dry season, according to water regulators.

National Water Resources Board (NWRB) Executive Director Seville David Jr. said they have in fact increased allocation for the domestic water needs of Metro Manila residents amid the dwindling water level of La Mesa Dam.

NWRB, an attached agency of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, is in-charge of the allocation of water supply from Angat Dam to the National

Irrigation Administration for the irrigation of farmlands in Bulacan and Pampanga, and Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) for the water requirements of households in Metro Manila.

"We are prioritizing the requirements for domestic water supply for Metro Manila by providing the maximum allocation from the Angat Dam," David said, pointing out that about 97 percent of Metro Manila's domestic requirements are sourced from Angat Dam.

NWRB is currently implementing 48 cubic meters per second (cms) allocation for the domestic water supply of residents in Metro

Manila, as against the 46 cms last February.

The current allocation coming from Angat Dam is distributed by the MWSS for water concessionaires Maynilad and Manila Water.

Although down from 200.59 meters last Monday to 200.28 meters on Tuesday, Angat Dam's water level remains above its 180-meter minimum operating level.

"So far, we can maintain the maximum water allocation coming from Angat Dam because there is still sufficient water supply that can last until the end of dry season," David said. **(Ellalyn De Vera-Ruiz)**



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Maynilad set to share supply with Manila Water

Drone image taken yesterday shows La Mesa Dam in Quezon City where the water elevation has reached the critical level of 68.85 meters. Inset shows a woman carrying a container in Bagong Ilog, Pasig, one of several areas in Metro Manila where water rationing is being implemented.

WALTER BOLLOZOS, MIGUEL DE GUZMAN



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By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

With water rationing implemented in several areas, Maynilad Water Services Inc. has agreed to share its supply with Manila Water to address shortages in parts of Metro Manila and Rizal province.

The Pangilinan-led company said it would supply 50 million liters of water per day to Manila Water starting next month.

"MWSS (Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System) requested us if we can share water through cross-border flow to ease the problem," Maynilad Water supply operations head Ronald Padua said yesterday.

Manila Water services over six million people in the east zone of Metro Manila. Maynilad is the west zone concessionaire.

Padua said the allotment of 50 million liters is a portion of the 100 million liters per day capacity of Maynilad's newest treatment plant in Muntinlupa.

The volume is expected to benefit up to 50,000 households daily, especially in Quezon City, Parañaque and Taguig.

MWSS administrator Reynaldo Velasco said they sought Maynilad's help to ease the water crisis.

Manila Water expressed hope that measures on the water sharing would be finalized within the week.

"We will have to look at
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technical solutions. We are looking for the optimal where we can have cross-border flow of water," Manila Water chief operating officer Geodino Carpio said.

During the El Niño episodes in 2010 and 2015, Manila Water shared its supply with Maynilad.

Despite the water sharing, Manila Water still warned of below normal supply during the summer.

"La Mesa Dam will not be refilled until the rain comes. And it will take a few weeks to refill even if it starts raining," Carpio said.

The water at the La Mesa Dam reached critical level of 68.85 meters yesterday.

Supply from La Mesa Dam is Manila Water's reserves since it has maximized allocation from Angat Dam at 1,600 million liters per day.

Manila Water has deployed 27 tankers to its concession areas to provide water to consumers.

The company said its customers would have to endure three more months of unstable water supply as service interruptions would continue amid El Niño.

The state weather bureau said the dry spell would last until June.

Velasco said the MWSS was looking at other sources to meet the water needs of the affected residents.

He said they have asked the National Water Resources Board to activate deep wells, which can supply 100 million liters per day to Manila Water.

"Manila Water will also activate its treatment plant in Cardona, Rizal to deliver 50 million liters of water by the end of March," Velasco said.

Senators call for action

Senators pressed yesterday concerned government agencies for swift action to address water shortage and the effects of El Niño.

Reelectionist Sen. Sonny Angara said the government should roll out an action plan in food-growing areas in the country before the drought unleashes its brunt on farmers, who are also grappling with low prices of rice and coconut.

He also pushed for a "proactive stance" on the part of the government beginning with the designation of an "anti-El Niño czar" who will orchestrate a multiagency response to the dry spell.

"A man-made disaster over a natural disaster is a double whammy that will leave less food on the table for families and less income for farmers," Angara said.

Sen. Grace Poe sought the approval of a bill creating a single agency in charge of sustainable water management and sanitation amid threats of a prolonged dry spell.

Poe earlier filed Senate Bill 1217 or the proposed Water Regulatory Act seeking to rationalize and streamline functions of various state agencies in terms of water regulation in that



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the independent body is mandated to set the policy for water supply, sewerage and septage management, issue licenses and set, review or approve rates.

She also urged the Department of Agriculture and other government agencies to activate Task Force El Niño that would identify communities severely affected by drought and water shortages.

In Zamboanga, the agriculture department regional office reported that around P80 million worth of rice and corn was damaged due to drought.

Sen. Nancy Binay hit the conflicting statements of government agencies and private companies on the water shortage in Metro Manila.

"The MWSS and PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration) said there is sufficient supply of water in the Angat Dam. Manila Water claims water is lacking that's why there's shortage. Maynilad is willing to share water with Manila Water, what's the real score?" Binay said.

Isabela Rep. Rodolfo Albano III urged authorities to regulate the use of water by carwash shops and golf courses in Metro Manila.

"We should control the distribution of water to carwash businesses and golf courses because washing your vehicle or playing golf is a luxury we could forgo. In fact, if the water supply problem worsens, the government could deny giving water to these establishments," he said.

Albano said car owners who need to have their vehicles cleaned and people who have to play golf could do so in nearby provinces where there is ample water.

He said some carwash businesses even have illegal water connections.

Albano called on the government to give priority to households and critical establishments such as hospitals in the distribution of water.

He also asked Malacañang to direct state agencies to control their water use.

PNP appeals for calm

The Philippine National Police (PNP) yesterday appealed for calm from Metro Manila residents affected by the water shortage.

PNP spokesman Senior Supt. Bernard Banac urged the public to maintain order in dealing with the crisis.

While they understood the suffering of the people who have to wait for long hours to get water supply from their respective local government units, Banac said it should not result in violence.

He said police officers are ready to provide assistance and security in the distribution points of water.

Banac urged policemen to conserve water in their respective offices, including those located at Camp Crame in Quezon City. - **With Rhodina Villanueva, Paolo Romero, Jess Diaz, Emmanuel Tupas, Cecille Suerte Felipe, Roel Pareño**



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Explanation holds no water

El Niño? Come on Manila Water... Dams don't dry up overnight. Something happened... maybe a colossal management mistake or miscalculation... and there is no intention to own up to it.

El Niño is predictable and plans for it should have been laid out. Contingency plans to prepare the public is expected of the concessionaires. If a shortage is inevitable, water tankers should be secured to distribute in hard-hit barangays.

DEMAND AND SUPPLY



BOO CHANCO

One thing we don't want to happen is to surprise the public like what happened last week. So Manila Water blames El Niño? But Maynilad is operating normally and they draw from the same Angat Dam.

By citing the low La Mesa Dam level, Manila Water is making it look like *minalang sila*. That claim muddles the presentation of the problem. Let us review how the system works, just to be clear.

Angat Dam in Bulacan provides about 97 percent of Mega Manila's water requirements. The water from Angat flows to La Mesa where part of the water volume feeds into the Maynilad treatment plant and the balance continues into the La Mesa reservoir.

The water in La Mesa reservoir then feeds into the Manila Water's Balara treatment plant where it is then treated for the East Zone customers. The La Mesa reservoir is used exclusively for Manila Water.

In the event that Angat levels deteriorate, Manila Water has the advantage of sourcing from its reservoir in La Mesa. La Mesa is only a back-up source for Manila Water.

Water managers monitor the levels of Angat because that is the source of Mega Manila's water. Currently, the water level in Angat is normal for this time of the year and the allocation for Manila Water and Maynilad has not decreased.

That is why this whole situation is baffling – Manila Water has been getting its normal allocation from Angat and temperatures haven't been particularly intense to explain a rapid evaporation scenario – there is no reason for La Mesa to dry up.

I have asked my usually reliable sources and I am told that Manila Water has been drawing 1750 million liters a day (mld) from La Mesa when their share of the 60:40 split coming from Angat is only 1600 mld. This resulted in the depletion of La Mesa Dam.

Other sources think there is something more that Manila Water is not telling us. Maybe someone, in anticipation of the effects of El Niño, tried experimenting with valve management at La Mesa and screwed up.

Then maybe the number of Manila Water's customers grew beyond the supply of water it can distribute. They were feeding new customers out of gains from a campaign to reduce non revenue water or NRW. At 10 percent NRW, nothing much more can be cost effectively squeezed out given technical limitations. But this is a problem that should cause no surprises.

Assuming no management miscalculations and that the Ayala firm is a victim of the weather, why was the problem kept from the public?

Precautionary measures could have been adopted by Manila Water. Instead we woke up one morning with dry faucets and no plausible explanation except to blame the weather. This Ayala concessionaire is expected to manage better than government.

The privatization of the water distribution service in Metro Manila had been cited as a model in various international fora. Ayala has the moral obligation to see to it that the private sector is seen to perform better than government. That's the strongest reason for PPP.

In fairness to Manila Water, I have been its customer since privatization and I will attest that service had vastly improved. We have 24/7 water and in the right pressure. Our water tank has deteriorated from disuse.

But as in any public service, one is only as good as the service you provide today. Past accomplishments mean nothing. And because much is expected from the private sector, the bar is set a lot higher.

True, the government had been the roadblock to the proper planning of future sources of water for Metro Manila. We need to diversify from total dependence on Angat and to provide for population growth.

A proposal from San Miguel to develop new water sources had been shelved by two administrations prior to this one without even a good discussion.

The Aquino administration had been slow to act, but they left the Kaliwa Dam project with two prequalified bidders for a PPP venture. The Duterte administration, however, changed the mode to China funding and nothing has moved yet.

The use of Angat water for power generation will likely be limited to what water will be released for our domestic use. The Bulacan farmers who depend on Angat for irrigation will probably be sacrificed.

But the Bulacan bulk water system is already operational and it also depends on Angat. Metro Manila water users will have to share water from Angat with Bulacan households. After all, Angat is in Bulacan.

The immediate solution involves a cross border deal with Maynilad. But I remember when things were reversed in the past, Manila Water wasn't too helpful to Maynilad.

Remember the murky waters from Angat after weeks of heavy rains that forced Maynilad to reduce production. Manila Water could have shared water from La Mesa Dam which already had time to settle sediments for better water clarity. But no help came or was offered.

Still, I am glad to learn Maynilad decided to share water supply, but it isn't as easy now with the old cross border connection abandoned. New pipes will be needed. The MPIC/DMCI owned Maynilad is also sharing water tanks with Manila Water during the emergency.

The crisis for Manila Water customers will only get worse. But in the meantime, let's have the truth from Manila Water. Their current explanation simply doesn't hold any water.

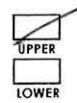
Boo Chanco's e-mail address is bchanco@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter @boochanco



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Water and wealth

On Monday, Maynilad Water Services tried to reassure its customers by tweeting, "We source our raw water directly from Angat Dam, which is currently at a normal level, so Maynilad customers are not experiencing any water shortage at present." Yesterday, it announced: "We are sharing our supply with Manila Water," that company having shared its supply with Maynilad in 2010's and 2015's El Niño seasons.

Manila Water, in a press conference yesterday, said that even if it got an increased water allocation from Angat Dam, its systems would not be able to accommodate the supply. Things still have to be done, including the opening of a fourth tunnel to be completed by next year. (Raf Madrigal, who tweets on water and climate change content, helpfully tweeted a schematic of the water supply in Metro Manila, pointing out that "60% of Water Supply goes to Maynilad (West) while 40% goes to Manila Water (East).")

Manila Water said infrastructure necessary to keep up with increasing demand has been delayed in the past. For example, Manila Water began trying, in March 2017, to get approval for a water treatment plant in Laguna de Bay which would have had a capacity of 250 million liters per day (MLD), but ran into objections from the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS), which said its less expensive Kaliwa Dam project could treat 600 MLD. At the time the spat was reported in the papers, Manila Water warned that a water shortage would result in Metro Manila in 2021.

Even ongoing quick fixes, such as drilling deep wells, still takes time (hopefully "30 MLD by April and 80 MLD by July"). To complicate things further, the question has become, why is the water level at La Mesa Dam at critical levels, when Pagasa opined that it



THE LONG VIEW

MANUEL L. QUEZON III

shouldn't be at critical levels because there's been plenty of rain? MWSS chimed in and said El Niño isn't to blame either.

Manila Water, in its press conference yesterday, added a curious note: "People outside affected areas saved water, resulting in unusual demand." The usual measures have been announced: the dispatch of water tankers to communities, and appeals to local government units to coordinate with the company.

The only thing missing, because it would be really bad PR, probably, was to appeal to everyone in its franchise area to pray an *Ora-tio Imperata* for rain.

An interesting—and alarming—complaint being registered by some consumers online concerns whether Manila Water is treating its customers fairly. This started when, on March 9, Manila Water had to make announcements that while it couldn't provide a definite time on when water interruptions would end, it hoped they would end the next day, March 10. The thing is, it also announced that consumers would have to expect pressure reduction and no water hours for the rest of the summer.

The response was skepticism and hostility

from quite a few people online. Among the observations made by these consumers is that water schedules are not being observed in places such as Pasig and Mandaluyong. Worse, when Manila Water pledged it was seeking to react to the shortage by making water distribution more equitable, it became apparent that there is the belief that Manila Water cuts off water supplies only in areas that aren't developments of the Ayala Corp. and its subsidiaries, or villages in which the wealthy live (places like Barangay Forbes Park and Barangay Bel-Air, went one observation, aren't included in the list of shortage-affected areas).

Such sentiments immediately invalidate whatever goodwill the company hoped to generate from its corporate social responsibility schemes like its "Tubig Para Sa Barangay" program, which benefits 1.6 million urban poor. Press conferences might eventually clarify the circumstances that led to the ongoing shortage, but the signs of the times are an eagle-eyed sensitivity among the public to any signs that some are enjoying uninterrupted water supplies, while everyone else goes waterless for extended periods of time.

Manila Water can start by giving more lead time to communities in announcing water interruptions. The other is to purge its announcements of industry jargon: One irritated consumer pointed out that "peak demand hours" aren't defined for consumers.

The other is the observation that commercial establishments have water while residential areas have their supplies cut off: As one person put it, the sight of mall maintenance personnel watering their grounds is proof of this.

In the meantime, it's every home for itself.

mlquezon3@gmail.com



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Drought stresses need to save rainwater

IT was just a few short weeks ago when we had to face the problem of floods and landslides because of a series of storms and low-pressure areas coming from the Pacific, then dumping rains as they swept on towards Asia.

Rains come regularly to our islands, following an annual schedule dictated by the world's weather. Our "habagat" winds come around May, bringing in waters that had evaporated from the hot equatorial seas southwest of us. This begins our rainy season, when our farmers start planting their fields.

July and August are the hot-season months. Then around October, the "amihan" starts flowing in from the cold north, bringing in the season we associate with Christmas in December and January. March and April mark the start of the hot season, which lasts up to May when the rainy season begins.

Apart from this schedule of the annual "habagat" and "amihan," we have the system of storms and low-pressure areas arising from the central Pacific, then sweeping westward towards the Asian mainland. They carry water that had evaporated from the hot Pacific. Wherever they hit land, the air rises and cools and dumps its load of water.

The Philippines stands right on the westward path of these storms or slightly north of it. When a storm nears us, at any time of the year, we have rains that often cause landslides. We had these storm rains as late as a few weeks ago when we should have been in the middle of our summer

season. The rainfall was such that Rep. LRay Villafuerte of Camarines Sur was moved to file a bill to save the rainwater that was just causing floods and landslides, before flowing out to sea.

In his bill, the congressman said developers of projects in Metro Manila and other major cities should set up rainwater retention facilities as part of their projects. In this way, we save the rainwater which is really a major natural resource.

The hot season has now begun in our islands. The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) has published a map of the Philippines, showing the entire Northern and Central Luzon and many provinces in Western Visayas and Western Mindanao as in danger of suffering from drought in the coming months.

The water level at La Mesa Dam, which supplies the water for Metro Manila, has fallen below the 69-meter critical level. The Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) has begun urging the public to conserve water. The usual summer weather is being enhanced this year by the El Niño phenomenon, when heat develops in the Pacific then spreads all around.

With or without El Niño, we really should save the rainwater that we receive in abundance during the rainy season. We already save a great deal of it in several dams, but we need to build more of them, along with smaller rainwater retention facilities.

Our days are getting hotter and longer, but we have the natural resources – rainwater – to meet this problem. We just have to save it and use it.



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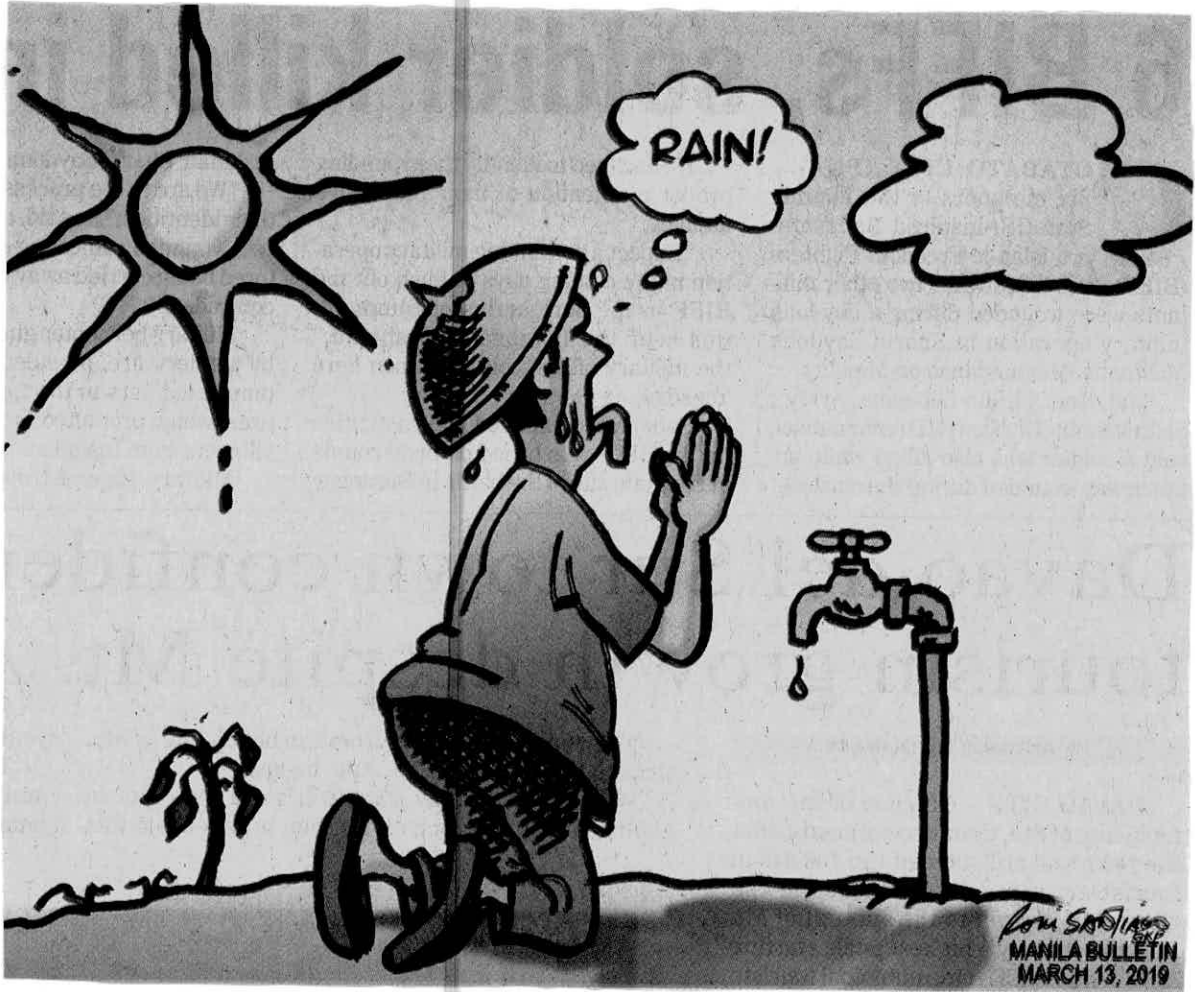
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CENTRAL VISAYAS: CEBU

Cebu provincial gov't approves risk management plan for El Niño

THE CEBU Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (PDRRMC) has approved the plan for mitigating the impact of the prolonged dry season due to El Niño. In a statement, the provincial government did not indicate the amount that would be allocated for the measures, but noted that the PDRRMC has a P255.266 million budget for this year. The total fund includes the PDRRMC's unspent P58.266 million trust fund for 2018, which has been approved for reprogramming this year. "Upon the recommendation and motion of PDRRM officer Baltazar Tribunalo, the council chaired by Gov. Hilario P. Davide III, during its first quarter meeting, approved the implementation of the El Niño preparedness measure," the local government said. The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration has reported that the current warming condition has been recorded since the fourth quarter of 2018 and may reach its peak in March to May this year.



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CTALK

CITO BELTRAN

We're so plastic

Yes, we Filipinos are so plastic! The worst part of it is it generates billions of plastic pollutants making us No. 3 violator in the region. GAIA, the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, recently did a study that was so disturbing the mainstream media reportedly did not carry the story. Here's some of the shocking information about plastic pollution and the impact of sachet packaging of consumer products:



Filipinos throw away 164 MILLION pieces of sachet packets daily. In one year or annually, estimates indicate that around 59.8 BILLION sachets are used – sold – discarded in the Philippines. On the average adult Filipinos each uses 591 pieces of sachet products a year, 174 plastic shopping bags, and 163 plastic "Labo" bags often used to wrap cooked food, wet market products or meats. 57 MILLION plastic bags are used daily (20.6 BILLION annually), while the use of plastic "Labo" bags is at 45.2 MILLION per day (16.5 BILLION pieces annually) most of which are thrown into garbage dumps or end up in canals, waterways and the sea.

In addition, Filipinos with infants and toddlers discard around three million diapers daily or 1.1 BILLION diapers every year. The report does not even mention the volume and impact of plastic drinking cups and utensils often provided and discarded by thousands of fast food chains and fresh fruits and *taho* vendors all over the Philippines! The study either failed to mention or did not include PET bottles in the 350 ml to the 500 ml that are the most common and most discarded type of plastic containers used by water, soft drinks and juice manufacturers.

An additional finding of our research team for AGENDA on Signal TV cited a 2015 report on plastic pollution by the Ocean Conservancy Charity and the McKinsey Centre for Business and Environment ranked the Philippines as the third largest source of discarded plastic that end up in the ocean behind two other Asian nations: China and Indonesia.

Sadly it seems that any and all laws submitted to Congress and the Senate have either disappeared, buried in the cemetery of unwelcomed bills or efficiently discarded by members of Congress who are either in the plastics business, support corporations heavily invested or engaged in sachet packaging or single use plastics.

A panelist lamented the fact that when the results of the study on plastic pollution were shared with the media not a single outfit picked up the data or has shown concern for plastic pollution probably because many of the manufacturers of plastic packaging are advertisers or sponsors of media outfits.

The lone figure whom environmentalists praised for consistently pushing anti-pollution bills was Senator Loren Legarda who's proposed bill to ban single use plastic languishes in Congress. The Mother Earth Foundation and Greenpeace South East Asia also emphasized the absence, as well as the need for a national policy on single use plastic, the need for such products to be biodegradable as well as its proper disposal.

The GAIA study reportedly conducted a sampling of several study sites where plastic pollutants or non-recyclable or non-biodegradable packaging were gathered, identified the trash by manufacturer's name and logged them down. This resulted in a finding where 10 major companies were tagged as the source or manufacturer of 60 percent of waste materials found in the study sites. Panelists discussing plastic pollution also pointed out that the so-called remedies or recycling ideas for plastic wastes are either ineffective or more of novelty than real solutions such as plastic bricks or filling plastic bottles with waste plastics and embedding them to make concrete walls have more wow than popularity of use. Chipping plastic bottles and debris and melting them and using the molten plastic to make school chairs on the other hand turns out to be time and energy consuming because of the chipping and melting process where you only produce five chairs in one day.

Many people agree that a ban on single use plastic and drastic reduction on sachet product packaging is the best solution and is urgently needed. Even some expat senior executives have privately expressed that the sachet pollution is so bad it has reached even the most isolated places in the country. But in order to orchestrate a pullout, Congress and the government need to put down the law banning the top ten or primary samples of plastic pollutants specifically sachet packaging. The manufacturers would then have an excuse to stop sachet marketing and would benefit by returning to bigger sizes and volumes, while putting an end to pollutants at source. If all this happens, we might end up really practicing genuine recycling like the good old days when Nescafe and Café Puro competed by selling coffee in much sought after glass jars or containers. Instead of being polluters, companies like Coke can go back to their glass bottles that we can buy, pay deposit on the bottle and recreate the "Diaryo – Bote" livelihood for the people living below the poverty line.

If all else fails we at AGENDA suggested that the unified groups of environmentalists should launch their "InFamous Awards Night" as a take off from the FAMAS awards, and give out awards to the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly corporations, individuals who are the source, champion or promoters of plastic pollution and a medal of honor for those who have done a lot to reduce plastic pollution. Whatever we do, we need to put an end to our "Ka-Plastikan" or sachet mentality because it has become the country's seal of poverty with vendors saying, Filipinos can't afford anything more! That is sick! We can afford better and we deserve better!

* * *

Email: utalk2ctalk@gmail.com



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SMC tests use of recycled plastics in building roads

Conglomerate San Miguel Corp. (SMC) continues its push toward sustainability as it starts building roads out of recycled plastics, in a bid to reduce the impact of waste on the environment.

"This initiative is part of our push toward greater sustainability. Two years ago, we announced our major water sustainability project: to cut SMC water use by 50 percent by 2025," SMC president and chief operating officer Ramon Ang said in a statement.

He said the company has already achieved its 2020 intermediate deadline of 20 percent reduction two years ahead of schedule.

"Last year, we announced another initiative, and that is to address solid waste pollution. This project is part of that goal," Ang said.

SMC said it would be working with leading materials science company

Dow Chemical for the project, that will use hard-to-recycle plastics as an alternative raw material input to asphalt for road building.

"Developing roads using plastics that would have otherwise ended up in landfills or our bodies of water is an environment-friendly method of disposing of scrap plastics," Ang said.

"We can help our environment and at the same time improve the quality of our infrastructure projects. We are eager to begin this initiative," he added.

Among the benefits of using recycled plastics for road surfacing are: improved stability and durability of roads; increased skid resistance, which improves road safety; longer lifespan of roads; lower asphalt costs, and less waste destined for landfills.

Dow has worked on projects that uses plastics for modifying the properties of bitu-

men, used in the making of asphalt, which has been tested in India, Indonesia and Thailand.

SMC said it would initially test out the technology in small municipal roads, as well as sidewalks and parking lots.

Ang said if the technology proves effective and meets all safety and quality requirements, the company may roll it out for larger infrastructure projects.

"While we are proud to be the first-mover in this area, we are very hopeful that we won't be the last or the only ones," Ang said.

"The research is there and available to everyone, and we'll be glad to share our own processes and experience. At the end of the day, this kind of innovation will benefit the same environment we all share," he added.

- Catherine Talavera



SMC builds roads using recycled plastics

By **EMMIE V. ABADILLA**

San Miguel Corporation (SMC) is building roads out of plastic, recycled plastic that is, instead of asphalt, to help reduce the plastic waste devastating the earth.

"This initiative is part of our push towards greater sustainability," announced SMC president and COO Ramon S. Ang.

"Two years ago, we announced our major water sustainability project: to cut SMC water use by 50% by 2025. Recently, we reported that we beat our 2020 intermediate deadline of 20% reduction, by two years. Last year, we announced another initiative, and that is to address solid waste pollution."

Now, making roads out of recycled plastic becomes "part of that goal", he underscored.

SMC will be working with leading materials science company Dow Chemical for the project, using hard-to-recycle plastics as an alternative raw material input to asphalt for road building.

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Benefits of using recycled plastics for road surfacing include improved stability and durability of roads; increased skid resistance, which improves road safety; longer lifespan of roads; lower asphalt costs, and less waste destined for landfills.

Already, Dow has worked on projects that uses plastics for modifying the properties of bitumen, used in the making of asphalt, which has been tested in India, Indonesia and Thailand.

Initially, SMC will test out the technology in small municipal roads, as well as sidewalks and parking lots.

If the technology proves effective and meets all safety and quality requirements, the company may roll it out for larger infrastructure projects, according to Ang.



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SMC to build PH's first recycled plastic roads

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SMC will be working with leading materials science company, Dow Chemical, for the project that will use hard-to-recycle plastics as an alternative raw material input to asphalt for road building.

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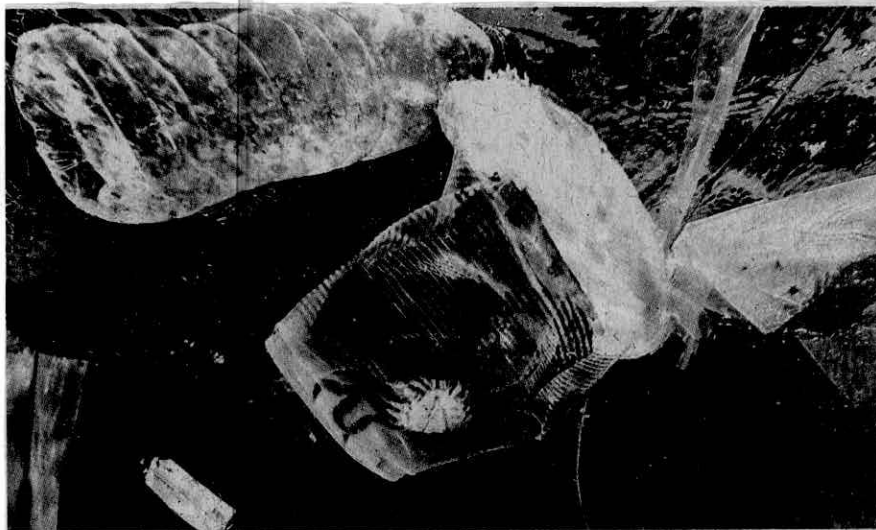
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MARINE MENACE - A crab is trapped inside a discarded milk tea cup in Verde Island Passage in Batangas City. Abandoned and discarded plastic bottles, caps, and bags are among the most common form of waste that threaten global marine life. (Photo courtesy of Greenpeace).



DOF pushes uniform 5% royalty rate for mining

By MARY GRACE PADIN

The Department of Finance (DOF) has appealed for the Senate to adopt its original proposal for mining fiscal reforms, which is projected to raise about P7.2 billion in additional revenues in the first year of its implementation.

In a statement, the DOF said it has made a last-minute appeal to the Senate to pass the original mining reform proposal of the DOF, as contained under Senate Bill 1979, instead of the version approved by the House of Representatives.

The DOF wants to retain, in particular, the provision which pushes for a uniform royalty rate of five percent for

all mining operations, whether located inside or outside a mineral reservation areas.

Finance Assistant Secretary Ma. Teresa Habitan, during the last hearing of the Senate ways and means committee on the measure, said the proposed uniform tax rate is pursuant with the government's objectives of making the country's tax system simpler, more ef-

ficient and fairer for all taxpayers.

"In the House, there was a considerable discussion about how the royalty was going to be calculated and with different methodologies on that. What finally was approved by the House can be considered a compromise position. The DOF always wanted a simpler manner of computing the royalty," Habitan said.

Senate Bill 1979 calls for the retention of all existing taxes and fees on the mining industry.

It also pushes for the imposition of a five-percent royalty on the gross output of all min-

ing operations, regardless if they are large scale or small scale, metallic or non-metallic, or located inside or outside of mineral reservations.

For those outside mineral reservations, the royalty fees would be implemented on a staggered basis, from three percent in the first three years of implementation, four percent on the fourth year, to five percent in the fifth year.

SB 1979 also provides for an additional government share when its basic share is less than 50 percent of the net mining revenue; thin capitalization to avoid mining

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DOF pushes... From C1

contractors relying too much on debt funding; and ring-fencing in which each mining project will be treated as a separate taxable entity.

Unlike the original DOF proposal, Habitan said the House-approved version lowered the current five percent royalty on large-scale mining inside mineral reservations to three percent.

It also imposes a royalty equivalent to one to five per-

cent of profit margins for large-scale mining outside mineral reservations, and 0.1 percent of gross output for small-scale mining outside or inside mineral reservations.

According to Habitan, the original DOF proposal may generate P7.2 billion in incremental revenues in the first year of its implementation.

However, she said this would be lowered to P3.7 bil-

lion should the House version be approved.

Citing data from the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB), the DOF official said the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) collected P1.1 billion in royalties and P1.9 billion in excise taxes from mining operations in 2017.

She said these royalties were collected only from operations inside mineral reservations as those operating outside these zones are not required to pay them.



DOF urges Senate to adopt uniform mining royalty rate

By **CHINO S. LEYCO**

The Department of Finance (DOF) has appealed to the Senate to pass its original proposal of a uniform royalty rate for all mining operations in the country in line with the government's reform objectives of making its tax system simpler, more efficient and fairer for all taxpayers.

In a statement, Finance Assistant Secretary Ma. Teresa Habitan said the DOF proposal, which is a uniform rate of five percent for all types of mining operations, would haul in an estimated P7.2 billion in incremental revenues to the state coffers in the initial year of its implementation.

According to Habitan, the projected revenue from its original proposal is double than the P3.7 billion the government is estimating under the House of Representatives' approved version.

"In the House, there was a considerable discussion about how the royalty was going to be calculated and with different methodologies on that. What finally was approved by the House can be considered a compromise position. The DOF always wanted a simpler manner of computing the royalty," Habitan said.

The House version lowers the current five percent royalty on large-scale mining inside mineral reservations to three percent and imposes a royalty equivalent to one to five percent of profit margins for large-scale mining outside mineral reservations, and 0.1 percent of gross output for small-scale mining outside or inside mineral reservations.

Habitan said the DOF prefers a rationalized and single fiscal regime for the mining industry to make this sector's tax system simpler, more equitable and more efficient, in line with the overriding goal of the Duterte administration's Comprehensive Tax Reform Program (CTRP).

She said that in 2017, data

from the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) showed that the government collected P1.1 billion in royalties and 1.9 billion in excise taxes from mining operations. The royalties were collected only from operations inside mineral reservations.

Most mines in the country operate outside mineral reservations and do not pay royalty, she said.

The DOF proposal on reforming the fiscal regime for the mining sector as outlined under Senate Bill 1979 filed by Senate President Vicente Sotto III calls for the retention of all existing taxes and fees on the mining industry, and a royalty of five percent on gross output paid to the government on all mining operations, regardless of the nature of the agreement, whether large-scale or small; metallic or non-metallic minerals extraction; or located inside or outside of mineral reservations.

According to Habitan, the existing taxes paid by mining contractors are the corporate income tax (CIT), excise tax, indigenous people's royalty, local business tax and value-added tax (VAT), among others.

The DOF wants these taxes retained under the new fiscal regime to level the playing field among all other sectors.

SB 1979 also provides for an additional government share when its basic share is less than 50 percent of the net mining revenue; thin capitalization to avoid mining contractors relying too much on debt funding; and ring-fencing in which each mining project will be treated as a separate taxable entity.

Under the DOF-endorsed SB 1979, the current 5 percent royalty rate for operations located inside mineral reservations will be retained, while for those outside mineral reservations, a phased-in rate is proposed, as follows: 1) on the first 3 years upon the effectivity of the law, 3 percent; 2) on the fourth year, 4 percent; and 3) on the fifth year, 5 percent.



DoF bats for simpler 5% mining royalty scheme

THE Department of Finance (DoF) said its proposal to charge a uniform 5% royalty for all mining operations will generate about P7.2 billion worth of revenue in the initial year of implementation.

In a statement sent to reporters on Tuesday, the DoF said it made a last-minute proposal to the Senate to pass its proposed uniform rate for all mining operations, whether located inside or outside mineral reservations.

Finance Assistant Secretary Ma. Teresa S. Habitan told senators before the adjournment of

the congressional session last month that its proposal would earn a P7.2 billion in incremental revenue, almost double the P3.7-billion estimated earnings the government will collect from the fee structure outlined in the House of Representatives version approved in November.

"In the House, there was considerable discussion about how the royalty was going to be calculated... What finally was approved by the House can be considered a compromise position. The DoF always wanted a simpler manner of computing the royalty," Ms. Habitan said

during the Senate hearing on the proposed new fiscal regime for the mining industry last month.

Senate Bill No. 1979, written by Senate President Vicente C. Sotto which has yet to be approved at the committee level, will impose a 5% royalty based on gross output on both large-scale or small-scale miners in mineral reserves; and an initial 3% royalty based on gross output on mining outside mineral reserves for the first three years of implementation, increasing to 5% in the fourth year and to 5% in the fifth year.

Its counterpart measure, House Bill No. 8400, proposed to reduce the royalty on large-scale mining within mineral reserves to 3% of gross output from 5% currently, and introduce a 1-5% margin-based royalty on miners operating outside mineral reserves.

The House version was approved on third and final reading on Nov. 12.

In September, the DoF said the proposed fiscal regime for the mining industry will bring in P11.3 billion in incremental revenue within five years of implementation.

Ms. Habitan said the Finance department prefers a "rationalized and single fiscal regime for the mining industry" to simplify the tax system.

She added that most mines in the country operate outside mineral reservations and do not pay royalties.

"[I]n 2017, data from the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) showed that the government collected P1.1 billion in royalties and P1.9 billion in excise taxes from mining operations. The royalties were collected only from operations

inside mineral reservations," Ms. Habitan said.

On top of the proposed fiscal regime, the DoF said it wants the existing taxes paid by mining contractors such as corporate income tax, excise tax, indigenous people's royalty, local business tax and value-tax among others to be retained to "level the playing field among all other sectors."

Ms. Habitan added a rationalized fiscal regime for the mining sector is in line with the "overriding" goal of the Comprehensive Tax Reform Program (CTRP).
— **Karl Angelo N. Vidal**



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Simplify mining taxation, DoF urges

THE Finance department wants the Senate to approve a 5-percent royalty rate for all mining operations, saying this would increase government revenues and make the tax system simpler and fairer for all taxpayers.

Based on department's proposal, incremental revenues from the royalty for all mining operations, whether located inside or outside a mineral reservation, would bring in an estimated P7.2 billion, about double the projected P3.7 billion the government will collect from a mining revenue reform bill approved by the House of Representatives last November.

The House version lowers the current 5 percent

royalty on large-scale mining inside mineral reservations to 3 percent and imposes a royalty equivalent to 1 to 5 percent of profit margins for large-scale mining outside mineral reservations and 0.1 percent of gross output for small-scale mining outside or inside mineral reservations.

A royalty is currently only imposed on mine sites in mineral reservations and Finance Assistant Secretary Ma. Teresa Habitan said most mines in the country operate these "Minahang Bayan".

"In the House, there was a considerable discussion about how the royalty was going to be calculated and with different methodologies on

that. What finally was approved by the House can be considered a compromise position. The DoF (Department of Finance) always wanted a simpler manner of computing the royalty," Habitan was quoted as saying during a recent Senate hearing.

Under the department's proposal, all existing taxes and fees levied on the mining industry, along with a royalty of 5 percent on gross output paid to the government, will be retained whether the mining operation is large-scale or small, involves metallic or non-metallic mineral extraction, or is located inside or outside mineral reservations.

EIREENE JAIREE GOMEZ



Pass 5% uniform royalty tax on mining, DOF asks Senate

By REA CU [@ReaCuBM](#)

THE Department of Finance is urging the Senate to pass the uniform royalty tax of 5 percent on mining operations in the country under the original proposal of the DOF, in line with the government's push to make the Philippine tax system simpler and fairer to all taxpayers.

Finance Assistant Secretary Ma. Teresa S. Habitan told senators before the adjournment of the congressional session last month that the DOF proposal would haul in an estimated P7.2 billion in incremental revenues to the state coffers in the initial year of its implementation. This is double the projected amount of P3.7 billion that the government will collect from the mining revenue reform bill approved by the House of Representatives in November 2018.

"In the House [of Representatives], there was a considerable discussion about how the royalty was going to be calculated and with different methodologies on that. What

finally was approved by the House can be considered a compromise position. The DOF always wanted a simpler manner of computing the royalty," Habitan said during a recent hearing on the proposed new fiscal regime for the mining industry conducted by the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

The House version lowers the current 5-percent royalty on large-scale mining inside mineral reservations to 3 percent, and imposes a royalty equivalent to 1 percent to 5 percent of profit margins for large-scale mining outside mineral reservations, and 0.1 percent of gross output for small-scale mining outside or inside mineral reservations.

The DOF's proposal is outlined

P7.2B

The estimated amount of incremental revenues that the DOF proposal will bring in to the state coffers in the initial year of its implementation

under Senate Bill (SB) 1979 filed by Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III, which calls for the retention of all existing taxes and fees on the mining industry, and a royalty of 5 percent on gross output paid to the government on all mining operations, regardless of the nature of the agreement, whether large scale or small; metallic or nonmetallic minerals extraction; or located inside or outside of mineral reservations.

SB 1979 also provides for an additional government share when its basic share is less than 50 percent of the net mining revenue; thin capitalization to avoid mining contractors relying too much on debt funding; and ring-fencing in which each mining project will be treated as a separate taxable entity.

Under the DOF-endorsed SB 1979, the current 5-percent royalty rate for operations located in-

side mineral reservations will be retained, while for those outside mineral reservations, a phased-in rate is proposed, as follows: on the first three years upon the effectivity of the law, 3 percent; on the fourth year, 4 percent; and on the fifth year, 5 percent.

Habitan reported that in 2017, data from the Mines and Geosciences Bureau and the Bureau of Internal Revenue showed the government collected P1.1 billion in royalties and P1.9 billion in excise taxes from mining operations. The royalties were collected only from operations inside mineral reservations, with most mines in the country operating outside mineral reservations.

The existing taxes paid by mining contractors are the corporate income tax, excise tax, indigenous people's royalty, local business tax and value-added tax, among others.

To differentiate, mining operations inside mineral reservations are located in areas where the government has already made some investments and where there is some certainty on the presence of minerals, while those outside mineral reservations are areas not developed by the government and where discovery of minerals is, thus, less certain.



No coal plants in surf town

Resolution by town council of San Juan, La Union, protects environment

By **Gabriel Cardinoza**
@gabrielcardinozaINQ

SAN JUAN, LA UNION—This surfing town is now off-limits to coal-fired power plants.

In a bid to preserve biodiversity and protect the health of residents, the municipal council on Monday banned the construction, development and operation of coal-fired power plants in the town.

In a resolution that was unanimously approved during Monday's session, the council said coal-fired power plants had been scientifically proven to produce hazardous pollutants that destroy the environment and affect people's health and livelihood.

It was authored by Councilor Miguel Corleone Magsaysay, chair of the council's committee

on tourism, culture, history, sisterhood and international relations.

Inspiration

"The approval of the resolution is a big contribution to our fight against the Luna coal-fired power plant," Crisanto Palabay, president of the Koalisyon Isalbar ti Pintas ti La Union (Coalition to Save the Beauty of La Union), referring to the campaign by residents of nearby Luna town to ban polluting power plants.

"This is an inspiration not only for those who are in the movement but to councilors in other towns and cities to push for the use of renewable energy," he said.

The resolution also called on other local governments in the province to adopt the same

declaration "for the protection and conservation of the environment" and prevention of health hazards.

Since 2017, the coalition has been opposing the 670-megawatt power plant project proposed by Global Luzon Energy Development Corp., which will be built on a 41-hectare land straddling the coastal villages of Carisquis and Nalvo Sur in Luna.

Church opposition

Last month, San Fernando Bishop Daniel Presto urged the government to drop its plan to build the P80-billion coal-fired power plant.

In a manifesto read in all Masses, Presto said the temporary economic benefits from the operation of such plants were not acceptable trade-offs

for long-term degradation of the environment.

The project site is just north of Balaoan town, which is known for its bountiful corn harvests and diverse coral gardens, and this town, the surfing capital of northern Luzon.

In January, members of the Manila Surfers Association (MSA) expressed their support for the residents' opposition to the project. They staged a protest action before the start of this year's 12th MSA Cup, which was participated in by 100 surfers.

In the resolution, the town council said San Juan's beaches, marine sanctuaries, mountains and forests had attracted tourists and contributed to the town's economic growth and livelihood. INQ