

CAVITE NEWS

A COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER THAT'S NATIONAL IN SCOPE

VOL. XXI NO. 1

APRIL 23-29, 2020

P10.00

ISSN: 2651-7450

Entered as Second Class Mail at the Imus Post Office under Permit No. 2003-11 dated August 29, 2003

NFA has released some 2.2 M bags of rice for COVID19 relief

QUEZON CITY, - government units Authority (NFA) had already issued a total of 2,191,733 bags of rice to various local government units (LGUs), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), legislators, and other relief institutions, for distribution to affected families. National Food

(Turn to p. 2)

Farmers, fishers to get social amelioration from DA, DSWD

QUEZON CITY, - Agriculture Secretary William D. Dar clarified that qualified farmers and fishers will also receive social amelioration from the government during the enhanced community quarantine.

"The Department

of Agriculture under the Financial Subsidy for Rice Farmers (FSRF) will distribute P5,000 each to rice farmers, who till one hectare and below, and are listed in the Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture or RSBSA.

"This is a one-time payment, hence the recipients of FSRF can still receive cash assistance from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) during its second tranche of distribution," Dar said.



He added that only rice farmers in selected provinces are included based on the criteria

originally set under the RCEF program. Hence, those who are not FSRF beneficiaries

must receive the regular SAP from the DSWD.

"We do not want to

(Turn to p. 2)

PRC opens second COVID Testing Center

QUEZON CITY, -- the country could move on. Less than a week after opening its first COVID testing center to prevent the spread of the disease, the Philippine Red Cross (PRC) on Tuesday opened its second testing center in its national headquarters along EDSA to ensure victory over the virus.

PRC chairman and CEO Sen. Richard J. Gordon, stressed the need to unmask the enemy by doing more tests to be able to provide cure for the infected people so that

"We do have a plan in the Red Cross to make sure that we are able to know the enemy. Napakahalaga na matanggalan ng maskara itong enemy na ito. We cannot win a war without knowing who the enemy is. Kaya from Day 1, inisip namin dito sa Red Cross - magtesting. Once you do that, you can isolate, after tracing, of course, sino mga dinapuan niya. Then we can start healing, and we can



Philippine Red Cross chairman and CEO Sen. Richard J. Gordon (left) with DILG Sec. Eduardo Año (center) and DOH Sec. Francisco Duque III (right), during their visit at the PRC 2nd Molecular Laboratory in Mandaluyong City also attended by IATF Spokesperson Cabinet Sec. Karlo Nograles, DND Sec. Delfin Lorenzana and some NCR Mayors (not in photo). (PRC)

start loosening up, makapagnegosyo tayo

sa lalong madaling panahon. Kaya tumaya ang Red Cross dito ng katakot-takot," he said.

Gordon said that with four machines, the new testing center can also run up to 4,000 tests per day, like the first facility, and will also be operated by 18 medical technicians working on a three-shift basis.

"Each machine is capable of running up to 1,200 tests, theoretically, but I'll be happy with 800 or 500 in the beginning and when they become more proficient, dapat makakuha tayo ng at least 1,000 each

(Turn to p. 2)

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SMC to distribute P150-M poultry products to poor families

MANILA -- San Miguel Corporation has set aside PHP150 million worth of poultry products from its inventory to be given to poor communities mostly in areas where it operates, bringing its total contribution to help address challenges brought about by the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic to PHP1.147 billion to date.

In ramping up its response to the crisis, the conglomerate continues to leverage its portfolio, capabilities and resources to bring immediate tangible assistance to the most affected communities, businesses and those on the frontline of the fight.

"With the resources that we have, we are in a position to help and provide essential relief, especially to our neighbors, in these difficult times. To use these resources well and put them to good use is the right and responsible thing to do," SMC president and COO Ramon S. Ang said in a statement.

SMC's most recent effort to distribute fresh poultry products to

communities mostly in areas surrounding its facilities, pushed the company's total food donations to about PHP390.7 million consisting of canned goods, fresh meats, biscuits, breads, coffee, milk, and flour.

"Many families do not have the means to earn a living right now, so food is really a concern. By helping our LGUs (local government units) and partner non-profit and charitable organizations bring food to those who need it, we hope that the most vulnerable families will have one less thing to worry about, especially since we are all mandated to stay in our homes," he added.

On top of its own food products, the company has also distributed some 1.1 million kilos of rice worth an estimated PHP38.4 million, as part of its food donation drive.

It has also donated over 15,000 bags of flour to LGUs for their local bakers, who make these into affordable and free breads for their communities.

The company also

reported that its ongoing donations of disinfectant alcohol to hospitals, government agencies and installations, and local governments, from its repurposed liquor facilities nationwide, has reached over 1 million liters amounting to PHP83.3 million.

Since before the start of the enhanced community quarantine, the company had been reconfiguring operations at its Ginebra San Miguel Inc. facilities nationwide to produce 70 percent ethyl alcohol, all of which are donated to the fight against Covid-19.

The company has also donated PHP15.37 million worth of its own brand of powder disinfectant Protect Plus Gold, produced by its San Miguel Animal Health Care, a unit under San Miguel Foods, Inc, to various LGUs and hospitals.

Meanwhile, its support for medical front-liners also recently got a big boost, with the arrival of close to 54,000 sets of medical-grade personal protective equipment (PPE) it acquired from

Olympics might only be canceled if pandemic not over by 2021

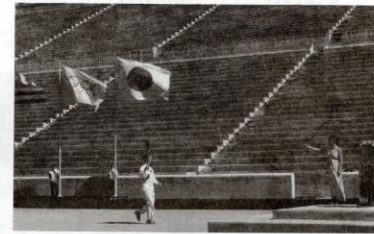
ISTANBUL – The postponed Tokyo 2020 Olympics might only be canceled if the coronavirus pandemic is not over by the rescheduled date in 2021, the head of the organization said on Tuesday.

On March 30, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics was postponed for a year to be held between the dates of July 23 and Aug. 8, 2021.

A further postponement would be impossible, Tokyo 2020 Olympics President Yoshiro Mori said in an interview with Japan's Nikkan Sports daily.

According to Mori, the Tokyo Olympics could not be delayed again even until 2022.

If the coronavirus pandemic remains a threat by next year, the



Tokyo Olympics would be canceled, he said.

Without a vaccine against the new coronavirus, it would be difficult to host even the postponed Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2021, Japan Medical Association President Yoshitake Yokokura also told reporters in a video press briefing on Tuesday.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) has spread to 185 countries and regions since emerging in

China last December, with the US and Europe the hardest-hit areas in the world.

More than three million cases have been reported worldwide, with the death toll near almost 215,000 recoveries, according to data compiled by the Johns Hopkins University in the US.

Japan reported 385 deaths from the virus with 13,614 cases, and 1,899 recoveries. (Anadolu)

China, and the first 10,000 locally-made, medical-grade PPE produced by the Confederation of Wearable Exporters of the Philippines (CONWEP).

The sets of PPE are part of a PHP500-million fund the company pledged to buy medical equipment and supplies needed by medical front liners and hospitals.

The PPE from China were distributed to over a hundred hospitals and the Office of Civil Defense, while the 10,000 locally-produced ones were donated to the Philippine General Hospital, the primary medical facility for Covid-19.

The company further said it donated life-saving ventilators to at least five public hospitals.

SMC's assistance to medical practitioners also extends to free use of expressways operated by its subsidiary, SMC Infrastructure.

As of April 21, free toll for medical workers had amounted to PHP5.1 million, with 5,191 front-liners availing of the toll-free RFID stickers.

Other donations from the San Miguel Group include PHP100 million from Ang and family for Project Ugnayan, a coalition of private companies assisting the government in the fight

against Covid-19; PHP5.3 million worth of fuel donated by SMC Infrastructure and Petron for the MMDA and DOT's "Libreng Sakay" program for medical front-liners; PHP5 million for the construction of emergency quarantine facilities within military camps, and another PHP3.8 million in various assistance from Petron. (PR)

**DRAW CLOSE
TO GOD AND
HE WILL
DRAW CLOSE
TO YOU
James 4:8**

FARMERS . . . FR. P. I

discriminate other farmers, and also fishers, from the financial assistance being given by the government to the marginalized sector of our society. It just so happened that the fund and implementing guidelines of the FSRF has already been finalized and approved early this year, even before the Covid-19 pandemic," Dar said.

The FSRF is an existing social amelioration program of the DA, funded under the General Appropriations Act of 2020, to help rice farmers mostly affected by the sudden drop of palay price in 34 rice-producing provinces, the agri chief explained.

"This is actually the second tranche of the Rice Farmer Financial Assistance (RFFA) program that we rolled out last year for rice farmers tilling 0.5 to 2 hectares," he added.

In December 2019, the DA has started to distribute P5,000 cash assistance to farmers in 33 provinces severely affected by the low price of palay under the RFFA. More than 597,000 farmers will benefit, of which 100

PRC . . . FR. P. I

machine per day. I'm happy na pinadalhan tayo ng RITM (Research Institute for Tropical Medicine) ng 1,000 samples. We were able to finish them right away," he added.

The PRC chief also commended and

percent will be totally paid this month.

"The DA's SAP focuses on the affected agricultural sector of the country. We are trying to maximize our resources, while ensuring the no one is left behind. We have been continuously coordinating with the DSWD to ensure that those not covered under the FSRF will still be given assistance," Dar said.

Since the rolling out of the FSRF early April, the DA has confirmed 234,586 beneficiaries for payout. It is expected to cater to more than 591,000 beneficiaries after completion.

To claim, qualified farmers may coordinate with their municipal/city agriculture office to know the schedule and mechanics of distribution in their locality.

The DA's partner financial institution, the Land Bank of the Philippines, will send out messages/announcements on the claiming of cash cards loaded with the P5,000 cash assistance.(MGL/DA)

expressed gratitude to local business groups, the Australian government, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and international

NFA . . . FR. P. I

and other relief institutions, for distribution to affected families. (File Photo from NFA)

From March 16 to April 16, a total of 1,919,719 bags of NFA rice had been released to various LGUs across the country; 94,413 bags to the DSWD; 86,655 bags to legislators; and 90,946 bags to other relief-giving institutions for relief purposes.

Aside from Luzon, LGUs in Visayas and Mindanao consequently declared their own ECQs either to prevent transmission to their communities or to arrest the further spread of Covid19 infections among their respective constituents.

On a regional level, more than half of the NFA rice issuances were recorded in Luzon, for a total of 1,209,736 bags. The biggest withdrawals were registered in the National Capital Region (NCR) at

organizations for their generosity which enabled the Red Cross to build the facilities.

Among the groups he cited were the Ayala Group of Companies, which also provided skilled manpower to retrofit the two molecular laboratories; Megaworld; Okada; Metrobank; Security Bank; Nestle; BPI; Puregold; Liwayway Corporations; Rebisco; Nickel Asia; and Bloomberg, among others.

319,169 bags; followed by Region 5 (Bicol) at 267,892 bags; Region 4 (Southern Tagalog) at 249,195 bags; Region 3 (Central Luzon) at 161,942 bags; Region 1 (Ilocos) at 114,736 bags; and Region 2 (Cagayan Valley) at 97,386 bags.

In the Visayas, a total of 631,460 bags of NFA rice were withdrawn, broken down as follows: Region 6 (Western Visayas) - 281,341 bags; Region 8 (Eastern Visayas) - 255,956 bags; and Region 7 (Central Visayas) - 94,163 bags.

In Mindanao, a total of 350,537 bags were withdrawn, with Region 11 (Southern Mindanao) getting 78,954 bags; Region 10 (Northern Mindanao) - 75,929 bags; Region 11 (Central Mindanao) - 63,885 bags; Region 9 (Western Mindanao) - 59,494 bags; Region 14 (ARMM) - 44,471 bags; and Region 15 (CARAGA) - 27,804

"I can't thank them enough and a lot of other people have donated, some in kind. We're putting all the donations together. The Ayala Group, they were the ones who retrofitted the laboratories. They put in their construction people, who are quite good in putting all the equipment together, including the negative pressure. This one was completed in five days," Gordon said. (PRC)



National Food Authority (NFA) had already issued a total of 2,191,733 bags of rice to various local government units (LGUs), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), legislators, and other relief institutions, for distribution to affected families. (File Photo from NFA)

bags.

"We still expect high volumes of NFA rice withdrawals during the duration of ECQ until April 30 and beyond, as the threat of Covid19 infections to continue. That's why we also continue to replenish our rice stocks especially in areas with high incidence of infections," NFA Administrator Dansal said.

Dansal has directed NFA offices nationwide to be open daily, even during weekends and holidays, not only to quickly respond to the rice needs of LGUs and relief agencies, but also to continuously procure palay from farmers, transfer rice stocks to areas in need, and undertake full-blast milling of palay stocks to augment rice buffer stocks across the country. (NFA)

CAVITE NEWS

WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

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THIS NEWSPAPER IS EDITED, PUBLISHED AND CIRCULATED IN THE PROVINCE OF CAVITE AT BLK. 3 LOT 75 ISTANA MALAGASANG 1F IMUS CAVITE

Commercial Advertising Rate: P200.00/col.cm
Legal Rate P160.00/col.cm.

PH hospitals to join WHO solidarity trial

MANILA – Some 21 hospitals across the country will be participating in the solidarity trial that will look into the effects of different drugs on coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) patients, a health official said Thursday.

"Noong Lunes, kakapirma pa lang namin ng mga dokumento at naipadala na natin sa World Health Organization [WHO] at tayo ay nakapagbigay na rin ng unang listahan ng protocol, kung ano-anong ospital, ilang pasiyente ang kasama, gaano karami ang mga pangangailangan ng mga gamot (On Monday, we have signed the documents and sent them to the WHO and we've provided the first batch of protocols, which hospitals, number of patients, amount of medicines needed), Health Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire said in a virtual press briefing.

These hospitals include the Philippine General Hospital in Manila City, The Medical City in Pasig City, San Lazaro Hospital in Manila City,

Lung Center of the Philippines in Quezon City, Research Institute for Tropical Medicine in Muntinlupa City, Baguio General Hospital in Benguet, East Avenue Medical Center in Quezon City, Makati Medical Center in Makati City, St. Lukes Medical Center Global, St. Lukes Medical Center Quezon City, University of the East Ramon Magsaysay Medical Center in Quezon City, Cardinal Santos Medical Center in San Juan City, Manila Doctors Hospital in Manila City, Manila Medical Center in Manila City, Chinese General Hospital in Manila City, San Juan de Dios Medical Center in Pasay City, Diliman Doctors Hospital in Quezon City, University of Santo Tomas Hospital in Manila City, Vicente Sotto Medical Center in Cebu City, Southern Philippines Medical Center in Davao City, and World Citi Medical Center in Quezon City.

Vergeire said there are 500 patients who will participate in the solidarity trial.

"Ang protocol na ginawa ay adaptive,

maaaring mag-expand (The protocol is adaptive, it can expand) into having additional patients that can be included in the trial and might also be able to expand the time that were going to do the trial," she added.

Earlier, the WHO said the solidarity trial will compare the safety and effectiveness of four different drugs or drug combinations against Covid-19.

The WHO described it as a "historic trial" which will "dramatically cut the time needed to generate robust evidence about what drugs work".

"We'll give information tomorrow if we have submitted all the documents so we can start with the trial. The drugs will be shipped to the Philippines so this shipment will have a process but we already have a plan while the shipment is not yet here...we'll use the stocks here which will be replaced by the shipment from the WHO," Vergeire said in Filipino. (By Ma. Teresa Montemayor/PNA)

More RxBox ready for distribution: DOST

MANILA -- More units of RxBox biomedical device will be delivered anytime soon to hospitals, to help health workers attend to more patients while also protecting themselves during the fight against coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19), Department of Science

and Technology Secretary Fortunato dela Peña said Friday.

In the "Laging Handa" public briefing, dela Peña said RxBox was actually developed few years ago, with the objective of deploying these to rural areas where there are only a few clinical specialists.

The RxBox is capable of capturing medical signals through built-in medical sensors, storing data in an electronic medical record, and transmitting health information via internet to a clinical specialist in a hospital for expert advice.

Covid-19 will be around a long time: WHO chief

GENEVA – People with stay-at-home orders are understandably frustrated by weeks of confinement, but coronavirus disease (Covid-19) will be around for a long time and one of the greatest dangers is complacency, World Health Organization (WHO) chief warned Wednesday.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus' comments came during a video press conference from WHO headquarters where he noted the coronavirus in Western Europe appears to be stable or declining.

In Africa, Central and South America and Eastern Europe where numbers are low, there are worrying upward trends, said Tedros.

He said most countries are in the early stages of Covid-19 but some that were affected early are now seeing a resurgence in cases.

"Make no mistake: we have a long way to go. This virus will be

with us for a long time," said Tedros. "There's no question that stay-at-home orders and other physical distancing measures have successfully suppressed transmission in many countries. But this virus remains extremely dangerous."

He said early evidence suggests most of the world's population remains susceptible.

"That means epidemics can easily reignite," said Tedros.

Executive Director of the WHO's Health Emergencies Program Mike Ryan said there has to be "two-way communication and there is no confusion in the communication" from authorities in getting their message across.

Tedros responded to calls by some American politicians for his resignation after US President Donald Trump accused him of being China-centric and ordered Washington stop



World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (Anadolu)

funding the WHO.

He indicated he would not resign without directly answering.

"I hope that the freezing of the funding will be reconsidered and that the US will once again support WHO," said Tedros.

"Our responsibility is saving lives, and I will focus on changing this organization for good, but not only that, especially now focusing on the pandemic and saving lives. That's my focus."

More than 2.62 million cases have been reported worldwide as deaths have surpassed the 182,000 mark, according to data compiled by the US-based Johns Hopkins University. Nearly 707,000 patients have recovered. (Anadolu)

patients without getting near them. They would be able to attend to more patients, check their vital signs, since this is very easy to use," he said.

An initial 200 units were delivered to the

Philippine General Hospital, and a hospital in Laguna. He said the DOST already received new batteries, so deployment of more units will happen anytime soon. (By Ma. Cristina Arayata/PNA)

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL POLICE

"This (RxBox) would enable (health workers) to monitor

PH to defend sovereignty amid Covid-19 pandemic

MANILA – The Philippines will continue to defend its sovereign rights at the West Philippine Sea (WPS) even as it grapples with the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) health crisis, Malacañang said on Thursday.

In a virtual presser, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque expressed support for the move of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to file two diplomatic protests against China for violating international law and Philippine sovereignty.

“Yung filing of diplomatic protest, ginagawa po ‘yan basta kinakailangan gawin. Ke Covid, ke wala, tayo po ay mananatili na proporetktahan at itataguyod ang ating national territory at ang ating sovereign rights (The filing of diplomatic protest, we will file them if they need to be filed. With or without Covid, we will continue to protect and defend our national territory and sovereign rights),” Roque said.

On Wednesday afternoon, Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. said the Philippines filed two protests against China for pointing a radar gun at a Philippine Navy ship and declaring a Philippine territory as part of Hainan province near the Philippine-occupied Rizal Reef in the Kalayaan Island Group on Feb. 17.

Roque defended the government’s move amid criticism questioning the timing of the filing of two diplomatic protests amid the pandemic.

“Kung kinakailangan mag protesta gagawin po natin ‘yan (If there is a need to file a protest, we will do that). We need to do the correct thing even if it’s unpopular. Hindi



po popularity contest kung anong dapat gawin ng DFA pagdating po sa usaping national territory (What the DFA does when it comes to national territory should not be a popularity contest),” he said.

He said he has not heard of reports of reclamation in the disputed territories but expressed hope China would fulfill its promise to stop reclamation activities in the disputed waters.

“Wala po akong nakalap na balita na gumagawa po sila ng mga bagong imprastruktura pero uulitin ko po na ang pangako po ng Tsina na tayo po ay umaasa na tutuparin nila, wala pong bagong reclamation na gagawin (I have not heard of reports that they’re constructing new infrastructure but I am hopeful that China will fulfill its promise that there should be no further reclamation activities),” he said.

In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague, Netherlands invalidated China’s nine-dash line, a geographical marker Beijing invoked to assert its extensive claims in the strategic waters.

The tribunal decided in favor of the Philippines’ arbitration case filed against China in 2013 but Beijing rejected it as null and void.

No proof China violated international law

Roque, meanwhile,

shrugged off Senator Risa Hontiveros’ call asking China to shoulder Philippine expenses in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

He said there is “no proof” that China should be liable to pay reparations to injured states over its failure to promptly notify the world of the outbreak as required by the International Health Regulations of the World Health Organization (WHO).

“Bilang isang propesor din ng international law, yung issue po ng state responsibility depende po ‘yan kung mapapatunayan na merong nilabag na obligasyon ang Tsina either be it treaty-based or customary-based na obligasyon sa international law (As a professor of international law, the issue of state responsibility will depend on whether there is proof that China violated obligations either be it treaty-based or customary-based obligations in international law),” he said.

Roque also pointed out that China would most likely reject any possible arbitration to take place concerning the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Ang pinaka importanteng katanungan, sinong tribunal ang magdedesisyun ng ganyan dahil ang world court po, ang International Court of Justice, ay may

PH inflation seen to fall below target in Q3 ’20 to Q1 ’21

MANILA – The country’s inflation rate is seen to decelerate below the government’s 2 percent to 4 percent target starting in the third quarter of 2020 until the first quarter of next year because of the coronavirus virus 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic.

In a briefing held through the Facebook page of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) on Friday, director of the central bank’s Department of Economic Research, Dennis Lapid, said the rate of price increases is projected to be benign this year since the pandemic is expected to slow global economic growth.

“The key factors that will push down inflation for this year and also for next year have to do with a steeper slowdown in key economic activity and also a weaker prospect for domestic economic activity,” Lapid said.

He said the weaker global economic activity is expected to result in a decline in tourism receipts, trade, and remittances “that could be a downward influence to GDP (gross domestic product) growth.”

“The possibility of a longer imposition of

containment measures, like the enhanced community quarantine, could exert a downward pressure on economic activity as well,” he added.

Economic managers, as well as BSP Governor Benjamin Diokno, forecast growth to be zero or even at -1 percent this year.

On Friday, the Palace announced another extension of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) in the National Capital Region (NCR) and select provinces until May 15 to ensure that the rise in the number of Covid-19 infections is controlled.

Lapid said this is among the factors that are in play and have contributed to the uncertainty in the inflation outlook.

“But the assessment is that the overall risks seem to be weighted towards the downside for the inflation forecast,” he added.

Lapid said inflation is seen to slowly rise to within-target levels in the second half of 2021.

He added that Philippine monetary officials “are not completely ruling out any problems or spikes in

inflation this year” due to upside risks coming primarily from food prices.

Lapid traced the upside risks to higher rice import prices due to weather-related factors, the impact of the African swine fever (ASF) on meat products, and the possible production disruption and logistical bottlenecks or temporary supply issue of some food items.

The global pandemic is seen to reduce the growth of inflows from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).

During the same briefing, BSP Assistant Governor Illuminada Sicat said the baseline forecast shows a growth of 3 percent for remittances this year.

“But considering that there are already OFWs being repatriated back, particularly from the sea-based sector, we see that there will be some contraction in remittances by about 0.2 to 0.8 percentage point,” she added.

Sicat said additional contraction is expected since the pandemic continues to bring out more economic issues. (By Joyce Ann L. Rocamora/PNA)

hurisdiksiyon lang ‘yan sa mga bansa na tumanggap ng hurisdiksiyon ng korteng ito at hindi po tinatanggap ng Tsina ang hurisdiksiyon ng ICJ at hindi rin tingin ko papayag ang Tsina sa kahit na anong arbitration (The most important question is which tribunal would make the decision because the International Court of Justice only has jurisdiction in states that accept their jurisdiction and China doesn’t. I think China would not allow any arbitration),” he said.

Asked if the Philippines would hold

China accountable for Covid-19, Roque said it would depend on whether there is enough evidence.

“Depende kung merong napatunayang paglabag sa obligasyon ang Tsina. Sa ngayon po, wala pa akong nalalaman na paglabag ng obligasyon ng Tsina (It would depend on whether there is proof that China violated international obligations. At present, I do not know of any obligation violated by China),” he said.

Hontiveros said China should pay the Philippines’ Covid-19 response as reparation

for the country’s losses due to China’s damage of Philippine reef ecosystems for over six years now, estimated at over PHP200 billion.

She said the money, which is past due, could go to government efforts in fighting the pandemic.

The Chinese Embassy, however, dismissed Hontiveros’ statement as “ridiculously absurd and irresponsible” as China and the Philippines are both working to curb transmission of the highly-infectious disease. (By Azer Parrocha/PNA)

Climate action, cooperation help prevent spread of infectious diseases

QUEZON CITY. -- Climate change has been linked with more severe and frequent storms that take away lives and damage properties. Its impacts include droughts and seasonal changes that affect harvests and food security. This global phenomenon has been warming the seas, thus bleaching corals and affecting fish catch. It also contributes to the rise of sea levels, which threaten to flood coastal communities, and even cities in the future.

While not highlighted as much, climate action also includes taking care of nature and the remaining biological diversity in the planet. This natural solution contributes to the sequestration of the burgeoning carbon in the atmosphere, helping mitigate the rising temperature and greenhouse gas emissions, and buffering vulnerable countries and communities from the impacts of the changing climate.

The continuing exploitation of our biological resources and degradation of our natural ecosystems have exposed us to the full brunt of disasters that are consequences of the climate crisis, which include the spread of infectious diseases. According to the World Health Organization, climate change affects water-borne diseases transmitted through insects and cold-blooded animals, and lengthens the transmission season of vector-borne infectious diseases. Malaria, which is strongly



ASEAN mangrove planting and coastal clean-up in Jakarta, Indonesia. Photo from ACB.

influenced by the climate, kills over 400,000 people every year.

Destroying key ecosystems and the unabated extraction of wildlife resources from their natural habitats have increased the probabilities of livestock and humans coming into contact with pathogens. SARS-CoV-2, the virus behind COVID-19, has been linked with human exposure to wildlife, and climate inaction has aggravated the situation. Changes in rainfall and temperature, for example, can affect food sources of wild animals, which are common hosts to viruses. Changes in the movement and behaviour of animals looking for food may bring wild animals and humans into closer contact.

Indeed, addressing climate change will help safeguard public health, and conserving biodiversity is one of the measures to achieve this. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the importance of decisive public health actions in the short and long term, and climate action is crucial today and in the

years to come.

This 22 April, the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) joins the international community in commemorating Earth Day, with climate action as its theme. The far-reaching issue of climate change, the impact of which will be felt by future generations, is important, now more than ever, as we mark the 50th Earth Day.

The ASEAN region is highly vulnerable to climate change because of its archipelagos, long coastlines, and concentrated populations and economic activities in low-lying areas. It is no stranger to disasters like storms, flooding, landslides, and wildfire. Moreover, climate change-related diseases like dengue and malaria are constant threats.

Just as viruses recognise no borders, making infectious diseases a global concern that require nations to cooperate, so does climate change require cooperation. While one nation's aggressive climate policies and programmes can be undermined by nations that do not have the same level of

commitment, the agreements and coordinated actions by nations working together can multiply the results of climate action.

The ACB welcomes the ongoing initiatives of the ASEAN region in addressing climate change. All 10 ASEAN Member States (AMS) are parties to the 2015 Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The AMS are committed to keeping the global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius. All the AMS have submitted Intended Nationally Determined Contributions and targets under the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Additionally, AMS leaders have been regularly issuing joint statements on climate change at the UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP) since 2007. The ASEAN joint statements highlight the region's common views and concerns towards a global solution to

climate challenges, and a climate-resilient ASEAN through national and regional actions. In COP 25, the AMS affirmed their commitments, including the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and fostering conservation, sustainable forest management, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (REDD+). The AMS are in varying stages of implementing REDD+, with some planning and designing roadmaps, and a number engaging local communities in reforestation and sustainable forest management.

Moreover, outside of REDD+, the AMS are actively conserving and planting mangroves, which are among the best carbon sinks. Mangroves are also nature-based solutions that serve as buffers against storms and flooding.

Restoring and conserving ecosystems like forests also contributes to carbon sequestration. The ASEAN region has so far placed 13 per cent of its terrestrial areas under protection, and is on track to meet the global Aichi Biodiversity target on increasing coverage of terrestrial and marine areas under protection. ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHPs), a regional network of protected areas that conserve ASEAN's rich, unique, and endangered biodiversity, likewise contributes to mitigating climate change.

To scale up their initiatives, the AMS work with other nations and partners in several climate change-related programmes. For example, the AMS

collaborated with the ACB and other partners like the EU, KfW, and other organisations in the conduct of the Sixth ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHP) Conference. The Conference enhanced capacities of AHP managers and facilitated sharing of best practices in AHP management, among them on climate change mitigation and adaptation, with emphasis on nature-based solutions. The AMS and India, together with the ACB, also worked together to share experiences and opportunities in integrating urban biodiversity conservation in cities. Studies show that biodiversity in cities helps reduce heat, a common issue with climate change, and brings back native species in their natural habitats.

AMS leaders and experts have come together in other climate-related events to discuss actions and solutions and enhance capacities in climate response, like the ASEAN Climate Change Partnership Conference, and the ASEAN Strategic Policy Dialogue on Disaster Management in 2019.

These are but some of ASEAN's climate initiatives. We need all these and more to address our climate concerns, and consequently, mitigate the spread of climate-related infectious diseases. As we work as a cohesive and a responsive ASEAN to address the COVID-19 pandemic, this Earth Day and beyond, let us continue to mitigate and adapt to climate change and its impacts in solidarity, for our health and our future. (ACB)