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Lawmakers appeal to relax travel restriction on senior citizens

MANILA – Several lawmakers at the House of Representatives on Wednesday appealed to the national government to reconsider barring senior citizens from leaving their homes under the enhanced community quarantine

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Malacañang bares new guidelines for areas under GCQ

MANILA – Malacañang on Thursday released a copy of the revised guidelines for areas that will be placed under general community quarantine (GCQ) from May 1 to 15.

The new set of guidelines for areas under GCQ was approved by the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases on Wednesday, Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque said.

In a virtual presser aired on state-run PTV-4, Roque said Metro Manila; Central Luzon, except Aurora; Calabarzon; Pangasinan; Benguet; Iloilo province; Iloilo City; Bacolod City; Cebu province; Cebu

City; and Davao City are under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) until May 15.

GCQ will be imposed in other places in the country that are not included in the list of areas under ECQ.

Roque said there must be minimum public health standards “at all times” in areas where GCQ would be enforced.

“Ibig sabihin, social distancing, pagsusuot ng face mask, yung mandatory check of temperature, at paggamit po ng alcohol at iba pang sanitizers (Meaning, social distancing, use of face mask, mandatory check of temperature, and use of alcohol and other sanitizers [must be observed]),” he said.

Limited public movements

Roque said public movements are still limited to accessing essential goods and services and for work in the permitted industries during the implementation of GCQ.

Thus, movement for leisure purposes are not allowed, he stressed.

“Yung mga biyaha para sa leisure, mga bakasyon, hindi pa rin po iyan pinapayagan (Travel for leisure activities or vacation is still prohibited),” Roque said.

Roque said people aged 21 and below or 60 and above; people with immunodeficiency, comorbidities, or other health risks; and pregnant women who are in areas under GCQ

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No classes for grade schoolers in June: Palace

MANILA – Classes for grade school students will not begin in June due to the prevailing coronavirus disease (Covid-19) health crisis in the country, Malacañang said on Wednesday.

Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque made this clarification amid the intention of some private schools to start classes in June by implementing a “multi-modal approach” which allows combination of both face-to-face and online classes.

Roque reiterated that only Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) may resume operations on a skeletal



workforce in areas not under the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) on May 4.

“I can announce that there will be no classes this June for grade school, but for higher education institutes, they can have skeletal forces but only to finish the academic year and only to consider alternative learning,” Roque said in a television interview.

The Inter-Agency

Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) earlier recommended moving the next school opening to September, subject to the approval of the Department of Education (DepEd).

DepEd, which is eyeing the opening of classes in late August, is set to present its recommendations to the IATF-EID in May.

“I don’t think there’s

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must observe strict home quarantine, except “when indispensable under the circumstances for obtaining essential goods and services or for work in permitted industries and offices.”

Work gatherings, religious activities allowed

“Yung mga essential work gatherings and religious activities, pupwede na pong magpatuloy (Essential work gatherings and religious activities may proceed),” he said.

Roque said essential work gatherings and religious activities may continue as long as strict social distancing of at least two meters is observed.

He added that attendees are required to wear face mask, face shield, or other facial protective equipment during the event.

Public transportation

Roque said road, rail, maritime, and aviation sectors of public transportation can operate at “a reduced capacity” during the implementation of GCQ.

He said the operations of mass public transport must be in accordance with guidelines issued by the Department of Transportation.

“In all public transports, a strict one-meter distance between passengers shall be observed and appropriate engineering controls [shall be] in place,” Roque said.

Work resumption

Once GCQ is implemented on May 1, Roque said work in government offices may be at “full operational capacity,” Roque said.

“Balik trabaho na po ang mga government offices, local and national. Kinakailangan, merong social distancing (Work in government offices -- local and national -- will resume. Social distancing must be observed). At saka kung pupwede po, magkaroon ng (There should also be) alternative work arrangements, as agencies may deem proper,” he said.

Roque noted that limited operations in malls and shopping centers would still be allowed.

He, however, stressed that leisure establishments would remain closed.

Roque said the resumption of essential public and private construction projects would be allowed, in accordance with guidelines issued by the Department of Public Works and Highways

He added that amusement, gaming and fitness establishments may not operate during ECQ period.

He likewise said hotels or similar firms cannot operate, except for those that are outside Luzon; have existing long-term bookings; and serve as basic lodging to repatriated Filipinos, healthcare workers, and other front-liners.

Physical classes still suspended

Roque said physical classes are still suspended in areas that are placed under GCQ.

Classes have been suspended as early as March to stop the further spread of

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regulations.

House senior citizens committee chair and Senior Citizens Party-list Rep. Francisco Datol Jr. Said he sees no need to “completely disallow” senior citizens from going out of their homes just because of their age, as not everyone would have poor health or ailments.

“Many of our senior citizens are still strong and gainfully employed or are active in business... Senior citizens also need to go outside to move around, as long as they are practicing social distancing,” Datol said.

“Especially those who live alone, we should not isolate them in their homes, as such may be detrimental to their health. They should be allowed to do their errands and work if they are still able,” he added.

House labor and employment committee chair and 1-PACMAN Party-list Rep. Enrico Pineda noted that many of the top executives of industry and officials of the national government, its agencies, and local government units are senior citizens, even President Rodrigo Duterte.

“I’m not saying that everyone should be allowed out because many seniors do have health problems — but there should be exemptions, maybe allow those below 70 years old without any high-risk health conditions,” Pineda said.

Cagayan de Oro City Rep. Rufus Rodriguez said he received several complaints from senior citizens with a prevailing

coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) in the country.

Roque said higher education institutions (HEIs) may hold classes through flexible learning arrangements to finish the academic year 2019 to 2020.

He added that HEIs may operate at a limited capacity to receive

sentiment that if such rule is applied to them, it should also apply to other citizens, whether they are in government or the private sector.

“I can understand and even share their sentiments. Like many of us public officials who are 60 years old and above, they are physically fit to work and move around. Some have retired from the government or the private sector, and a big number of them now run their own small businesses while some are captains of industry,” he said.

Rodriguez said some of the complainants are invoking their freedom or liberty to travel and the equal protection clause of the Constitution in appealing that they are allowed to go out of their homes.

“They are asking the IATF (Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases) to trust them with their own safety. They will always wash their hands, wear face masks when going out and always observe social distancing,” he added.

Kabayan Rep. Ron Salo said the IATF should reconsider this restriction to ensure that the rights of senior citizens are not “unduly curtailed, but still ensuring the protection of their health and safety.”

“Protecting them from Covid-19 does not justify complete disregard of their civil liberties as well as their right for gainful employment and practice of their profession. No less than our President,

students’ requirements, as well as to prepare credentials subject to the guidelines that may be issued by the Commission on Higher Education.

As of Thursday, the Philippines has 8,488 confirmed Covid-19 infections, with 568 deaths and 1,043 recoveries. (PNA)

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much of a difference between the recommendation of the IATF and the law because we’re only talking of one week. I think that can be threshed out,” he said.

Although continuity of learning is important, Roque said “the primary consideration now is the health of the nation.”

Citing a study by the University of the Philippines, Roque said the youth “have the most contact with vulnerable populations including the elderly.”

“As far as epidemiology is concerned, the worst ‘carriers’ are actually young people,” he said.

Last April 23, President Rodrigo Duterte approved the

most members of the Supreme Court and Cabinet officials, as well as Chairpersons of most companies, belong to this category,” Salo said.

“They should be allowed to enjoy their freedom, subject to strict adherence to health protocols such as wearing of masks, hand sanitation, social distancing, and the like whenever they are outside their homes,” he added. (PNA)

I A T F - E I D ’ s recommendation to place Metro Manila, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Pangasinan, Benguet, Albay, Catanduanes, Davao del Norte, Davao City, Oriental Mindoro, Occidental Mindoro, Antique, Iloilo, Cebu, and Cebu City under ECQ until May 15 since these are considered as high-risk areas.

The EITF-EID, however, recommended to revise the list of areas to be placed under ECQ, Roque announced on Tuesday.

The revised list includes Metro Manila; Central Luzon, except Aurora; Calabarzon; Pangasinan; Benguet; Baguio City; Iloilo; Cebu; Cebu City; and Davao City.

Roque said other areas will be placed under a less-stringent general community quarantine from May 1 to 15.

GCQ in low-risk areas may be lifted after May 15, in case there is no deterioration in their risk level.

The Philippines currently has 7, 958 confirmed cases of Covid-19, 530 deaths, and 975 recoveries. (PNA)

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ILO raises global job loss forecast to 305M amid virus

GENEVA – The International Labor Organization (ILO) on Wednesday announced an increase in estimated full-time job losses to 10.5 percent of the world's workforce to 305 million since the beginning of 2020.

The drop was due to "the prolongation and extension of lockdown measures" imposed due to the novel coronavirus outbreak, the ILO told reporters in a virtual press conference in Geneva.

The ILO also noted that the sharp decline in working hours globally due to Covid-19 meant that 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy -- nearly half the global workforce -- were in immediate danger of losing their livelihoods.

"As the pandemic and the jobs crisis evolve, the need to protect the most vulnerable becomes even more urgent," said ILO-Director General Guy Ryder. "For millions of workers, no income means no food, no security and no future. Millions of businesses around the world are barely breathing."

The organization called for urgent, targeted and flexible measures to support workers and businesses, particularly smaller enterprises, those in the informal economy and others who were vulnerable.

The organization



said that compared to pre-Covid-19 crisis levels in the fourth quarter of 2019, a 10.5 percent deterioration was now expected to have occurred -- the equivalent of 305 million full-time jobs assuming a 48-hour working week.

The previous estimate had been a 6.7 percent drop, which translates to 195 million full-time employees.

Ryder said that on top of losing their jobs, informal workers also had no savings or access to credit.

"These are the real faces of the world of work. If we don't help them now, they will simply perish," said Ryder.

Without alternative income sources, such workers and their families will have no means to survive, he added.

Ryder noted that the first month of the crisis was estimated to have seen a drop of 60 percent in the income of informal workers globally.

That drop translates into a decline of 81 percent in Africa and the Americas, 21.6 percent in Asia and the

Pacific and 70 percent in Europe and Central Asia.

Boeing to cut 10% of jobs

In Washington, Boeing said it will reduce its workforce by about 10 percent amid economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

CEO Dave Calhoun said new reductions in production rates and the continued effect of Covid-19 on business is forcing the move.

"We have begun taking action to lower our number of employees by roughly 10 percent through a combination of voluntary layoffs, natural turnover and involuntary layoffs as necessary," Calhoun said in a video message to employees, according to The Hill website.

Boeing, the nation's largest aerospace company, globally employs about 160,000 workers, according to estimates.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, 26 million Americans have lost jobs and the layoffs by Boeing will put

British Airways to cut 12K jobs amid pandemic

LONDON – British Airways (BA) announced on Tuesday that it will cut 12,000 jobs as the coronavirus outbreak has grounded flights around the world.

International Airlines Group (IAG), the airline's parent company, said it will make over a quarter of BA's workers redundant as the majority of its fleet remains grounded due to the global pandemic. BA employs 45,000 people.

IAG's statement said: "In light of the impact of Covid-19 on current operations and the expectation that the recovery of passenger demand to 2019 levels will take several years, British Airways is formally notifying its trade unions about a proposed restructuring and redundancy program."

The program will likely "affect most of British Airways' employees and may result in the redundancy of up to 12,000 of them," it added.

IAG suffered operating losses of \$535 million (nearly USD580 million), or 13 percent, in the first

quarter of the year, caused mainly by BA's

pressure on the economy. As well, the US economy shrank 4.8 percent in first quarter from January through March, the biggest decline since the Great Recession.

"Please know that



quarter of the year, caused mainly by BA's

battering by the coronavirus. IAG said it expects the situation to worsen in the second quarter.

BA chief executive Alex Cruz wrote to employees: "In the last few weeks, the outlook for the aviation industry has worsened further and we must take action now."

He added: "There is no Government bailout standing by for BA and we cannot expect the taxpayer to offset salaries indefinitely.

"We do not know when countries will reopen their borders or when the lockdowns will lift, and so we have to reimagine and reshape our airline and create a new future for our people, our customers and the destinations we serve."

BA employs around 4,500 pilots and

we will do everything we can to minimize that impact, and as we take these steps, we will be as fair and transparent as possible -- and absolutely honest and respectful," said Calhoun.

As of Wednesday,

16,000 cabin crew.

Brian Sutton, general secretary of the British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA), said BA pilots and staff are "devastated" by the news.

"This has come as a bolt out of the blue from an airline that said it was wealthy enough to weather the Covid storm and declined any Government support."

The union vowed to fight "to save every single" job lost.

After first appearing in Wuhan, China last December, the coronavirus disease 2019 has spread to at least 185 countries and regions.

Data compiled by the US's Johns Hopkins University shows worldwide infections surpassing 3.09 million with more than 215,000 deaths. Some 918,000 have recovered. (Anadolu)

more than 1 million people have been infected and nearly 60,000 have died from Covid-19 in the US, according to Johns Hopkins University in the state of Maryland. (Anadolu)

DOH reports 254 new Covid-19 cases, 48 new recoveries

MANILA – The Department of Health (DOH) on Wednesday reported 254 new persons infected with coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19), bringing the total number of confirmed cases in the country to 8,212.

At a Covid-19 virtual presser, DOH Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire also reported 48 new recoveries and 28 new deaths.

The total number of recovered cases nationwide is now 1,023 while the death toll has climbed to 558.

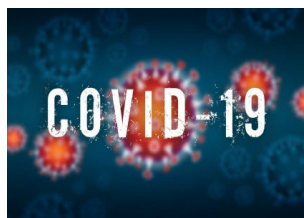
Vergeire reported that latest data show 1,552 health care workers are infected with the disease.

Of the total number, 571 are nurses, 548 are physicians or doctors, 97 are nursing assistants, 60 are medical technologists, 30 are radiologic technologists, 18 are respiratory therapists, 17 are midwives, 11 pharmacists and 200 are other health care workers such as dentists, barangay health care workers and administrative aids.

"Mula dito, 32 ang kumpiradong pumanaw sa Covid-19 kabilang dito ang 24 na physicians at pitong nurse (From this, 32 were confirmed to have died from Covid-19, including 24 physicians and 7 nurses)," Vergeire said.

About 232 healthcare workers have recovered.

As of April 28, the



DOH has delivered personal protective equipment (PPE) -- 287,640 coveralls, 1,700,390 face masks, 345,700 gloves, 168,175 gowns, 149,775 KN95 masks, 83,680 N95 masks, 41,292 face shields, 371,800 head caps, 2,392 thermal scanners, 157,503 goggles, 30 non-invasive ventilators and two sanitation tents -- to hospitals and health care facilities nationwide.

Vergeire said the Covid-19 testing laboratories nationwide have recorded 89,021 total unique individual tests.

"At 78,730 o 88.44 percent dito ay nagtala ng negative results, samantalang 10,139 o 11.39 percent naman ang nagtala ng positibong results. Muli, lilinawin lang po namin na ang total positive tests ay maaaring mas mataas sa total confirmed cases dahil ito ay dumadaan pa rin sa case validation and processing (about 78,730 o 88.44 percent here yielded negative results, while 10,139 or 11.39 percent yielded positive results. We just want to clarify that the total positive tests are higher than the total confirmed cases because they still go through case validation and processing)," Vergeire said. (PNA)

Deadlines for tax amnesty, ITR extended anew

MANILA – The Department of Finance (DOF) has issued Revenue Regulations (RR) No. 11-2020 further extending to June or July the deadlines on the filing or submission of necessary documents and/or payment of taxes required under the Tax Code of 1997, as amended.

Such deadlines were extended following President Rodrigo Duterte's extension of the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) period in Metro Manila and other major provinces until May 15.

RR No. 10-2020 amended RR No. 7-2020 on the extension of deadlines for the filing of various tax returns as provided for by Republic Act 11469, or the Bayanihan to Heal As One Act.

The RR applies throughout the Philippines and shall generally apply during the "quarantine" period, whether community quarantine, enhanced community quarantine (ECQ), modified community quarantine or general community quarantine (GCQ).

The extended deadlines include the filing and payment of annual income tax returns (ITRs) for individuals and corporations -- June 14; submission of required hard copies of audited financial statements and other attachments to the annual ITRs -- June 30; quarterly ITRs for individuals and corporations for the quarter ending March - June 14 and June 29, respectively; monthly

VAT returns for March and April -- June 4 and June 19, respectively; quarterly VAT returns for the quarter ending March -- June 9; and quarterly percentage tax return for the quarter ending March - June 9.

Tax returns and payments for one-time transactions (ONETT) whose deadlines fall within the quarantine period are extended for 30 days from the date of the lifting of the quarantine.

Likewise, the RR provides that the deadline for the filing of position papers, protest letters and other correspondences with due dates falling during the quarantine period shall be 30 days from the lifting of the quarantine.

The running of the statute of limitations shall also be suspended during the said period.

Also, taxpayers wishing to avail of the Tax Amnesty on Delinquencies (TAD) under RA 11213 and implemented by RR 4-2019, as amended, can do so until June 22, 2020. The deadline was previously set to June 8.

This extension intends to give taxpayers ample time to settle their tax delinquencies while allowing the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to increase its collection from the tax amnesty program.

All other reportorial requirements not specifically mentioned in the RR whose date of submission falls within the quarantine period from March 16, 2020 has an extended

Moody's reduces growth forecasts for G20 economies

ANKARA – Moody's on Tuesday projected all G20 economies will contract by 4 percent in 2020 amid coronavirus, deeper than its previous forecast as restrictions create high economic cost.

The global rating agency expect G20 economies to pick up recovery next year and grow 4.8 percent.

The agency's previous forecast unveiled last month was minus 0.5 percent for 2020 and 3.5 percent for 2021.

Pointing to the rapid accumulation of economic costs of the coronavirus crisis amid the near shutdown of the global economy, Moody's foresaw G20 advanced economies as a group to shrink by 5.8 percent this year.

G20 advanced economies are projected to grow 4.2 percent next year, below pre-coronavirus levels.

"However, it will likely take around two years for the global economy to reach pre-coronavirus real GDP levels," it added.

The length of time and extent that countries lift restrictive measures and reopen their

economies will determine the pace of the recovery, the report underlined.

The US economy will contract by 5.7 percent in 2020, followed by a rebound of 4.2 percent growth next year, the agency noted.

The eurozone is expected to shrink by 6.5 percent this year and expand by 4.7 percent in 2021.

Moody's forecast Chinese economy to grow 1 percent in 2020, followed by 7.1 percent growth in 2021, partially reflecting a revival in demand from its trading partners.

Turkish economy is foreseen to shrink by 5 percent this year and gain momentum next year, growing 3.5 percent.

Noting that the global integration within the world economy will likely shift driven by coronavirus, Moody's said: "For example, the coronavirus shock has created supply chain disruptions and could also fundamentally change consumption patterns, which could lead to a large-scale reorganization of economies over time." (Anadolu)

deadline of 30 days from the date of the lifting of the quarantine.

In case of any further quarantine extension, the extended deadlines shall be further extended for 15 calendar days.

Finally, the DOF and the BIR reminded the taxpaying public that they may still opt to file and pay their taxes before the extended deadline.

Taxpayers who file their tax returns within the original deadline or before the extended

deadline may still amend their tax returns at any time on or before the extended due date.

If the amendment results in additional tax payments, such will not be subject to surcharge, interest and compromise penalties.

If the amendment results in an overpayment of taxes paid, the taxpayer may opt to either file for a refund or carry over the overpaid tax as credit against the tax due for the succeeding periods' tax returns. (PR)

South Korea records no new local coronavirus cases

ANKARA – South Korea's fight against the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) seems to have borne fruit as the country recorded no new local cases on Thursday.

It is first time in last 72 days that no local case of Covid-19 was found in the country, according to South Korea President Moon Jae-in.

Moon applauded the people for helping curb the spread of the virus that has claimed 247 lives in the country.

"Zero locally confirmed Covid-19 patients [for the first time] in 72 days. Zero infections in the 14 days since the general elections. This is the power of the Republic of Korea and the South Korean people," Moon said in a statement posted on his twitter handle.

South Korea held general elections on April 15 in which Moon-led ruling party registered a landslide victory.

According to Korea



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the country found four more coronavirus cases, all of whom are imported, taking the tally to 10,765.

The first case of the virus in the country was detected on Jan. 20. The cases peaked at the end of February.

South Korea has imposed strict social distancing measures to stem the spread of the virus in the country. It barred people from gathering and also asked religious places to

maintain lowest attendance.

Almost 80 percent of the infections were related to clusters in the country, according to Yonhap.

Authorities also closed educational institutions and shifted to online classes.

As South Korea is celebrating Buddha's birthday on Thursday, May Day on Friday and Children's Day on coming Tuesday, health officials urged people to continue following anti-Covid-19 measures. (Anadolu)

PH to loan Philippine Eagle pair to Singapore

MANILA – Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Roy Cimatu said the country will provide the government of Singapore a pair of Philippine Eagles (scientific name "Pithecophaga jefferyi").

Said move aims to ensure there will still be Philippine Eagles left for breeding there in case an outbreak of disease either wipes out or significantly affects this species' population in the country.

"We'll do that to preserve the Philippine Eagle which is very near extinction already," he said Wednesday (April 24) in Quezon City at DENR's 2019 celebration of the annual Earth Day, the environmental protection-advocating global event this month.

Since the Philippine Eagle is a top predator, DENR said this species is responsible for regulating population of smaller animals that may pose danger to humans and crops.

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) already warned about the Philippine Eagle's decreasing population.

Available IUCN data show there are some 180 to 500 mature Philippine Eagles left.

Diseases, hunting, habitat destruction and climate change are among threats to such species, noted IUCN.

DENR Undersecretary Jonas Leones said the Philippines-Singapore bid to conserve the Philippine Eagle will commence this year.

"The pair of eagles will be on loan to Singapore," he said on the celebration's side.

He noted Singapore's government has experts who can look after the eagles.

DENR will provide, as soon as possible, more details about the matter.

To better manage and conserve the Philippine Eagle, Cimatu last year issued DENR Memorandum Circular 2018-04 covering the protocol for loan of this species.

Loaning a pair of Philippine Eagles to Singapore is in line with "Protect our species," the 2019 Earth Day theme.

This aims to help raise awareness about accelerating extinction

rate of species worldwide, intensify species conservation efforts and promote more species-protecting individual action like stopping use of pesticides.

Proclamation 615, series of 1995, declared the Philippine Eagle as the country's national bird, noting the species' uniqueness, strength, power and love for freedom "exemplifies the Filipino people."

"The Philippine Eagle offers immense ecological, aesthetic, educational, historical, recreational and scientific value to the Philippines and the Filipino people," Proclamation 615 also said.

Earlier, DENR said its collaboration with various organizations and research institutions led to discovery of new individual Philippine Eagles as well as breeding pairs, nests and distribution records of this species.

DENR added the Philippine Eagle Foundation-led program for breeding Philippine Eagles produced 28 captive-bred eagles between 1992 and 2016 at Davao-based Philippine Eagle Center. (PNA)

PH structures should be climate smart, disaster resilient

MANILA – All structures in the country must be able to withstand natural calamities such as strong typhoons and earthquakes.

"Based on one of the priority areas of the National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP), an infrastructure has to be climate smart and disaster resilient in order to save lives. For instance, a hotel or school can stand more than 300 kph tropical cyclone," said Glenn Banaguas, organizer of the Climate Smart and Disaster Resilient ASEAN conference.

According to Dr. Francis Aldrine Uy, the Dean of Civil, Environmental and Geological Engineering at the Mapua University, there is a need to install systems such as the Universal Structural Health Evaluation and Recording System

(USHER).

The conference, keynoted by US Ambassador Sung Kim at the Bayleaf Hotel, focused its discussion on earthquakes late Monday afternoon, when a huge tremor was felt by the participants.

The magnitude 6.1 earthquake, which had its epicenter in Zambales, caused a major infrastructure - such as the Clark International Airport, to be closed, at least temporarily, due to the damage caused by the quake. There were also buildings that were seen swaying, or some that have been severely damaged after the quake.

This puts into question the safety of all high-rise and mid-rise buildings, not only in Metro Manila, but also in other major cities in the country, if these buildings can withstand an even

higher magnitude, or a stronger earthquake.

Last year, hearings were held at the Senate, under the Committee on Trade, Commerce, and Entrepreneurship, under Senator Koko Pimentel, which discussed the safety of Quench Tempered (QT) or Thermomechanically Treated (TMT) rebars, which involves the rapid cooling of plain low carbon steel, by means of using a fine water spray.

QT rebars are said to have a fatal flaw since only the outer skin of the rebar meets the minimum grade, and thus becomes vulnerable, in the event of a major calamity, such as an earthquake.

A number of studies abroad has cited the disadvantages of using quenched steel for high-rise buildings. QT steel are also said to be manufactured and sold

by big steel mills.

For example, a study published in the American Journal of Engineering and Applied Sciences in 2015, says, "Numerous studies conducted after the 7.7 magnitude 921 earthquake in Taiwan in 1999, have reported that because heat-treated steel features relatively unstable mechanics properties, using such steel in welding, bar splicing, or as thread-cutting components in structures may result in the lack of resistance to seismic activity."

A 2016 study in

Japan highlights the importance of improving the standards of steel bars. It concludes, "As for buildings, accompanied by the trend in high rise structures, the strength of steel materials was enhanced, and steel materials excellent in seismic resistance were developed, in which the upper limit of yield ratio and the validation limit of yield strength are specified.

Pampanga Governor Lilia Pineda, when interviewed on ANC, questioned the manner of the construction of the four-story Chuzon

Supermarket, which collapsed due to the earthquake.

"Titingnan namin yun specifications niya sa materyales niya. Kung ito ba ay pumasa sa standards, sa bakal niya, sa timpla ng semento niya, at ano yun lalim ng poste niya sa paggawa ng (We will look at its specifications and the materials used to see if these passed standards. The metal frames, the mixture of cement and how deep was the post situated for it to be able to have a) 4th floor," Pineda said. (PR)

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DOLE realigns P1.5-B from 2020 budget to aid more workers

MANILA – The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) on Wednesday said it has realigned PHP1.5 billion from its budget this year to provide more funds for the one-time assistance of PHP5,000 to an additional 300,000 workers already processed under its Covid-19 Adjustment Measures Program (CAMP).

“With internally sourced funds, DOLE will now be able to assist a total of about 650,000 workers with PHP3.24 billion in total CAMP assistance. This, however, will leave around 1,000,000 workers still unserved under the special amelioration program. The requests for assistance submitted by their employers had already been processed,” Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III said in a statement.

The realignment was implemented to be able to assist more formal sector workers displaced by the Covid-19 pandemic, which is over 2.3 million.

As of April 28, some 87,301 establishments reported that over 1.6 million of their workers were affected by temporary closures while 797,729 were on alternative work arrangements due

to the enhanced community quarantine.

As for cash assistance to overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), the DOLE said it has given the PHP10,000 cash assistance to more than 70,000 beneficiaries or close to 50 percent of targeted Filipinos of the PHP1.5-billion Abot Kamay ang Pagtulong (AKAP) assistance fund.

The Philippine Overseas Labor Offices and local offices of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration reported that more than 297,000 OFWs are seeking cash assistance.

Meanwhile, the DOLE is set to start next month its regular T u l o n g Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/ Displaced Workers (TUPAD) program in areas that will be under a general community quarantine.

The program will use a separate PHP1 billion worth of realigned regular funds of the labor department.

The DOLE already used up over PHP1 billion to fund the emergency TUPAD Barangay Ko Bahay Ko (BKBK) to assist 275,000 informal sector workers hard hit by the pandemic.

The program was recently cited by the United Nations Food

Agriculture Organization having been adopted specifically for informal sector workers and adopted by only 11 countries to mitigate the impact of the global crisis.

Aside from the Philippines, other countries cited for such programs are Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Egypt, Australia, Thailand, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. (PNA)

DSWD starts payout for 'social pension' beneficiaries

MANILA – The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) on Wednesday said it has started the first-semester payout of its Social Pension (SocPen) program to augment the needs of indigent senior citizens during the enhanced community quarantine.

In a press release, DSWD said as of April 29, a total of 227,876 indigent senior citizens from Cagayan Valley, Central Luzon, Mimaropa, Bicol, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, Northern Mindanao, Davao, Cordillera Administrative Region, and Caraga have already received their pension for the first semester amounting to PHP3,000 each at PHP500 per month

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 with more than 920,000 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)

from January to June, equivalent to more than PHP674 million.

Meanwhile, other DSWD field offices (FOs) are now finalizing the fund transfer process with concerned local government units (LGUs) for the immediate release of the stipend of the remaining beneficiaries.

To ensure the efficient payout, DSWD FOs will provide the official list of social pensioners to LGUs and forge a memorandum of agreement (MOA) for the distribution of the grant specifically during the community quarantine.

Once the MOA is signed, DSWD, through its FOs, will transfer the fund to

concerned LGUs for payout to beneficiaries.

Some DSWD FOs, it said, are also doing cash payouts directly to the senior citizen-beneficiaries through their special disbursing officers (SDO).

However, DSWD said the distribution schedules may depend due to the community quarantine and other circumstances in the area.

SocPen is a program under Republic Act No. 9994 or the “Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010” which provides monthly stipend amounting to PHP500 to indigent senior citizens to augment their daily subsistence and other medical needs.

It is distributed on a semestral basis at

PHP3,000 per semester or PHP500 per month for six months.

The law specifies that seniors qualified to receive social pension are those who are frail, sickly or with disability; without any pension from other government agencies; and without a permanent source of income or source of financial assistance/compensation to support their basic needs.

DSWD assured the public that it will adhere to existing safety and health protocols in determining the best payout method to lessen the exposure of its beneficiaries and personnel to the coronavirus disease. (PR)