

Año lauds ‘obstruction-free’ Marikina City

**MANILA** -- Marikina City Mayor Marcelino Teodoro on Wednesday said the city has fully complied with the 60-day deadline imposed by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) to clear roads and sidewalks of obstructions in Metro Manila.

“We have 100 percent complied with the 60-day deadline given by DILG. Based on the comprehensive manual report, there are 'non-applicable' remarks on us. It's because we have cleared many sidewalks immediately,” Mayor Marcelino Teodoro told reporters on Wednesday.

Quoting DILG Secretary Eduardo Año, Teodoro said the department might adopt Marikina’s manual report as best practice.

“We asked if we still have to submit a report, since Marikina has no obstruction (already). Sec. Año said that yes, just for compliance. He said they want to know how we did it, and so that DILG can use our manual report as benchmark for other cities in Metro Manila,” the mayor added.

According to Teodoro, they will furnish a copy of their report to the Metro Manila Council (MMC) for the reference of Metro mayors.

On July 29, Año, through Memorandum Circular 2019-121, gave the mayors 60 days “to exercise their powers essential to reclaim public roads which are being used for private ends, and in the process rid them of illegal structures and constructions.”

The order is in compliance with the directive of President Rodrigo Duterte for the department to ensure that LGUs will rid public roads of obstructions to ease traffic congestions.

In Metro Manila, the Marikina mayor said 30 percent of roads and sidewalks are clogged because of various types of obstructions.

He believes that the 60 days is enough for Metro mayors to rid their cities of obstructions.

Marikina City has a total of 376 kilometers of sidewalks, he said.

Teodoro said the real challenge for Metro mayors is how to sustain the cleanliness of their respective cities after conducting clearing operations.

“The most challenging part is sustaining the sidewalks and roads, making sure that they are always clean and walkable,” the mayor said.

“Us in Marikina, we have been educating our people way back when I was still a councilor. It was not an easy task but it is doable. We make our residents understand that the roads and sidewalks should always be free from obstructions as it will equate to order and smooth flow of vehicles in the city,” he stressed, adding that sidewalks are part of public domain.

Other mayors in Metro Manila then told Teodoro that they want to go to Marikina to observe how his city was able to keep its sidewalks and roads clear of obstructions.

Año earlier lauded Marikina City for being obstruction-free, and having walkable sidewalks. (PNA)

Napoles asks Sandigan to drop plunder raps, cites precedent cases

**MANILA** -- The defense counsels of alleged “pork barrel queen”, Janet Lim Napoles, urged the Sandiganbayan on Wednesday to order the dismissal of the plunder case filed against her by Sen. Jose "Jinggoy" Estrada following the acquittal of Sen Ramon “Bong” Revilla in a similar plunder complaint in connection with the multi-million pork barrel scam.

Napoles' counsels, led by lawyer Rony Garay, said the absence of a central public official as main plunderer merits the dismissal of a case.

Like Estrada, Revilla was a central figure in the indictment.

In its 31-page motion, Napoles' defense counsels pointed out that in order to sustain a conviction for plunder, an essential element is that there must be a single public officer identified or identifiable as the main plunderer.

“(I)t is respectfully prayed that the assailed Resolution dated June 13, 2019, be reconsidered and set aside, and a new one be issued granting the demurrer to evidence of accused Napoles and dismissing the above-entitled case against her,” Napoles said in her motion.

“All the evidence of the prosecution, still fail to identify the main plunderer, an essential element of the crime of plunder,” Napoles' lawyers said, adding that “the courts should persistently insist that accusation is not synonymous with guilt; hence, every circumstance favoring innocence should be fully taken into account,” Napoles argued in her pleading.

Citing precedent cases involving President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Napoles said that while there can be several plunderers, a conviction requires that

there is only one ‘main plunderer’ for whose benefit the amassing, accumulation and acquisition of ill-gotten wealth is made.

Upon Arroyo's acquittal in the plunder case for alleged irregularities in the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO), the anti-graft court's First Division had similarly dismissed the charges against the officials.

Citing precedents, Napoles' counsels argued that while “[i]t is possible for the main plunderer to exist alone without any co-conspirator as stated in the law on Plunder itself, it is never possible for a co-conspirator for Plunder to exist without a main plunderer xxx [a] private person like accused Napoles cannot be indicted nor convicted of the crime of plunder, if the Information failed to name the main plunderer or worse, when the prosecution fails to convict the alleged main plunderer.” (PNA)

Completed railway assets to ease traffic by 25%: DOTr

**MANILA** -- A Department of Transportation (DOTr) official said Wednesday they expect Metro Manila traffic to ease from 6 percent to 7 percent to 20 percent to 25 percent once all its railway assets are finished.

“Our estimate for the current pipeline when they (railways) become operational is we increase our rail capture from 6 (percent) to 7 percent up to 20 (percent) to 25 percent,” DOTr Undersecretary for Railways Timothy John Batan said in a Palace briefing.

Philippine National Railways (PNR) General Manager Jun Magno said the strategy is to create several corridors by means of railway assets to reduce traffic.

“The strategy overall in rail is actually not to push everything through Edsa but actually through several corridors: One, is the subway; one, is NSCR (North-South Commuter Railway), and then MRT-3 (Metro Rail Transit),” Magno said.

“But again, the earliest that would materialize is NSCR ahead of the subway,” he added.

The officials estimated that one million passengers use the country's four railway systems -- the PNR, Light Rail Transit (LRT-1, and -2), and the Metro Rail Transit (MRT-3).

Batan said on weekdays, there are about 20 million trips in Metro Manila.

“Out of that 20 million trips, we have around 14 million trips by public transport. And out of that 14 million trips, we are getting one million trips in our railway system or around 6 (percent) to 7 percent of our daily public transport commuters,” Batan said.

reconstruct...thing like that,” she added.

Citing a report from the Comelec's Finance Department, the poll body official said the COA report is no longer accurate.

“There have been liquidations already after that report was done by COA. So we are happy that our Finance Department has been working really hard because that used to be more than PHP5 billion and it went down to PHP1.6 billion because we are required to liquidate,” Guanzon added.

On Monday, the COA has required the poll body to immediately liquidate its cash advances amounting to over PHP1.6 billion.

The figure includes expenses in the 2018 Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan elections totaling to PHP1.202 billion. (PNA)

Comelec to settle P1.6-B unliquidated expenses

**MANILA** — The Commission on Elections (Comelec) on Wednesday assured that it will settle in due time liquidation reports on its expenses, which were flagged by the Commission on Audit (COA).

Comelec Commissioner Rowena Guanzon said this includes liquidation reports on travel and cash advances.

“The other liquidations that are remaining are the usual ‘yung mga travel, cash advances of Commissioner, Directors...but it will be settled in due time. It's not really a malversation issue,” Guanzon said in an interview.

“It's because when you travel you have to liquidate your cash advances by submitting documents, boarding pass, sometimes you know some people lose their boarding passes so it takes time to

**PNR extension**

Meanwhile, Magno said the PNR is mulling the construction of a bridge between Valenzuela and Malabon to extend the PNR service all the way to Malabon.

“We are poised to carry 120,000 passengers between Malabon and Calamba and we are planning to extend the service because of traffic issues that came out yesterday. That's why we might open all the way to Valenzuela,” Magno said.

He said the PNR has been studying the engineering obstacles in relation to the construction of the proposed bridge, which he said will take less than 30 to 45 days to build.

“Right now, we have service all the way to Governor Pascual in Malabon. Malabon and Valenzuela (are) separated by a body of water, (the) Tullahan River. We used to have an old bridge but it was destroyed,” Magno said.

“Because we are making the NSCR project, we are looking for a space where we can connect it to Valenzuela, so we could re-open service between Valenzuela and Makati,” he added.

Magno said once the bridge is built, residents living in Valenzuela can take a jeepney to Governor Pascual, and take the train service from there going to Makati.

“So we'll just be adding trains. There are trains coming. We will make sure there are a lot of trains and then we connect the bridge between Tullahan and Malabon),” Magno said. (PNA)