

## MWSS wants Laguna Lake declared as ‘vital source of water’

**MANILA** -- The Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) wants the Laguna Lake to be declared as “a vital source of water” in wake of the looming water crisis in Metro Manila.

MWSS Administrator Emmanuel Salamat made this suggestion during the 43rd Cabinet meeting in Malacañang on Wednesday emphasizing the need for Laguna Lake to be protected and secured, Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo said in a statement.

Last September, the Department of Envi-

ronment and Natural Resources (DENR) expressed support for the government’s plan of sourcing additional water supply from the Laguna Lake to address Metro Manila’s water woes.

Meanwhile, Salamat also requested the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) to issue department orders to local government chief executives to expedite necessary permits to meet timelines of the projects of the MWSS.

He suggested the need to secure assistance from other agen-

cies to create a comprehensive water security plan.

Salamat also proposed the creation of an inter-agency task force on water supply and sewerage.

Maynilad and Manila Water announced rotational water service interruptions due to the continued decline of water levels in the Angat and Ipo dams.

The two water concessionaires also warned that the water rationing may last until next year.

President Rodrigo Duterte earlier warned of taking over opera-

tions of water concessionaires using “extraordinary powers of the presidency” should the looming water crisis gets declared as a national emergency.

The President said he also wanted to fast-track the construction of the New Centennial Water Source-Kaliwa Dam project to prevent another water crisis in Metro Manila.

The China-funded Kaliwa Dam project in Quezon province is expected to provide an additional 600 million liters a day (MLD) of water to Metro Manila and environs. (PNA)

## BI nabs human trafficking suspect, rescues 5 victims in Cebu

**MANILA** – The Bureau of Immigration (BI) on Thursday reported the rescue of five human trafficking victims at the Mactan-Cebu International Airport (MCIA).

At the same time, BI Commissioner Jaime Morente said they also intercepted a female courier from a syndicate believed responsible for recruiting and facilitating the departure of undocumented overseas workers at the said southern port.

He added the five passengers were intercepted last October 27 and October 30 as they were about to board their flights for Hong Kong and Macau.

The BI chief said the suspected syndicate was also stopped on October 30 when three of the five victims were barred from leaving for Hong Kong and pointed to the woman as the one who escorted them to the airport and briefed them prior to their flight.

On the other hand, BI MCIA Travel Control and Enforcement Unit (TCEU) head Ma. Asuncion Palma-Gil said the suspected trafficker was turned over to the National Bureau of Investigation which then filed a criminal com-

plaint for human trafficking and illegal recruitment against her before the Cebu City Prosecutor’s Office.

She declined to reveal the suspect’s name as well as those of the five victims in compliance with the law which forbids it.

The BI official added that five victims were bound for Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) where they were hired to work as household service workers and waitresses.

“We suspect that all these victims were recruited by the same syndicate and that the female

suspect we arrested is involved in the perpetration of this trafficking scheme,” Palma-Gil said in a statement.

Initial investigation revealed that the passengers disguised as tourists supposed to be first flown to Hong Kong and Macau where they would later board their connecting flights to Dubai.

They allegedly admitted during investigation that they have UAE working visas in their possession which were processed and provided to them by their recruiters.

Palma-Gil said the

five passengers were intercepted nearly two weeks after 17 suspected trafficking victims were stopped from leaving the Mactan airport while attempting to leave for Hong Kong and Macau.

Morente has alerted all BI personnel in ports outside Metro Manila to be on the lookout for trafficking victims who might attempt to exit their turf due to intelligence reports that syndicates were planning to shift their activities to ports outside Manila due to the Bureau’s intensified anti-trafficking drive at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport. (PNA)

opening of Barcelona PCG; an estimated 3,000 Filipinos with the establishment of Istanbul PCG; at least 68,269 Filipinos with the Melbourne PCG; and around 75,000 with Nagoya PCG.

Meñez said there are about 14,443 Filipinos in Sweden and 4,603 in Morocco.

Aside from the considerable number of Filipinos, Meñez said other considerations in opening these posts are to further explore relations on trade and investments as well as

### DFA to open 6 new embassies, PCGs

**MANILA** -- The Philippines will open six foreign service posts by yearend, an official from the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) bared Wednesday.

"The DFA hopes to implement, with the President's approval, congressional initiatives under General Appropriations Act 2019 to establish 6 Foreign Service Posts (embassies and consulates general)," DFA Assistant Secretary Eduardo Meñez said in a text message.

Meñez said four

Philippine Consulates General (PCG) are being eyed in the following areas: Barcelona (Spain), Istanbul (Turkey), Melbourne (Australia), and Nagoya (Japan). Embassies are planned to be opened in Sweden and Morocco.

One of the considerations in opening the foreign posts was the number of Filipinos in the area, he added.

More than 15,000 Filipinos, with a concentration in the Cataluña region, are seen to benefit from the re-

## More safety drills eyed to prepare public for disasters

**MANILA** -- Defense officials have recommended the conduct of more safety drills to raise awareness and prepare the public for future disasters after a series of earthquakes struck Mindanao last month.

Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo said this was among the recommendations made by National Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (NDRRMC) Chairperson, Undersecretary Ricardo Jalad during Wednesday’s Cabinet meeting in Malacañang.

During the meeting, Undersecretary Renato Solidum, Officer-in-Charge of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology, briefed the Cabinet on the series

of earthquakes in Mindanao.

Lorenzana and Jalad discussed the damages, casualties and government actions being carried out.

The defense officials recommended the sustainment of relief operations, improvement of facilities used as evacuation centers and construction of temporary shelters and permanent housing.

They also suggested the need to repair and reconstruct damaged schools, provide livelihood and training and loan assistance to families, and conduct of post disaster needs assessment.

Three powerful earthquakes hit parts of Mindanao last October.

On October 16, a magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck Tulunan, North Cotabato around 7:37 p.m. at a depth of eight kilometers. It was

followed by a magnitude 6.6 earthquake in the southeastern part of Tulunan, North Cotabato on Oct. 29 and a magnitude 6.5 earthquake struck again Tulunan on October 31.

Mitigation officials said the series of earthquakes have killed at least 22 people, injured hundreds, and displaced over 8,000 residents.

At present, the government continues to expedite the release of relief items and goods for those severely affected by the Mindanao earthquakes and assured that there is enough stock for affected families.

Lorenzana urged quake victims to go to their designated evacuation centers and barangay halls for assistance following reports that some quake victims are begging for help along the roads. (PNA)

## PRRD welcomes Florida consul in Manila

**MANILA** -- President Rodrigo Duterte received Henry B. Howard, the Philippine honorary consul for the state of Florida and founding director of the US-Philippines Society, in a courtesy call in Malacañang on Wednesday.

Duterte thanked the

to adhere to the principle of reciprocity and where such is extended to the Philippines.

"The DFA also views the establishment of FSPs from the lens of the Philippine Development Plan, the DFA Strategic Plan, and the National Security Plan," he said.

At present, the country has 88 foreign service posts, of which 61 are embassies, 23 consulates general, and four missions.

American consul for visiting the country, a Palace statement said.

Howard, who has an extensive background in US-Philippine ties, first came to the country as an American Field Service (AFS) high school exchange student in Cagayan de Oro in 1974.

He was appointed as the Philippines’ honorary consul for the state of Florida in 2015.

He also became the president and chief executive officer of the US Education Finance Group, an Advisory Board Member of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and a member of the Board of Directors of the US-Philippines Society, among his other duties.

The US-Philippines Society aims to help create a new and timely mechanism for elevating the Philippines’ profile in the United States.

Howard, deeply involved in Philippine education, also established the Henry Howard Scholarship which graduated 44 scholars since its establishment in 2001.

Around 100 students have benefited from the scholarship by receiving tuition, dormitory, food, books, clothes, uniforms, and annual home or parental visit travel expenses.

The courtesy call took place before the scheduled Cabinet meeting in Malacañang. (PNA)