



NEWS ROUNDUP

16 JANUARY 2025 [08:00 am]

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Information and Knowledge Management Division

GMA NEWS

PAGASA: 3 weather systems to bring rains across PH

The shear line, the easterlies, and the Northeast Monsoon or amihan will continue to bring cloudy skies and rains over parts of the country, PAGASA said.

In its 4 a.m. bulletin, the state weather bureau said the Bicol Region, Cagayan, Isabela, Quirino, Aurora, Quezon, Oriental Mindoro, Marinduque, and Romblon will have cloudy skies with scattered rains and isolated thunderstorms brought by the shear line.

Eastern Visayas, Caraga, Davao Region, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi will be affected by the easterlies that will cause cloudy skies with scattered rains and thunderstorms.

Amihan will prevail over the Cordillera Administrative Region and the rest of Cagayan Valley, which will have cloudy skies with rains.

Metro Manila, Ilocos Region, and the rest of Central Luzon will experience partly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated light rains triggered by amihan.

The rest of the country will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated rainshowers or thunderstorms caused by the easterlies.

PAGASA said no low pressure areas are being monitored for tropical cyclone formation as of 2 a.m. Thursday.

Sunrise will be at 6:25 a.m. while sunset is at 5:47 p.m.

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By: Ben Radford

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) held a series of hearings over December 2–13, receiving oral submissions from 97 countries on obligations under international law to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This will inform the ICJ's advisory opinion, expected later this year.

An advisory opinion is a clarification and interpretation of international law issued by the ICJ, which is non-binding. But advisory opinions can clarify legal responsibilities towards binding laws, such as the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

The two central questions asked of the ICJ were: countries' obligations under international law to "ensure the protection of the climate system and other parts of the environment" from human-caused greenhouse gas emissions for other countries and "present and future generations"; and the legal consequences for countries that have "caused significant harm to the climate system and other parts of the environment", with respect to climate-vulnerable countries and "present and future generations affected by the adverse effects of climate change".

In other words, the ICJ will determine if countries are obliged under international law to reduce emissions, and what the legal consequences are if they fail to do so.

Climate justice

If the ICJ delivers a favourable advisory opinion, it could open the door to climate-related lawsuits against governments, as well as human rights cases against corporations and countries violating the principles of climate justice.

Climate activists from the world's most climate-vulnerable regions have spearheaded the demand for climate justice to be considered under international law.

Law students from the University of the South Pacific in Vanuatu first came up with the idea to seek an advisory opinion from the ICJ in 2019. After forming the group Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change, they appealed to Pacific Island countries to take it up, which Vanuatu accepted.

In March 2023, 132 countries co-sponsored a successful resolution at the United Nations General Assembly to request the advisory opinion from the ICJ. The resulting case is the biggest in the ICJ's history, with 97 countries and 11 organisations participating in the hearings.

Vanuatu has played a key role in climate advocacy for Pacific Island countries, many of which are existentially threatened by the worsening climate crisis. It was the first country

to sign the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, which seeks to be a binding agreement to stop fossil fuel production and implement a just transition to renewable energy.

The low-lying Pacific Island country is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world, particularly threatened by worsening sea level rise and tropical cyclones.

Vanuatu and the Melanesian Spearhead Group opened the hearings by highlighting the existential threat that the climate crisis poses to the Pacific Islands and humanity. They underscored that the injustice of the climate crisis is inseparable from colonial histories, and made the link between the right to self-determination, intergenerational inequity and the climate crisis.

They argued that countries' legal obligations in relation to the climate crisis go beyond the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, and urged the ICJ to consider the full spectrum of international law.

Chile, the Philippines, Cameroon, Colombia and Bolivia demanded that the judges apply human rights, including the principle of intergenerational equity, in their decision regarding legal responsibility for climate change.

Senegal, Seychelles, Samoa, The Gambia, Slovenia and Sri Lanka asserted the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and that the corresponding obligations should extend beyond borders.

Sierra Leone, the Cook Islands, the Marshall Islands and the Solomon Islands — some of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world — highlighted how climate change threatens their sovereignty and right to self-determination, which is burdened by colonial legacies.

Jamaica, the Maldives, Papua New Guinea and the African Union presented legal arguments for comprehensive climate reparations based on historical and current responsibility for causing climate change.

Polluters push back

Predictably, the minority of polluting countries, most responsible for causing climate change, were strongly opposed to a more rigorous international legal framework for climate action.

Australia, Saudi Arabia and Germany opposed the addition of any more climate change obligations under international law, arguing that the Paris Agreement is sufficient.

Germany and Britain opposed the proposition that under international law there is a right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and that countries are responsible for climate-related harms outside their territories. Britain argued that historical emissions, or any legal frameworks beyond the Paris Agreement, should not be considered in determining climate responsibility.

The United States and Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) outright dismissed the application of human rights law to climate mitigation, as well as the principle of prevention of “transboundary harm”.

Following the hearing, Ida Idling, spokesperson for youth-led climate group Aurora — which is currently suing the Swedish government for failing to act on the climate crisis — said: “The Nordic countries, who got rich thanks to their extractive and polluting activities, failed to recognise their substantial responsibility for causing the climate crisis.”

Movement

Protesters gathered outside the ICJ in The Hague during the hearings to demand that it uphold climate justice and that human rights prevail over the interests of a minority of countries.

Following the dismal outcomes of the latest United Nations climate change conference in November, where rich countries refused demands for meaningful climate finance, climate-vulnerable countries are seeking further avenues for attaining justice under international law.

While a favourable ICJ advisory opinion, followed by rulings that compel climate action, would be a positive step towards climate justice, countries are not actually obligated to abide by them. For example, Israel has simply ignored the ICJ’s supposedly legally binding order in January last year that it take “provisional measures” to prevent genocide in Gaza and allow humanitarian aid to the besieged population.

This highlights the limitations of legalistic avenues seeking climate justice, particularly at an international level where there exists little enforceability. While a strong ICJ ruling that countries are legally obliged to take climate action should be supported, what’s really needed is a mass climate movement, spearheaded by those living in the most climate-vulnerable situations and supported in solidarity by people in the Global North.

PCO

Big dams PBBM's funding priority

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. committed to provide adequate funds for the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) to support the country's irrigation programs.

In a meeting with NIA officials at Malacañan Palace on Wednesday, President Marcos emphasized the importance of constructing large dams not only for irrigation but also for other purposes.

Under NIA's 2025 programs, activities and projects (PAPs), the agency allocated PhP20.84 billion for the Pump Irrigation Sub-Program and PhP7.88 billion for Stage 2 of the Ilocos Norte-Ilocos Sub-Abra Irrigation Project (INISAIP).

Earmarked for the Balog-Balog Multipurpose Project Phase II in Tarlac was PhP2.49 billion while PhP99.5 million was set aside for the Special Irrigation Sub-Program.

"The big dams. We need to have that," President Marcos said, referring to NIA funding under the 2025 General Appropriations Act (GAA).

"The PhP22 billion, that's in the GAA, PhP22.882 [billion], that's in the GAA. Palagay ko mayroon pa tayong savings diyan," President Marcos said.

President Marcos met with NIA officials to discuss the agency's strategic plans and projects for 2025.

NIA Administrator Eduardo Eddie Guillen outlined the agency's objectives to enhance irrigation efficiency, ensure continuous operation of existing irrigation service areas and maintain current irrigated lands.

Guillen also highlighted plans to improve service roads along irrigation canals.

The PAPs will incorporate technological interventions and modernization of irrigation systems to mitigate the effects of climate change, he said.

Present during the meeting were Department of Agriculture (DA) Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr., Department of Finance Secretary Ralph Recto, and Department of Budget and Management (DBM) Secretary Amenah Pangandaman.

NEDA Secretary Arsenio Balisacan was also present during the meeting along with Special Assistant to the President for Investment and Economic Affairs Frederick Go and PCO Acting Secretary Cesar Chavez.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Eastern Samar town seeks aid amid flooding

By: Joey Gabieta

The local government of Jipapad in Eastern Samar is appealing for food aid and livelihood assistance for residents and farmers who were severely affected by the massive flooding spawned by nonstop rains that began on Jan. 10.

Victorina Abestros, the town's disaster risk reduction and management officer, said the floods affected 1,817 families or 9,913 residents in the town.

About 48 hectares of rice fields, she said, were destroyed, resulting in losses amounting to P719,850.

"This (damage) involves newly planted rice crops that were completely wiped out," she said in an online interview on Tuesday.

Jipapad in Eastern Samar was placed under a state of calamity on Jan. 12 due to the widespread flooding that hit local communities. The declaration allowed the local government to access its calamity fund to procure the needed supplies for affected households.

While no significant properties like government facilities and houses were damaged, Abestros said the local government needed food aid and livelihood assistance, especially for farmers who lost their crops.

She said the local calamity fund of P7.551 million was insufficient to cover the extensive damage.

"We cannot fully use the fund considering that it is just the start of the New Year," Abestros said.

Despite limited resources, the local government has prepared food packs for affected families.

Their primary concern, however, remains the livelihood of farmers.

Jipapad, a low-lying town situated near major waterways like the Oras and Pambujan rivers, is highly vulnerable to flooding during heavy rains caused by the shear line. In past incidents, floodwaters submerged houses and schools in the town.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) in Eastern Visayas reported that 32,033 families or 127,973 people from different towns in Eastern Samar and Northern Samar provinces were affected by the floods last weekend.

At least 435 families in Northern Samar remained in evacuation centers while 330 families were staying with relatives or friends in safer areas.

The DSWD had distributed relief goods to over 4,600 families in affected areas across Eastern Samar and Northern Samar.

Class suspension

In Mindanao, several local governments on Wednesday ordered the suspension of classes at all levels because of moderate to heavy rains brought about by the easterlies affecting the Visayas and Mindanao.

Officials in the city of Mati in Davao Oriental province; the cities of Panabo, Samal, and the town of Santo Tomas in Davao del Norte province; General Santos City in South Cotabato province; Jose Abad Santos town in Davao Occidental province; Alabel town in Sarangani province; at least four towns in Davao de Oro province; and 20 barangays in Davao City have ordered class suspensions to ensure the safety of residents amid poor weather conditions since Tuesday afternoon.

The provincial government of Davao Occidental also suspended classes and work in government offices in the province.

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[Group condemns use of single-use plastics as fiesta decors](#)

By: Ma. Teresa Montemayor

The use of disposable plastic banderitas (flaglets) in celebration of the Feast of Sto. Niño is inconsistent with local and global efforts to address plastic pollution, an environmental group said Tuesday.

In a news release, the EcoWaste Coalition urged community leaders to forgo the use of plastic "labo" (thin plastic without handles) and other single-use plastic materials as decorations, which pose threats to the environment and public health when disposed of.

"Buntings made of plastic labo and other single-use plastics go straight to garbage disposal sites after the festivities," EcoWaste Coalition zero waste campaigner Ochie Tolentino said.

"We question the continued use of disposable banderitas in faith-inspired festivities, which only add to the perennial garbage woes facing our communities," she added.

The group spotted the plastic banderitas in Manila's Pandacan and Tondo districts.

It noted that their use during fiestas is not in line with the resolution on plastic that church leaders adopted at the 128th Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines in July 2024.

The resolution supports the eradication of plastic pollution as one of the six ecological actions to be pursued by the Catholic community.

In 2019, the bishops issued a pastoral letter on ecology titled "An Urgent Call for Ecological Conversion, Hope in the Face of Climate Emergency."

It affirmed the commitment of the church to live the spirit and principles of Laudato Si, the encyclical of Pope Francis on care for the natural environment and the people.

It also included 13 ecological actions, including one point advising the faithful to "live simply, minimize consumption, and actively promote ecological awareness and action through integral waste segregation and by minimizing the use of plastic and paper, by eliminating single-use plastics, polystyrene, and the like, from our homes and institutions."

Tolentino urged the public to make the protection of the environment and of people the center of faith-rooted celebrations.

Plastic constitutes 91% of marine litter in Manila Bay – group

By: Ma. Teresa Montemayor

Hard and film plastics represent 91 percent of the collected wastes in Manila Bay, an environmental group said Wednesday.

In a press conference, the EcoWaste Coalition, together with De La Salle University - Dasmariñas, shared the findings of its 2024 Marine Litter Monitoring Survey Report, which showed a 36 percent decrease in the volume of marine litter and a 42 percent reduction in the total weight of collected wastes from 2023 to 2024 in its 10 project sites.

These include Silangan, Rosario; Timalan, Naic; Sahud Ulan, Tanza; Capipisa, Tanza; and Julugan, Tanza in Cavite.

In the National Capital Region, the project sites include San Dionisio, Paranaque; and Tanza, Navotas.

Meanwhile, the project sites in Bataan are Cabcabén, Mariveles; Agwawan Beach, Barangay Simsiman, Mariveles; and Bantan, Orion.

Despite the decline in marine debris, seasonal data further indicated a 16 percent increase in litter counts during the wet months compared to the dry season.

“These findings demonstrate the progress we’ve made, but they also highlight the urgent need for stricter waste management practices,” EcoWaste Coalition’s Enhancement of Marine Litter Management (EMLM) Project Officer Wes Lipana said.

“We have made significant strides in reducing litter, but the continuing dominance of plastics in our waste indicates the need for collective action – both from government bodies and the public.”

The group presented key actions to address the ongoing challenge of marine litter: strict enforcement of existing environmental laws, such as Republic Act 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act, and Republic Act 9275 or the Clean Water Act to ensure accountability at all levels; expansion of information campaigns at the barangay level to raise awareness about waste segregation, plastic pollution, and sustainable disposal practices; adoption of standardized cleanup methods, as outlined in the Manual for Beach Litter Monitoring Program, to improve data collection and cleanup efficiency; and development of a comprehensive, integrated marine litter management plan for Manila Bay, incorporating both government and community efforts.

It also urged everyone to take part in carrying out the proposed solutions by adopting more sustainable waste management practices in their daily lives to protect Manila Bay and other vital coastal ecosystems nationwide.

The Korea International Cooperation Agency Philippines and the Korea Marine Environment Management Corp., through Our Sea of East Asia Network, fund the EMLM project for 2021 to 2025.

SUNSTAR

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The Interfacing Development Interventions for Sustainability (Idis) believes that the flooding incidence highlights a combination of natural and human-induced factors, particularly in Matina Pangí Watershed, Davao City's smallest watershed with a catchment area of 7,879 hectares.

Based on our satellite imagery assessments of the upstream areas of the Matina River revealed that significant patches of Non-metallic Quarrying (Earth-fill or Limestone) and other human activities may have significantly reduced forest and vegetation cover. Forests help stabilize soil and prevent erosion, particularly during heavy rain.

The lack of sufficient vegetation accelerates soil erosion, leading to increased sedimentation in the river. This sedimentation decreases the river's capacity to carry water, causing water levels to rise more rapidly and intensifying the flooding experienced downstream.

Additionally, there is a lack of wetlands along the midstream and downstream sections of the Matina River. Wetlands act as natural sponges, absorbing and slowing water flow during excessive rainfall. The degradation or absence of these critical ecosystems limits the river's ability to manage surges in water volume. As a result, heavy rain upstream leads to a more rapid and severe overflow in downstream areas like Matina, where there are no wetlands to help mitigate the impact.

Another significant contributing factor is the presence of residential settlements along the riverbank. These settlements were placed at designated floodplains, which naturally retain water during high river levels. The encroachment into these floodplains increases the risk of

flooding the settlements during peak river flow periods.

Initial analyses suggest that intense rainfall in the upstream watershed areas was a primary driver of the surge in water levels. This surge, combined with the reduced

capacity of the river due to sedimentation and the absence of wetlands, overwhelmed the system and caused the river to overflow. The urban settlements along the riverbank further exacerbated the situation by blocking natural drainage pathways, leaving floodwaters with limited avenues to recede.

One important consideration along the Matina Pangí Watershed is the presence of the Davao City Sanitary Landfill in Barangay New Carmen. Overloading leachate dams in sanitary landfills also poses serious environmental and public health risks, particularly by increasing the volume of floodwater and pollution.

Leachate, the toxic liquid formed from rainwater and waste, can contaminate the surrounding areas if not properly managed. This issue often arises from underestimating leachate volumes or inadequate systems to handle excess leachate during heavy rainfall.

The December 6, 2024 incident at the Davao City Sanitary Landfill in New Carmen highlights these dangers, as the leachate dam burst, releasing contaminated water that potentially worsened flooding and introduced hazardous pollutants into the environment. This spill threatened water quality and public health, leading to the evacuation of nearby families to protect them from toxic exposure.

To address these recurring issues, we need immediate and long-term measures incorporating nature-based solutions in infrastructural mitigation, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policies, and public awareness for Matina Pangí Watershed.

- Development of a Watershed & Drainage Management Plan for the Matina Pangí Watershed by the Local Government Unit;
- Strict regulation for non-metallic mining and quarry activities;
- Strict enforcement of riverbank protection policies;
- Integrate Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) designs such as natural trenches, lagoons, stormwater parks, and permeable surfaces to public works and infrastructure development
- Construction of detention ponds and wetlands for flood water storage;
- Establishment of flood control and mitigation, such as pumping stations and flood gates at downstream settlements;

- Reclaim and improve riparian zones or legal easements through sustainable designs and riparian reforestation;
- Increase forest cover and reforestation projects at midstream to upstream areas of Matina Pangí Watershed;
- Rehabilitation of the Sanitary Landfill in Brgy. New Carmen;
- Formation of Community-based environmental and disaster volunteers;
- Impose disaster vulnerability transparency of real estate and housing developments along the Matina River; and
- Increase public awareness of climate and disaster risk hazards and zoning policies.

The Matina River flood in 2011 was described as the city's most devastating disaster, leaving 10,000 people homeless and claiming the lives of 33 individuals. To prevent such a tragedy from happening again, it is crucial to enhance ridge-to-reef watershed protection and improve disaster management strategies for the Matina Pangí Watershed. The recurring flooding incident serves as a reminder of the urgent need for an integrated watershed management plan that incorporates nature-based solutions and mitigates human-induced stressors on the Matina River. By prioritizing sustainable development practices and ecosystem restoration, the risks of future flooding can be minimized, protecting both the environment and the communities that depend on it. While the January 4 flooding incident fortunately resulted in no casualties, it underscores the importance of acting swiftly to implement these protective measures.

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