



NEWS ROUNDUP

28 JANUARY 2025 [08:00 am]

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DAILY TRIBUNE

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PHILIPPINE INFORMATION AGENCY

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The Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) on Monday, Jan. 27, assured that all housing units under President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s flagship Pambansang Pabahay para sa Pilipino (4PH) Program promote climate resiliency.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

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The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) have formalized a cooperation agreement to support the 30by30 Zero Philippines Program, aimed at accelerating sustainable finance in the country.

Under the pact, both the SEC and the IFC will undertake capacity-building initiatives for thematic bond issuers, investors, and domestic external reviewers.

Further, they will also conduct a stocktaking survey on the Philippine Thematic Capital Market, and explore other potential areas for collaboration.

Representing the SEC and the IFC at the ceremonial signing held on 21 January were Commissioner McJill Bryant Fernandez and Regional Manager for East Asia and the Pacific Christina Ongoma, respectively.

In his remarks, Commissioner Fernandez highlighted the importance of this partnership in the context of the Philippines' urgent climate challenges.

"The Philippines faces the immense challenge of mitigating climate change while ensuring inclusive and sustainable economic growth...Through this partnership, we aim to channel long-term funding into climate-focused initiatives that prioritize both people and the planet," he said.

For her part, IFC Regional Manager Ongoma thanked the SEC for its unwavering support and collaboration with IFC since 2023: "We are grateful for our partnership with the SEC and are delighted to formalize our collaboration...Through this, we will continue to jointly host dedicated technical workshops and training sessions to further enhance the awareness and capacity of the capital market players regarding climate thematic instruments and opportunities."

INTERAKSYON

Disaster fatigue: battered by storms and out of compassion

By: Mariejo Ramos

Four back-to-back typhoons pummeled the Philippines in 10 wild days of November. The storms followed 14 other typhoons to lash the archipelago last year, leaving its rescue teams frazzled, frustrated and burnt out.

Compassion fatigue has now washed over emergency workers in a mammoth wave, submerging the medics and volunteers who stepped into the fray – again and again – with a sense they're drowning.

“No one is really immune to trauma, compassion fatigue and mental health problems – not even doctors,” said Pura Jacobe Gaddi, a local doctor who helped mobilise a 200-strong team of rescue and relief volunteers across the six provinces worst hit.

As a wall of punishing storms moved in last autumn – schools and hospitals shut for a week, streets turned to rivers – family doctor Gaddi knew she had to find a way to reach the many patients who were stranded in her typhoon-prone region.

So after Typhoon Trami welled over, she helped set up a network of volunteer doctors and rescuers and saw some 200 patients a day, be it visiting their ravaged homes, touring evacuation centres or caring via telemedicine and field visits.

Multiple cyclones – along with other natural disasters from earthquakes to volcanic eruptions – had taken a toll not only on the most vulnerable but also on those whose very job it was to help to them.

“People say that Bicolanos are resilient, but in my entire life, we experienced nothing of the same,” said Gaddi, one of the founders of the Tarabangan-Bicol Disaster Volunteer Network. “We are first typhoon survivors before we became volunteers.”

Bicol is long used to natural disasters – its position facing the Pacific Ocean exposing it to frequent typhoons and floods.

Compassion fatigue

Mercemarie Fajardo, also a volunteer doctor in Bicol, said she struggled with a sense of utter helplessness immediately after the storms, inundated with desperate calls for help.

“A lot of the towns were submerged and [people] had no choice but to expose themselves to the flood water. It was challenging to reach out,” said Fajardo.

The Department of Health said it was monitoring burnout amongst the population, acknowledging that “compassion fatigue” has also taken its toll on response and rescue personnel.

“The difference between a disaster zone and a combat zone is that in a disaster zone, no one’s shooting back at you, but the chaos, misery, and frustrations are there. People who work in disaster risk reduction management (DRRM) are not the superhumans we aspire them to be,” said Jason Bonaga, a water search and rescue volunteer in Bicol, which lies in the southern tip of Luzon island.

“No one really asks the rescuers here – ‘Are you okay? What can we do to help you?’ The compassion fatigue is real, but we don’t have the programs in place for psychological first aid,” said Bonaga. “We need to start caring for (the rescue) people.”

Disaster risk reduction and management staff work for local governments, while the officials of cities or municipalities are expected to be the first responders to any local disasters.

But government auditors say local disaster funds often go unspent, according to a 2023 report by anti-poverty NGO Oxfam, which means help has not been handed to the helpers.

Volunteers also often make up for a shortfall in rescue officers, relief packs or health services – yet the volunteer doctors said their aim was never to replace local government, rather to offer spontaneous help in the immediate aftermath.

“It’s important to have a timeline. Like in the first 48 to 72 hours, that’s the emergency phase,” said Gaddi, setting out the parameters in which volunteer backup worked best.

“The next weeks is the recovery and rehabilitation phase,” she said. “It’s important that our volunteers know when will our volunteer efforts stop and when will the local government step in and take over.”

Are you ready?

A survey published in November showed that Bicol residents had experienced among the highest levels of exposure to disasters, especially typhoons, in all of the Philippines.

And despite having strong local disaster relief mechanisms in place – most locals know what they must do when one strikes – the survey found Bicol residents had the lowest opinion of their national government’s response efforts.

It is not a badge that Manila can afford to wear.

Asia was the world’s most disaster-hit region from weather, climate and water-related hazards in 2023, according to the United Nations World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Of all disasters, floods and storms caused the highest number of reported casualties and economic losses, according to the WMO.

Yet the World Risk Poll 2024, a study by Lloyd’s Register Foundation, an independent global safety charity, shows people in Southeast Asia feel more prepared for disasters than anywhere else.

About 62% of adults in Southeast Asia surveyed in 2023 live in households where everyone at home knows just how to respond in an emergency and about 67% say they could protect themselves and their families from a future disaster.

“The high rate of experiencing disasters certainly contributes to these high scores,” Benedict Vigers, a researcher with Gallup, a consulting company commissioned to conduct the poll, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Despite such positives, Bonaga said: “We were only as prepared as our most vulnerable – and for most people, the mundane demands of day-to-day life come first.”

“It’s easy to say, ‘have a go-bag or an emergency supply’. But if you’re a daily wage earner... that’s not something you think about,” he said.

MANILA BULLETIN

[Villafuerte's proposed green tax to hit 2 birds with 1 stone](#)

By: Ellson Quismorio

A green tax measure is being sought by Camarines Sur 2nd district Rep. LRay Villafuerte under House Bill (HB) No.2894, or the proposed Piso para sa Kalikasan (A Peso for Nature) Tax.

Villafuerte says HB No.2894 represents the country's first-ever carbon tax on electricity (CTE), which intends to augment state coffers while keeping the Marcos administration on track for its ambitious goal of a low-carbon economy.

"One win-win revenue measure that the government can consider is a CTE or Piso para sa Kalikasan tax to help it raise extra funds beginning this year for higher public spending and for debt servicing and at the same time keep the Philippines on track to fighting climate change by reducing its GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions by 75 percent by the year 2030," he said.

Villafuerte, president of the National Unity Party (NUP), has long been an advocate of green initiatives in the Congress.

"Collections from this proposed Piso para sa Kalikasan Tax are to be used for programs on climate-change mitigation and adaptation," he said.

The measure proposes a CTE on the use of electricity, equivalent to P1 for every kilogram of CO2 emission per kilowatt hour (kWh).

Villafuerte filed the bill after Department of Finance (DOF) Secretary Ralph Recto said the government will pursue the legislative passage this year of its remaining priority tax measures to offset the impact of a slower rate-cutting cycle on the national debt service burden.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects the Philippine fiscal deficit to drop from 6.1 percent in 2023 to 5.6 percent in 2024 and 2025, with IMF Mission chief Elif Arbatli Saxegaard saying that the Philippines has to weigh different considerations in thinking about a carbon tax.

"It is one option (carbon tax) for their consideration that can support the transition to a green economy to promote renewable energy, to shift consumption patterns away from polluting energy to more green energy sources," she said.

"We understand that there's also different tradeoffs playing out here. The cost of power and electricity in the Philippines is quite high," added Saxegaard.

Watchdog warns vs greenwashing on 'natural' gas

By: Mat Richter

An environmental watchdog has sounded the alarm on RA 12120 or the Philippine Natural Gas Industry Development Act, which seeks to boost the share of natural gas, a polluting fuel, in the country's energy mix.

While the law aims to promote it as "a safe, efficient, and cost-effective source of energy," natural gas is a harmful fossil fuel that contributes to climate warming, and it's an act of greenwashing to say otherwise, Greenpeace campaigner Jefferson Chua stressed.

RA 12120 also incentivizes investments in the Philippines' natural gas industry by opening the floor to investors through a competition system, transparency and fair trade, and active policy support.

Its goal is to make energy "affordable," but electricity made from burning liquefied natural gas is two to three times pricier for Filipinos compared to renewable sources, Sam Reynolds, research lead and energy finance analyst at IEEFA in the US, told Associated Press.

"The new gas industry development law enables more profiteering from an industry that is scrambling to secure its continued relevance, while continuing to contribute to the dangerous heating of the planet," Chua said.

Compared to coal, the dirty fuel burns "cleaner" as it emits around half the carbon emissions per unit of electricity generated, but will produce more emissions over time as we adapt to increasing energy demands, said US-based nonprofit Union of Concerned Scientists.

A peek into the past

Methane possesses a warming potential around 80 times higher than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned.

Following the liquefied natural gas (LNG) buildout in Batangas province, the law is expected to help the country achieve its goal of becoming a hub for LNG in the Asia-Pacific region.

It's set to construct two dozen power plants and has already caused harm on fish catches, surrounding communities, and coral life since the first plant was built in 2002.

Similarly, the Verde Island Passage, known as "the center of the center" of marine shorefish biodiversity, has since faced environmental threats from potential methane leaks and disruption of sensitive ecosystems.

"A cozier environmental policy for gas investments unfortunately means longer lock-in periods for fossil fuel dependence. This law will cost us critical and valuable time to achieve a just energy transition of the Philippines' already meager target of 50 percent renewable energy by 2050," Greenpeace campaigner said.

"Expanding the current bounty of inexpensive natural gas alone would not slow the growth of global greenhouse gas emissions worldwide," an analysis by the US DOE's Pacific Northwest National Laboratory noted, pointing out that natural gas is ultimately methane—a harmful climate pollutant.

What can be done

Chua said instead of yielding to oil and gas companies, the Philippines must carve its own path by taking concrete steps away from fossil fuel dependence, and demand payment for escalating loss and damage from oil and gas companies.

He also called on President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to prioritize the welfare of communities and the environment and ensure that laws root in climate justice, which set legal frameworks to hold polluters accountable.

"The president must use his significant influence to reverse this decision, as well as to improve the policy and infrastructure environment for renewable energy. His administration must mandate a net-zero target that would ensure the phase-out of coal, oil, and gas, and start enabling the transition of energy systems toward a massive uptake of renewables," he said.

Methane, the main component of natural gas, is accountable for almost a third of global temperature rise since the Industrial Revolution (year 1750), Paris-based International Energy Agency noted on its Global Methane Tracker. Chua then underscored that the Philippines' detour to renewable energy through natural gas "runs counter to science, common sense, and climate justice."

"The president's term coincides with the most crucial years for climate action. We call on him to do what is right and choose the wellbeing of the Filipino people over profit for an industry largely responsible for the crisis endangering millions of people in the Philippines and the world over," he expressed.

MANILA STANDARD

[Coalition says plastics account for 91% of wastes in Manila Bay](#)

By: Ma. Teresa Montemayor

Hard and film plastics account for 91 percent of the collected wastes in Manila Bay, an environmental group said last week.

The EcoWaste Coalition, along with De La Salle University-Dasmariñas, shared in a press conference, 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, Parañaque; and Tanza, Navotas.

The project sites in Bataan are Cabcaban, 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.

The initiative seeks 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.

The group 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. PNA

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

Gov't housing promotes climate resiliency

By: Rio N. Araja

All housing units under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s flagship "Pambansang Pabahay para sa Pilipino" (4PH) program promote climate resiliency, the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development on Monday said.

"All 4PH projects are of good quality since aside from being compliant with the Building Code, the government is very much focused, along with the local government units in putting up housing projects," Housing czar Jose Rizalino Acuzar said.

"The department ensures that our 4PH projects are not sitting in hazardous or disaster-prone areas, and that these are aligned with the approved Comprehensive Land Use Plans and Local Shelter Plans of our LGUs," he added.

Mr. Marcos earlier directed the DHSUD to explore climate-resilient housing designs to mitigate the effects of natural disasters to human settlements and ensure the safety of beneficiaries of public housing.

The agency is also spearheading the "Plan and Do" or the "Planado" program that integrates climate change considerations into urban planning processes with a focus on developing sustainable and resilient communities through streamlined land use planning and coordination with various stakeholders.

The program ultimately aims to create cities that can better withstand the impacts of climate change like flooding and extreme weather events.

To date, 56 projects under 4PH are in various stages of development and construction, some already having completed buildings.

Acuzar said he is elated that the government is now reaping the initial fruits of the flagship housing program two years after its formulation.

"These ongoing turn over of units and simultaneous development and construction of housing projects are solid proofs of concepts that 4PH is on the right track. It is proof that we can tap private funds for public housing," he said.

SEC, IFC vow to advance PH sustainable finance, sign climate initiative deal

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They will also conduct a stocktaking survey on the Philippine Thematic Capital Market and explore other potential areas for collaboration.

Representing the SEC and the IFC at the ceremonial signing on Jan. 21, 2025 were Commissioner McJill Bryant Fernandez and regional manager for East Asia and the Pacific Christina Ongoma, respectively.

Fernandez cited the importance of the partnership in the context of the Philippines' urgent climate challenges.

"The Philippines faces the immense challenge of mitigating climate change while ensuring inclusive and sustainable economic growth...Through this partnership, we aim to channel long-term funding into climate-focused initiatives that prioritize both people and the planet," he said.

Ongoma thanked the SEC for its unwavering support and collaboration with IFC since 2023.

"We are grateful for our partnership with the SEC and are delighted to formalize our collaboration...Through this, we will continue to jointly host dedicated technical workshops and training sessions to further enhance the awareness and capacity of the capital market players regarding climate thematic instruments and opportunities," Ongoma said.

Developed jointly by IFC and the World Bank with funding from the German government's International Climate Initiative, the 30by30 Zero Philippines Program aims to grow the climate-related lending of financial institutions to 30 percent of total portfolio on average with near zero coal exposure by 2030.

The initiative is expected to strengthen the role of financial institutions as aggregators of climate financing, integrating green finance strategies into investment plans to mitigate climate risks and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

PHILIPPINE INFORMATION AGENCY

[DHSUD assures 4PH projects promote climate resiliency](#)

The Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) on Monday, Jan. 27, assured that all housing units under President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s flagship Pambansang Pabahay para sa Pilipino (4PH) Program promote climate resiliency.

This, after President Marcos Jr. called on DHSUD to explore climate-resilient housing designs to mitigate the effects of natural disasters to human settlements and ensure the safety of beneficiaries of public housing.

“Lahat po ng 4PH projects are mataas ang kalidad, dahil bukod sa compliant ang mga ito sa ating Building Code ay nakatutok ang gobyerno, kasama ang ating mga local government units, sa pagtatayo ng mga housing projects,” Secretary Acuzar stressed.

“Sinisiguro din po ng DHSUD na ang ating mga 4PH projects ay wala sa mga hazardous or disaster prone areas at naka align sa mga approved Comprehensive Land Use Plans at Local Shelter Plans ng ating mga LGUs,” he added.

The DHSUD is also spearheading the “Plan and Do” or the Planado Program which aims to promote climate resiliency by integrating climate change considerations into urban planning processes, with a focus on developing sustainable and resilient communities through streamlined land use planning and coordination with various stakeholders, ultimately aiming to create cities that can better withstand the impacts of climate change like flooding and extreme weather events.

Currently, at least 56 projects under 4PH are in various stages of development and construction, some already have completed buildings.

Last month, the first 4PH units at the Palayan City Township Development in Nueva Ecija were ceremonially turned over to overseas Filipino worker-beneficiaries by no less than the President and First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos in Malacanang.

In Bacolod City, the LGU last week has started turning over housing units to beneficiaries at the Asenso Yuhum Residences which is under the flagship 4PH.

Secretary Acuzar expressed elation that the government is now reaping the initial fruits of the flagship housing program – – two years after its formulation to finally put an end to the country's housing woes.

“These ongoing turnover of units and simultaneous development and construction of housing projects are solid proofs of concepts that 4PH is the right track. Ito po ay patunay na kaya natin i-tap ang private funds sa public housing,” Secretary Acuzar said.

“May mga program po ang ating gobyerno sa pamumuno ng ating mahal na Pangulong Bongbong Marcos Jr. upang siguruhing ligtas at dekalidad ang ating mga pabahay at matatatag at mauunlad ang mga komunidad kung saan itinatayo ang mga housing projects,” he added.

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