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ABS CBN

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By: Katrina Domingo

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By: Benise Balaoing

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PHILIPPINE INFORMATION AGENCY

NIA enhances preparations for dry season 2026
By: Shahana Joy Duerme-Mangasar

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THE GUARDIAN

US leads record global surge in gas-fired power driven by AI demands, with big costs for the climate

The US is leading a huge global surge in new gas-fired power generation that will cause a major leap in planet-heating emissions, with this record boom driven by the expansion of energy-hungry datacenters to service artificial intelligence, according to a new forecast.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

ABS CBN

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President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. attributes the Philippines' worst economic slump in decades to the effects of climate change and the ongoing corruption investigations in the country, Malacañang said on Thursday hours after the country's socioeconomic officials announced the country's growth number in 2025.

The Philippines lodged its slowest non-pandemic pace in 14 years in 2025 with growth pegged at 4.4 percent, well below a June projection of 5.5-6.5 percent.

"Naipaliwanag na sa Pangulo ni Sec. Balisacan ang epekto ng climate change related disruptions at nang pag-iimbestiga sa flood control mess sa ating ekonomiya," Communications Undersecretary Claire Castro said in a statement.

"Tanggap ng Pangulo ang naging resulta nang pangunahan niya na 'mapanagot ang mga sangkot sa korapsyon,'" she said.

"Alam niyang tatamaan ang kaniyang administrasyon at ang ekonomiya pero hindi siya nagdalawang isip na iutos ang patuloy na pag iimbestiga rito dahil kung di niya sisimulan, kailan pa?" she said.

The administration is working to boost investments in technology to boost productivity especially in the agriculture and infrastructure sectors, the Palace official said.

"Sa ngayon ay ginagawa ng administrasyon ang mga hakbang upang ma boost ang investments… mapasabatas ang mga prirority bills, mas lalong mapaigting ang good governance," she said.

"Maipapakita rin natin na ang bansang lumalaban sa korapsyon ay mas pinagtitiwalaan hindi lang ng mga investor kundi pati ng mga leaders at mamamayan ng ibang bansa," she added.

Marcos Jr. launched a crackdown on corrupt practices in the Department of Public Works and Highways in mid-2025 after billions-worth of flood control projects were found to be either substandard or missing.

The government has since decided to either cancel or postpone numerous public infrastructure projects across the country as authorities try to weed out irregularities in its internal procedures to create more safeguards against corruption.

The Philippines also posted worse unemployment numbers in the first 11 months of 2025 at 4.2 percent, higher than the 3.9 percent joblessness rate in the same period in 2024.

Philippines posts worst economic growth since 2011

By: Benise Balaoing

The Philippines economy grew at its slowest non-pandemic pace in 14 years in 2025, data showed Thursday, as it was swiped by a corruption scandal and climate change-fuelled weather woes.

The 4.4 percent expansion was well below a June projection of 5.5-6.5 percent, which was already a downgrade that took into consideration the imposition of US tariffs and "global uncertainties".

The full-year figure was the worst since a 3.9 percent rate in 2011 -- though it contracted 9.5 percent in 2020 during the Covid crisis.

The data also showed just 3.0 percent growth in October-December, compared with 5.3 percent the year before, marking the second straight quarter that targets have been missed.

Economic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan told reporters Thursday that a spiralling scandal over bogus infrastructure projects had weighed heavily on short-term growth.

"Admittedly, the flood corruption probe scandal weighed on business and consumer confidence," Balisacan said of alleged fraud that is believed to have cost taxpayers billions of dollars.

Construction spending has cratered since the scandal over bogus flood control projects erupted in July, when President Ferdinand Marcos made it the centrepiece of a speech. Scores of officials, lawmakers and construction firm owners have now been implicated.

Balisacan said Thursday that even normal figures from the sector would have improved 2025's growth numbers dramatically.

"If public construction (had not been) been flat, GDP for 2025 would have actually increased from 4.4 to 5.5 percent," he said of a 0.24 percent dip for the year.

"Weather and climate-related disruptions" had also taken a toll, he said, with missed work days and school closures amid heatwaves and nationwide flooding contributing to depressed domestic demand.

INFRA MASTER PLANS, CLIMATE RESILIENCE

“What we are now trying to do is to improve the quality of spending, and that will particularly include infrastructure,” Balisacan said. “So we need to ensure that the infrastructure we put in place, like roads, bridges, flood controls are supported by properly prepared master plans.”

When it comes to disaster preparedness, meanwhile, Balisacan said government was investing in early warning systems and improving adaptation to climate change.

“We are also boosting investment in climate resilient agricultural inputs, technologies and infrastructure to raise farm productivity, ensure food security and support sustained export growth,” he said.
The agriculture, forestry, and fishing sector grew by 1 percent in the last quarter of 2025. Industry shrank by 0.9 percent, while services expanded by 5.2 percent.

On the demand side, meanwhile, government final consumption expenditure was at 3.7 percent, a gross capital formation contracted by 10.9 percent. Household final consumption expenditure was at 3.8 percent.

ROAD TO UPPER MIDDLE INCOME ECONOMY

Philippine economic managers have cut the country's economic growth target for 2026 to 5 to 6 percent.

Still, Balisacan said the country’s goal of becoming an upper middle economy by 2024 was realizable.

“But we need all this good good governance and good economic management to realize that. And actually, if our investments that we are making in human capital, particular education and health and infrastructure, that can elevate that potential to even higher, 6.5 or even seven,’ he noted.

“So again, our trust is to keep the fundamentals sound. We must not be distracted by noise political noises, otherwise you sacrifice those sound fundamentals for short term gains, and that's not good for long term growth.

Balisacan predicted that reforms now under way would lead to a bounce back in 2026.

"The resulting measures and governance reforms are necessary to strengthen accountability, improve project quality, ensure better value for scarce public resources, and build our capacity for faster and more sustainable growth in the years ahead," Balisacan said.

But London-based analysts Capital Economics, noting a 18.4 percent plunge in public investment, warned growth would likely remain soft, while predicting interest rate cuts in the near term.

"Overall, we expect the economy to grow by around 4.5 percent in 2026, which would remain below trend and consensus (5.3 percent)," said Asia economist Shivaan Tandon.

"With inflation set to stay low, we think the central bank has scope to deliver a couple more interest rate cuts in the coming months."

The Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI) said "recovery is now imperative" after the flood control mess hurt the economy.

"We must focus on ensuring that corrective and preventive measures to ensure that this kind of disruption will not happen again," said PCCI president Perry Ferrer.

Ferrer noted the adoption of the blockchain technology in the 2026 national budget, ensuring that every peso spent is accounted for and data cannot be altered.

BBC NEWS

What is the Paris agreement and why does 1.5C matter?
By: Mark Poynting and Esme Stallard

In Paris in 2015, almost 200 countries signed a landmark agreement designed to avoid the worst consequences of climate change.

But despite some progress in areas like renewable energy, the world has continued to warm at a rapid pace.

What is the Paris climate agreement?
The Paris agreement is at the heart of the international commitment to tackle rising global temperatures.

It came into force on 4 November 2016 and saw almost all the nations of the world agree to cut the greenhouse gas emissions which cause global warming.

However, the United States - the world's second biggest greenhouse gas emitter -withdrew from the deal in January 2026 under President Donald Trump.

The US also withdrew during Trump's first presidency, but it rejoined in 2021 under his successor President Joe Biden.

The only other UN member states outside the Paris agreement are Iran, Libya and Yemen.

What does the Paris agreement say?
The Paris agreement lists a series of commitments:

- to "pursue efforts" to limit global temperature rises to 1.5C, and to keep them "well below" 2.0C above those recorded in pre-industrial times, generally considered to mean the late 19th Century
- to achieve a balance - known as net zero - between the greenhouse gases that humans put into the atmosphere and the gases that they actively remove, in the second half of this century
- each country to set its own emission-reduction targets, reviewed every five years to raise ambitions
- richer countries to help poorer nations by providing funding, known as climate finance, to adapt to climate change and switch to renewable energy

The 1.5C target is generally accepted to refer to a 20-year average, rather than a single year.

So, while 2024 was more than 1.5C warmer than pre-industrial times, it did not mean the Paris agreement threshold has been breached.

Why does keeping global warming to 1.5C matter?

Every 0.1C of warming brings with it greater risks for the planet, such as longer heatwaves, more intense storms and wildfires, according to climate scientists.

But a very large body of scientific evidence shows that warming of 2C or more would bring far greater impacts, on top of those felt at 1.5C, UN scientists say.

These include:

- more people being exposed to extreme heat
- higher sea levels as glaciers and ice-sheets melt
- increased risks to food security in some regions due to more extreme weather
- greater chances of some climate-sensitive diseases spreading, such as dengue
- more species being threatened with extinction
- the loss of virtually all coral reefs

Some changes could become irreversible if so-called "tipping points" are crossed.

It is not clear exactly where these sit, but once these thresholds are passed, changes could accelerate and become irreversible.

These could include the collapse of the Greenland Ice Sheet, warm Atlantic Ocean currents or further loss of the Amazon rainforest.

What does the Paris agreement promise for poorer countries?

The Paris deal restated a 2009 commitment that richer countries should provide $100bn (around £73bn) annually by 2020, to help developing nations deal with the effects of climate change, and build greener economies.

Although only $83.3bn was raised in 2020 itself, data from the OECD shows the goal was eventually achieved in 2022.

In 2023, countries agreed for the first time that a fund should be established exclusively for loss and damage. This is money to help countries recover from the impacts of climate change.

At COP29 in 2024, richer nations committed to providing $300bn (around £219bn) a year to developing nations by 2035. Developing countries - which had hoped for more - criticised the "paltry sum".

What has happened since the Paris agreement?

World leaders meet every year to discuss their climate commitments at international summits known as COPs (Conference of the Parties).
All COPs since 2015 have tracked how countries are building on what they promised in Paris.

At COP28 in 2023, countries agreed for the first time to "contribute" to "transitioning away from fossil fuels", although they were not forced to take any specific action.

Countries also agreed to treble the global capacity of renewables - such as wind and solar - by 2030.

But the most recent summit, COP30 in 2025, failed to directly mention fossil fuels in the final deal.

Is the world on track to meet the 1.5C target?

The long-term 1.5C global warming target has not yet been breached.

But global emissions of carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels hit a new high in 2025, according to provisional data.

And according to the UN, countries' plans to cut emissions fall far short of what is needed to limit warming to 1.5C.

Based on current rates of warming, the world could pass 1.5C of warming around the year 2030.

"One thing is already clear: we will not be able to contain the global warming below 1.5C in the next few years," UN secretary general António Guterres said in October 2025.

However, Guterres also said that he hoped temperatures could still be brought back down to the 1.5C target by the end of the century.

Sharp cuts to emissions can still make a major difference to future warming and the impacts of climate change, scientists say.

BUSINESS MIRROR

Flood losses in Southeast Asia seen topping $10B in 2025

By: Justine Xyrah Garcia

Flooding across Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, may have pushed economic losses above $10 billion in 2025, far exceeding the $1 billion to $2 billion typically recorded during major regional flood events over the past decade, according to a new report by Willis.

In its Natural Catastrophe Review 2026, Willis said extreme rainfall in the second half of last year triggered severe flooding across the region, increasingly affecting areas outside traditional high-risk zones as climate-driven weather patterns become more volatile.

Dr. Christopher Au, head of the APAC Climate Risk Centre at Willis, said that the economic implications of these losses remain significant for businesses, governments and insurers.

“Early indication suggests that the flooding across the Southeast Asia region may result in economic losses well above $10 billion, compared with the $1 billion to $2 billion range typical of major regional flood events over the past decade,” Au said.

He added that warmer oceans, shifting storm formation zones and greater track sensitivity are making past patterns less reliable guides to future risk.

“With this changing operating environment, the role of counterfactuals is becoming more central to risk management strategies, to help understand possible impact from near misses and natural variability, and not just rely on past observations,” he said.

The Philippines was cited among the most exposed economies, with flooding compounding a series of disasters in the latter half of 2025.

The country was hit by Super Typhoon Ragasa, four major earthquakes and their aftershocks, followed by two additional landfalling typhoons, with successive events adding to damage and slowing recovery for businesses and local governments.

Willis said the Philippine experience reflects a broader regional shift toward more complex, overlapping hazards, where disasters strike in quick succession and magnify losses.

“This is precisely why risk-layered disaster financing, combining public, private and parametric solutions is becoming essential to safeguarding long-term resilience. They can help reduce volatility, support faster recovery and strengthen financial stability across Southeast Asia’s most disaster-prone economies,” Au added.

Globally, insured losses from natural catastrophes again topped $100 billion in 2025, marking the sixth consecutive year above that level.

ECO BUSINESS

What one year of Trump's climate censorship reveals

President Donald Trump has gone beyond policy overhauls to fundamentally alter the way the government talks about climate change and the environment, limiting or outright deleting countervailing language and evidence during the first year of his second term in office.

The administration has methodically removed references to climate change and environmental justice from government resources and even blocked or deleted access to longstanding data and information that might contradict or undermine his agenda.

The implications are vast – and could bite even harder during the remainder of his term.

"There is a perception that science that doesn't align with the agenda will be muzzled and findings that are often misrepresented or found wrong will be pushed out in order to support the agenda," said Jonathan Gilmour, who works with the Public Environmental Data Partners, a coalition restoring and preserving data.

Trump himself has dismissed climate change as a "con job," and his administration has worked to reopen shuttered coal plants, boost oil and natural gas production and axe tax incentives for renewable energy resources like wind and solar.

The White House did not respond to requests for comment.

"It undermines the entire premise of democracy to obfuscate what is happening both inside and outside of government and to attempt to silence scientists and end data streams that tell us about the world and about public health and about the environment around us," Gilmour said.

"I fear that we will be less safe and less healthy and not understand the risks to our lives and livelihoods."

'Natural' climate change

Among the most recent moves, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - the leading federal agency tasked with protecting human health and the environment – in December reportedly started quietly deleting references to "human caused" climate change from its online resources.

The agency has removed about 80 pages from its website, many of which related to the causes and impacts of climate change, said Izzy Pacenza with the Environmental Data & Governance Initiative, a group tracking changes to federal sites.

"On certain pages that remain accessible what was removed was very targeted information that talks about the anthropogenic causes of climate change," she said.

“So for example, on (the) EPA’s page for causes of climate change, the page is still up, but information about how human-caused climate change can’t be explained by natural events has been removed and all the information remaining is talking about natural reasons for variations in Earth’s climate,” she said.

References to “natural climate variability” or “natural variability” appeared often in an Energy Department-released report in July that was written by a handful of contrarian climate scientists who downplayed the dangers of global warming.

An EPA spokesperson said the agency “no longer takes marching orders from the climate cult.”

“At the Trump EPA, we uphold gold-standard science, total transparency, and a commitment to fulfilling our statutory obligations,” the spokesperson said.

“Previous iterations of the website that do not meet those standards are archived and available to the public.”

The administration has also ceased adding new information to a database of natural disasters totalling US$1 billion or more in damages.

And it has limited the public online availability of the National Climate Assessment, a congressionally mandated report that typically comes out every four years and documents human influence on the world’s rising temperatures.

“The biggest thing I’ve learned is that we can’t necessarily ascribe a rhyme or reason to the changes that we’re seeing to federal websites,” Pacenza said.

But the “targeted removal” of facts will “lead to a lack of trust,” she said.

Fighting back

Pacenza’s group and Gilmour are part of the Public Environmental Data Partners, which is working to preserve or move some climate-related data the administration is limiting.

“This crisis has forced the community to mobilise in a way that it would likely not have,” Gilmour said.

“And that means more interchange of ideas. That means a lot of renewed energy and attention from funders. And it means we can wrestle with these really big questions and engage with them and engage with one another and think about re-imagining the system that has clearly not worked.”

The research group Climate Central this month released its own version of the billion-dollar disaster database, and the private company Fulton Ring – also part of the Public Environmental Data Partners - did so last year.

While the raw number of full data sets that have disappeared might be relatively small, Gilmour worries that job cuts are also doing major damage. Many climate experts who have lost their jobs as the administration slashes the federal workforce are not being replaced, and neither is their knowledge base.

“What we’re seeing is the human infrastructure behind the data sets is … being cut, is being reassigned, is being intimidated,” he said.

“That has downstream effects that we don’t even understand yet,” he added. “There’s so much good work that will not get done because entire offices are now hollowed out.”

‘Hatchet’

Rachel Cleetus recalled getting an email message last year that said her contributions were no longer needed on the National Climate Assessment, the scope of which the administration had said last year it was in the process of reevaluating.

The initiative, formed in 1990, was due to release its sixth report in 2027. But work stopped after Trump eliminated funding and the experts writing the report were dismissed last year. The website hosting past reports was taken down.

“That kind of science, which is really the science that we need, is not policy prescriptive. It is not political. It is not partisan,” said Cleetus of the Union of Concerned Scientists, a nonprofit advocacy group.

The assessment has been a critical policy tool to help government and the private sector prepare for a changing climate.

“It’s … very fact-based information that you can use. And to cut that off - it’s a travesty.”

“The whole world is watching us,” said Cleetus. “This government is taking a hatchet to what was the crown jewel of the global scientific enterprise.”

PHILIPPINE INFORMATION AGENCY

NIA enhances preparations for dry season 2026

By: Shahana Joy Duerme-Mangasar

The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) is ensuring that the farms belonging to irrigators' associations (IA) within its coverage area are properly aligned with this year's dry season.

The NIA-M'lang/Malasila Rivers Irrigation System (NIA-MMRIS) in Cotabato Province currently intensifies the monitoring and inspection of Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD) practices in areas served by the system's seven irrigator associations.

"The MMRIS is closely monitoring our respective Irrigators Associations regarding the implementation of the "Alternate Wetting and Drying" water-saving technology. We are focusing on installation and proper monitoring to ensure efficient water irrigation, especially in downstream portions," Engr. Milbrend Anne B. Alburo, acting chief of systems at the MMRIS, said.

AWD is a water-saving technology used by farmers to reduce irrigation water consumption in rice fields while sustaining yield levels.

The NIA implemented this practice under Memorandum Circular No. 35, Series 2016, aiming to minimize water usage and mitigate the effects of climate change.

"Through the implementation of Alternate Wetting and Drying in the Mlang-Malasila River Irrigation System, water consumption was reduced, resulting in 100% cropping intensity for both seasons and increased yields for local farmers," Alburo emphasized.

At present, the AWD method is being implemented on a total of 7,641.23 hectares of rice farmland within the coverage area of the MMRIS.

According to the MMRIS chief, the IA has developed contingency plans for water delivery, distribution, and effective communication in the event of inadequate water supply during the dry season.

The MMRIS, in addition to the AWD, enhances desilting activities in irrigation canals. This initiative aims to ensure the efficient flow of irrigation water to the farms of the irrigators' association.

Furthermore, it promotes the planting of diverse crops to help farmers maintain their income throughout changing seasons.

The dry season, as outlined in the approved cropping calendar, officially began on October 16, 2025, and is projected to continue until April 15, 2026.

THE GUARDIAN

US leads record global surge in gas-fired power driven by AI demands, with big costs for the climate

The US is leading a huge global surge in new gas-fired power generation that will cause a major leap in planet-heating emissions, with this record boom driven by the expansion of energy-hungry datacenters to service artificial intelligence, according to a new forecast.

This year is set to shatter the annual record for new gas power additions around the world, with projects in development expected to grow existing global gas capacity by nearly 50%, a report by Global Energy Monitor (GEM) found.

The US is at the forefront of a global push for gas that is set to escalate over the next five years, after tripling its planned gas-fired capacity in 2025. Much of this new capacity will be devoted to the vast electricity needs of AI, with a third of the 252 gigawatts of gas power in development set to be situated on site at datacenters.

All of this new gas energy is set to come at a significant cost to the climate, amid ongoing warnings from scientists that fossil fuels must be rapidly phased out to avoid disastrous global heating.

The gas projects in development in the US will, if all completed, cause 12.1bn tonnes in carbon dioxide emissions over their lifetimes, which is double the current annual emissions coming from all sources in the US. Worldwide, the planned gas boom will cause 53.2bn tonnes of emissions over projects' lifetimes if fulfilled, pushing the planet towards even worse heatwaves, droughts, floods and other climate impacts.

"Locking in new gas plants to meet uncertain AI energy demand means hard-wiring decades of pollution into a gambit that could be solved with flexible, clean power," said Jenny Martos, project manager at GEM's oil and gas plant tracker.

"As the AI bubble inflates, the US must decide whether it will double down on a fossil future while the rest of the world pivots to renewables."

Several countries around the world are betting big on gas, according to GEM's tracker, which tallies projects that have been announced or are at various stages of construction. Last year, China, the world's largest carbon emitter, installed 22.4GW of gas, its most gas capacity ever for single year.

But it is the US that is leading the way, accounting for nearly a quarter of all global gas capacity in development, followed by China, Vietnam, Iraq and Brazil. Texas is the center of this boom in the US, with 57.9GW of new gas power under way last year, leading Louisiana and

Pennsylvania. In 2026, new gas additions are set to surpass the annual record of 100GW of new gas added in the US, set in 2002.

Much of this power will be swallowed up by vast datacenters being built by tech companies to grow the AI industry. The growth of AI has been enthusiastically promoted by Donald Trump, with the president stating his administration will do “whatever it takes” for the US to lead in AI, vowing to sweep away “foolish rules” that slow the build-out of datacenters.

The proliferation of datacenters has, however, caused a bump in greenhouse gas emissions and boosted demand for electricity. This has raised power bills for many Americans, despite Trump’s promise to cut such costs in half in his first year in office.

The administration has also blocked numerous clean energy projects and has escalated the export of liquified natural gas, with both measures raising the price of energy for American households, experts say. Domestic gas prices rose last year and, after a static 2026, are forecast to surge again next year.

“Frenzied datacenter growth with little transparency or guardrails puts the public at risk of massive cost increases,” said Steve Clemmer, director of energy research at the Union of Concerned Scientists, which predicts electricity demand in the US could explode 60% by 2050 due to new datacenters.

A grassroots backlash against datacenters over power bills and the facilities’ rampant use of water has, however, halted some projects and caused a political headache for Republicans, with Trump recently promising that big tech companies such as Microsoft will “pay their own way” for the new infrastructure, although details on such a plan are scant.

“I said, You can’t create this much energy,” Trump conceded recently at a speech in Davos, Switzerland. “We needed more than double the energy currently in the country just to take care of the AI plants, and I said we can’t do that.”

The datacenter juggernaut shows little sign of slowing down, however, with plans such as tech giant Meta building a $1.5bn datacenter, powered by gas, in El Paso, Texas.

In western Pennsylvania, meanwhile, a shuttered coal plant is set to be resurrected as the largest gas-fired facility in the US in order to service a datacenter campus. The plan for the 3,200-acre Homer City site, about 50 miles east of Pittsburgh, has divided the local community, according to Tom Pike, director of campaigns at the Clean Air Council, a local green group.

“The coal plant was an environmental monstrosity, but it was a pillar of the local economy and some people are nostalgic for that,” Pike said.

“But no one wants to live next to a datacenter. The ammonia, and the smell of that, from gas will be worse than the coal plant, and the power generated will be used in service of private profit rather than keep households’ lights on.

“There’s no way it won’t impact power prices, either. There is tremendous public concern about this plan.”

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