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AZER NEWS

[Azerbaijan gears up for COP29: A Comprehensive Overview](#)

By: Nigar Hasanova

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ECO BUSINESS

[\[Opinion\] Climate disclosure rules are expanding. Companies need to keep up](#)

By: Janet Ranganathan

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[Opinion] Realising the potential of the climate loss and damage fund

By: Monique Barbut and Robert Filipp

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MANILABULLETIN

ADB's regional climate financing up 46% in 2023

By: Lee Chipongian

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COP28: 'Dangerous human interference with the climate system'

By: Mat Richter

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NIKKEI ASIA

Climate change fuels humanitarian risks in Asia, Red Cross warns

By: Norman Goh

The continued impacts of climate change will pose challenges across the Asia-Pacific region, becoming a major driver of humanitarian crises, the regional head of an international relief organization warned.

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

Catalonia declares drought emergency

For the first time, the government of Catalonia declared a drought emergency, announcing on Thursday new restrictions that will affect around 5.9 million people.

DENR partners with NASA for air quality research in Metro Manila

The Philippines will be part of an international collaboration with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to study and address air quality issues in the Asian region, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga announced on Sunday.

SUNSTAR

El Niño drives dreaded snakes out of habitat

By: Kaiser Jan Fuentes

THE surge in the number of cobra sightings in Cebu may be related to the ongoing El Niño phenomenon, climate change, and human interference with the natural habitat, according to the Department of Health Central Visayas (DOH 7).

THE BUSINESS STANDARD

ADB Commits Record Climate Finance of Almost \$10 Billion in 2023

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) committed a record amount of climate finance in 2023 to help its developing member countries (DMCs) in Asia and the Pacific cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of a warming planet.

THE MANILA TIMES

'Help farmers cope with climate change'

By: Bernadette E. Tamayo

SEN. Christopher "Bong" Go has called on Agriculture Secretary Francisco Laurel Jr. to help farmers recover from the impact of climate change to ensure food security.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Better data, resource valuation needed for Southeast Asian wetlands — ACB

By: Gaea Katreena Cabico

Investing in data collection and natural resource valuation initiatives is crucial to achieving more effective wetland restoration in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) said.

Marcos pushes solar-powered irrigation program

By: Helen Flores

The government will undertake a nationwide solar-powered irrigation program to help achieve its goal of rice self-sufficiency, President Marcos announced yesterday.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

AZER NEWS

Azerbaijan gears up for COP29: A Comprehensive Overview

By: Nigar Hasanova

Azerbaijan confirmed its commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 35% by 2030, increasing this objective to 40% by 2050. The government of Azerbaijan prioritizes fulfilling the pledges made under the 2015 Paris Agreement and actively works toward this goal.

Since 1995, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has been convened every year. The event aims to examine global progress in combating climate change.

The 29th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29) will take place in Azerbaijan in 2024. The decision was made during the plenary session of COP28 on December 11. Addressing the event, Azerbaijan's Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Mukhtar Babayev, thanked the Convention Secretariat and the United Arab Emirates for the exceptional organizing of COP28.

"The issues we face necessitate collective effort and adherence to broadly shared goals and ideals. Azerbaijan recognizes the critical importance of collaborative efforts to combat climate change," the minister stated.

Following that announcement, Azerbaijan hosted the first meeting of the Organizing Committee in conjunction with the 29th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29), the 19th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, and the 6th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement.

Samir Nuriyev, Head of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Chairman of the Organizing Committee, opened the meeting by stating that one of Azerbaijan's national priorities for social and economic development until 2030 is defined as a Country of Clean Environment and Green Growth, which is our country's base year. In comparison to 1990, he promised to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 35 percent by 2030, declaring the economic zones of liberated Garabagh and East Zangezur, and designating the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic a green energy zone. He further emphasized that Azerbaijan actively participates in international efforts to protect the environment and combat global climate change.

Since taking on the position of host, Azerbaijan has addressed numerous collaboration opportunities as well as preparation processes with several countries.

As an example, the Davos economic form also provided a venue for the Azerbaijani government to present its activities as COP29 host at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

"We reiterated our commitment to COP29's green agenda and global climate action," said Mikayil Jabbarov, Minister of Economy.

During that event, Azerbaijan and the UAE discussed cooperation under the framework of COP29. On the fringes of the Davos Economic Forum, the delegation met with Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri, the Minister of Economy of the United Arab Emirates and co-chairman of the Azerbaijan-UAE Joint Intergovernmental Commission.

"Those include preparations for the 9th session of the Azerbaijan-UAE Joint Intergovernmental Commission, enhancement of trade turnover and initiatives for developing business ties, collaboration within COP29, prospects for joint projects in the transition to sustainable energy sources," Mikayil Jabbarov, said.

In terms of private company corporations, the Azerbaijani delegation met with Eddy Pirard, President and CEO of Japan Tobacco International, and Ana Veljkovic, Director for International Affairs of Japan Tobacco International at the event. Their discussions centered on bilateral cooperation with the corporation. Furthermore, they addressed the future activities within the framework of COP29 that will be hosted by Azerbaijan, as well as the attraction of the private sector to the activity of COP29.

Minister also met with Sergio Mujica, Secretary-General of the International Organization for Standardization (IOS). Their conversations focused on the application of standards to give effective answers to global concerns, as well as actions to promote a high-quality ecological environment in our country. They discussed cooperation within the COP29, which will be hosted in Azerbaijan, as well as engagement with partner organizations to establish a robust program for the worldwide standards community.

Furthermore, Azerbaijani Minister of Energy Parviz Shahbazov and Deputy Foreign Minister of Germany, Special Envoy for International Climate Affairs Jennifer Morgan addressed activities related to the next COP29 in Baku, as well as discussion on the green energy transition.

The building of solar and wind power plants in Azerbaijan would increase the country's total electricity generation from renewable energy sources. This generation can be delivered to Europe via a unique energy corridor developed in conjunction with four countries, according to the information provided by the ministry. The parties discussed

the energy sector's responsibility in reducing climate change and complying with international accords.

"We're eager to engage with the president and look forward to doing so. We are excited to collaborate with Azerbaijan on the 15th Petersberg Climate Dialogue, which will be hosted in Germany. We will do everything we can to make this meeting a success. We will do everything we can to ensure that this COP builds on the last one and maintains the momentum," said Jennifer Morgan.

Azerbaijan's effective collaboration with the EBRD highlights the country's commitment to expanding its relationship with the bank. Azerbaijan's cooperation initiatives with the EBRD help to expedite the adoption of advanced methods, contemporary technology, and innovations for the country's long-term growth.

Azerbaijan's Minister of Economy, Mikayil Jabbarov, met with Harry Boyd-Carpenter, Managing Director of Climate Strategy and Delivery at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The economy minister stated that Azerbaijan's hosting of the 29th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29) provides momentum for the expansion of cooperation with the EBRD in the field of global climate strategy.

Members of the EBRD delegation expressed an interest in maintaining their beneficial relationship with Azerbaijan. They also expressed the EBRD's support for green energy transition initiatives and expanded usage of renewable energy sources in Azerbaijan. The meeting also covered the preparations for Azerbaijan's hosting of the COP29 Conference, as well as the establishment of dialogue with international organizations and the implementation of appropriate energy efficiency rules.

IPU Secretary General Martin Chungong visited Baku and emphasized that one critical aspect of the IPU-Azerbaijan collaboration is the battle against climate change.

"We have difficulties with climate change. This year, Azerbaijan has been chosen to host COP 29. It is a significant duty, and I applaud Azerbaijan for hosting that meeting. And, as with every major global process, the IPU wants to mobilize parliaments to support the efforts of governments and other stakeholders, particularly in the area of climate change. As we all know, climate warming is an existential threat to humanity, and everyone must work together to take action to minimize this unstoppable emergency. Another issue I've discussed with Azerbaijani authorities, and I'm pleased that we can count on the parliament's support here in Baku to organize a parliamentary summit during COP29 to mobilize parliaments' support for climate action in the context of the Paris Agreement," said the IPU secretary general.

Overall although there are several problems in getting the conference to Baku. Azerbaijan's preparation for COP29 demonstrates a comprehensive approach that includes national pledges, international cooperation, engagement with the corporate sector, and active participation in global forums. As the country prepares to host this important event, it prioritizes environmental sustainability and battling climate change. However, with correct connections and cooperation Azerbaijan can successfully host COP 29 and this will be an important milestone in showing Azerbaijan's commitment to green energy and the UN 2030 agenda.

ECO BUSINESS

[Opinion] Climate disclosure rules are expanding. Companies need to keep up

By: Janet Ranganathan

I predict the year 2024 will be a banner year for accelerating corporate climate action. Why am I so bullish? Because regulations requiring companies to disclose their greenhouse gas emissions are becoming the law around the world, including in the United States and Europe.

These new laws will soon cover over half the world's economy, putting pressure on corporations to calculate how much they're emitting and to share publicly what they've learned. Ensuring that businesses accurately measure and disclose this information is the first step towards slashing the carbon pollution that is rapidly warming our planet.

Many corporations have been voluntarily disclosing their emissions using the Greenhouse Gas Protocol Corporate Standard, which in 2001 created a global, standardised framework for how to accurately measure and report them.

By 2022, nearly 19,000 companies have publicly shared their emissions information through the nonprofit CDP, which helps companies calculate and disclose the environmental impacts of their operations. But even with these gains, fewer than half of publicly listed corporations are reporting.

Mandatory disclosure laws are quickly closing that gap.

For instance, last year California passed a law requiring corporations to publicly disclose their emissions which could end up applying to 75 per cent of public companies in the Fortune 1000. And this spring the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission is expected to finalise a rule requiring all publicly traded companies to do the same, as well as divulge climate-related risks.

Meanwhile, an EU law recently entered into force requiring companies to disclose emissions information according to the newly adopted European Sustainability Reporting Standards.

Critically, the new laws in the United States and Europe require companies to report emissions across their entire value chains, including their products and services. Known as Scope 3 emissions, they can account for as much as three quarters of companies' footprint.

Additionally, more than a dozen countries and jurisdictions have adopted new standards that will require companies to disclose their emissions. This step alone will impact between 100,000 and 130,000 companies globally.

Corporations need to adjust to this profound shift by making major investments in greenhouse gas accounting right now.

Mandating companies to disclose their emissions represents a major step forward, but it is just the first one toward the ultimate goal of driving down greenhouse gases. Corporations must also be working harder – and faster – to reduce these emissions.

To that end, over 4,000 of these companies have voluntarily set, or committed to set, ambitious emission reduction targets in collaboration with the Science Based Targets initiative. But while those numbers are impressive, encouraging voluntary reductions is insufficient to the task at hand.

Governments have a crucial role to play in speeding the process along.

New approaches for doing so are emerging. Last year, for instance, the EU took steps toward enacting a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism that will soon begin levying fees on companies importing cement, steel, fertiliser, and other emissions-intensive materials from trading partners.

And the European Commission has already issued a draft proposal requiring member states to reduce greenhouse-gas-producing food waste in processing and manufacturing by 10 per cent, and at retail and consumption levels by 30 per cent. If passed, it will make the EU the first region in the world to adopt legally binding targets to lessen the impact of food waste.

Climate change is a whole-of-economy problem and requires the private sector to be part of the solution. With all these new disclosure rules coming online, corporations' climate efforts will be under more scrutiny than ever before.

Now is the time for all businesses to not only map out a compliance plan but also sharpen their focus on driving down emissions.

[Opinion] Realising the potential of the climate loss and damage fund

By: Monique Barbut and Robert Filipp

In the vein of “We Are the World,” the 1985 hit that sold more than 20 million copies globally, the song “Lasting Legacy” was released at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai. The official charity anthem features 13 artists from around the world singing about unity, cooperation, and climate action.

One legacy of COP28 that ought to be commemorated in song is the launch of the Loss and Damage Fund. This new channel for multilateral finance aims to support developing countries that are facing ballooning costs from storms, heatwaves, floods, landslides, wildfires, droughts, sea-level rise, biodiversity loss, and desertification. These adverse effects of global warming are causing hundreds of billions of dollars in damage every year.

Currently, however, pledges to the Loss and Damage Fund are well below target. At COP28, donor countries, led by France, Germany, Italy, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom, promised around US\$700 million – far short of what is needed to meet the challenge.

Despite that, the UAE’s commitment is a welcome departure from the widely held view that only those countries with a historic responsibility for climate change should pay for loss and damage. It signals to today’s world that the responsibility for the state of the planet and its climate must be borne by everyone, while underscoring the importance of multilateral cooperation, especially among powerful governments.

To be sure, billions of dollars are already being invested in climate-change mitigation and adaptation through the multilateral system. Nearly all international financing institutions have facilities devoted to this end. The International Monetary Fund, for example, has its Resilience and Sustainability Trust, which received at least US\$41.1 billion in pledges as of November 2023.

Meanwhile, the UN has several, including the Central Emergency Response Fund, which spent around US\$2.2 billion between 2006 and 2022 on efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change, and Country-Based Pooled Funds. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Synthesis Report on Loss and Damage (which one of us co-authored) identified some 45 funding windows dedicated to disaster preparedness, with 13 more focused on emergency response.

This raises the question of where the Loss and Damage Fund fits in this crowded and complex terrain. Certainly, there is still a great need for financing: significant gaps

remain, and the lack of grant funding, especially for recovery and reconstruction, is particularly worrisome.

It will also be crucial to expand climate-risk insurance coverage and facilitate debt swaps (and deferrals) to create more fiscal space amid surging global interest rates. On the other hand, the new fund risks becoming another vain attempt to mend a multilateral system that is outdated and unfit for purpose – especially if it is underfunded.

To avoid that outcome, the Loss and Damage Fund should move away from a project-based model that involves doling out small amounts of money. Given the scale of the challenge and the intensity of people's suffering, the Fund should instead embrace structural and policy innovations that would help establish a new generation of multilateral organisations.

The Summit for a New Global Financing Pact, convened by French President Emmanuel Macron last year, and the Bridgetown Initiative led by Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley provide many starting points and proposals for redesigning the global financial system.

More specifically, the Loss and Damage Fund could create a new template for countries to mobilise domestic resources for climate mitigation and adaption more effectively, and to access global financial markets and multilateral lending at fair terms, as well as different forms of debt relief. The Fund could also design a global insurance scheme for the most vulnerable households and small and medium-size businesses.

In today's fragmented world, the Loss and Damage Fund could easily be derailed. But it is in our common interest to assist the most climate-vulnerable countries with recovery and reconstruction in a way that does not compromise development gains achieved over past decades. Providing these countries with enough resources, financial and otherwise, would ensure stability for us all.

MANILABULLETIN

ADB's regional climate financing up 46% in 2023

By: Lee Chipongian

Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) said it has committed a total of \$9.8 billion in climate financing in Asia and the Pacific in 2023, up 46 percent versus its 2022 climate-related funding.

In a statement, ADB said its climate finance to developing member countries (DMCs) such as the Philippines is aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to help DMCs “adapt to the impacts of a warming planet.”

Last year, ADB committed \$1 billion to the Philippines’ first large-scale electric bus system in Davao City. It is one of the multilateral bank’s flagship projects in 2023.

Other projects include a \$400 million Bangladesh loan for climate-focused development and an \$18 million grant for the Federated States of Micronesia to finance the sustainability of its water supply and sanitation services.

ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa said climate change “threatens the future of all development (and) 2023 was the hottest year on record and saw a swath of extreme, deadly climate impacts in our region.”

“This crisis threatens energy and food security and creates fiscal challenges. As the climate bank for Asia and the Pacific, ADB is deeply committed to helping our developing members de-fossilize their economies, progress along their climate transition pathways, and achieve their net-zero goals. We must act together, with urgency and at scale,” he added.

Meanwhile, ADB said that of the \$9.8 billion climate financing last year, about \$5.5 billion is for mitigation and \$4.3 billion for adaptation.

“The bank’s climate adaptation finance commitments in 2023 mean that ADB has provided more than \$10.4 billion in cumulative adaptation financing from 2019 to 2023—surpassing its target of \$9 billion in 2019–2024 a year early,” it said, adding that “adaptation financing is critical in Asia and the Pacific which is experiencing more extreme heat, droughts, and heavy rains, but where investments in adaptation remain a fraction of what is required.”

ADB noted that more than half of global carbon dioxide emissions are from Asia and the Pacific.

“(While) also being acutely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (the) region needs to invest an estimated \$3.1 trillion per year in energy and transport assets alone to meet net zero by 2050—around 50% more than current levels,” it said.

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COP28: 'Dangerous human interference with the climate system'

By: Mat Richter

The ambitious climate change mitigation goal requires that the world's average temperature should not exceed that of pre-industrial times by more than 1.5 C, demanding a significant emission cut within seven years.

Addressing climate change, in turn, is ever-crucial, particularly at COP28 – the 28th Conference of the Parties. During this event, United Nations member states convened to assess progress and strategize climate action following UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) guidelines.

The world's highest decision-making process on climate issues hosted over 70,000 delegates, including heads of state and world leaders, to build consensus and facilitate progress on climate action.

COP28 concluded in December 2023 at Expo City in Dubai, intending to combat "dangerous human interference with the climate system."

The 13-day climate summit focused on prioritizing funding for the Loss and Damage Fund to aid developing countries in managing disaster losses. Developed nations pledged financial support. The Philippines, among the most climate-vulnerable globally, joined the Loss and Damage Fund Board.

Delegates also debated the phasing out of fossil fuels, the primary cause of warming emissions, and the transition to solar and wind energy to align with the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting warming.

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[Opinion] Keep the country's 5 GEMs healthy with biodiversity

Yes, the Philippines is beautiful! Those who have made time to see the country know that it was not a waste of time to go see the Philippines, perhaps one weekend of the year at a time.

Recently, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) called attention to five of those beautiful spots, the Five GEMs (Green Economy Models) — El Nido, Coron, Siargao, Panglao and Puerto Galera.

DENR is working with the Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) to preserve the biodiversity of the Five GEMs. Government agencies are closely monitoring these prime tourist destinations for their water resource management, solid waste management, land use planning and enforcement of easement zones, and public-private partnerships.

Biodiversity is not only important to keep a prime tourist spot pretty but it is important to preserve the ecosystems that support life.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said the department has allocated ₱600 million for the agency's biodiversity management projects this year, specifically for the enhancement of the marine research station and the conservation of threatened species, such as the Philippine Eagle, Tamaraw, Dugong, Palawan Cockatoo, and marine turtles.

The importance of biodiversity to sustainability cannot be over-emphasized. It provides us with many products to sustain our survival – food, water, medicines, materials for shelter, protection from coastal erosion, and mitigation of climate change, with forests absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

The World Wildlife organization puts it simply: "Biodiversity is all the different kinds of life you'll find in one area—the variety of animals, plants, fungi, and even microorganisms like bacteria that make up our natural world. Each of these species and organisms work together in ecosystems, like an intricate web, to maintain balance and support life."

Since the Philippines is recognized for its rich biodiversity, the DENR chief said that most of the foreign funding it receives is related to the preservation of biodiversity.

We know that biodiversity is linked to climate, linked to food, linked to water, Sec. Loyzaga emphasized.

One of the problems that the agencies have to deal with is plastic pollution especially in the tourist areas. It seems that the more visitors a beautiful place attracts, the bigger the problem of plastic pollution mostly coming from food and product packaging. If solid waste disposal remains mismanaged, beach areas will be at risk of being temporarily closed for rehabilitation, similar to the case of Boracay Island years ago. This concern was expressed by DILG Secretary Benjamin Abalos during the meeting.

The five major threats to biodiversity have been identified as climate change, pollution, habitat loss, overexploitation of species and invasive species.

To keep the Philippines beautiful, especially its Five GEMs, more concern for a healthy biodiversity from the human population is needed to help the efforts of the DENR, DOT and the DILG.

The clarion call is for all local communities to participate in protecting our biodiversity and enhance the appeal of domestic tourist attractions in every corner of the nation.

NIKKEI ASIA

Climate change fuels humanitarian risks in Asia, Red Cross warns

By: Norman Goh

The continued impacts of climate change will pose challenges across the Asia-Pacific region, becoming a major driver of humanitarian crises, the regional head of an international relief organization warned.

"We are now living in a long emergency of accelerating climate risks that will affect everybody in the world and some countries more than others," said Alexander Matheou, Asia Pacific regional director at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), in a recent interview with Nikkei Asia.

The IFRC says some countries are more vulnerable due to their greater exposure to extreme weather and lower adaptation capacities.

The organization has projected 560 annual disasters annually by 2030, potentially pushing 37.6 million people into extreme poverty. In the Asia-Pacific region, the IFRC cautioned that countries like Bangladesh and the Philippines remain vulnerable to extremely devastating storms.

Moreover, the IFRC expects climate change to cause an increase in tropical diseases like dengue fever in the region. By 2050, it is estimated that 500 million to 700 million people there will face a 20% increase in the probability of lethal heat waves.

Matheou, who is based in Kuala Lumpur, noted that Asia-Pacific countries may receive less support from international humanitarian funds due to accelerating human-made risks in the rest of the world, such as the ongoing wars between Ukraine and Russia and Israel and Palestine.

"In 2021, with Myanmar and Afghanistan very much in the news, Asia-Pacific was quite prominent," Matheou said. "Once the war broke out in Ukraine, and then the large-scale earthquakes in Syria and Turkey, and the major disasters in Libya and Morocco, and now Gaza, you see that world attention is shifting away, from a humanitarian perspective, from the Asia-Pacific."

He called for people to seriously consider such climate risks, as many countries in Asia and the world have critical elections this year. "It's a big election year for the world. For those who are in a position to vote ... take climate risk seriously, and [take] investment in preparedness and mitigation seriously," he said. "It's something we should do."

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

Catalonia declares drought emergency

For the first time, the government of Catalonia declared a drought emergency, announcing on Thursday new restrictions that will affect around 5.9 million people.

"It is the worst drought on record," Catalan President Pere Aragones told a press conference. "Climate change is testing us like the pandemic."

The reservoirs that provide water to around 80 percent of the Catalan population are just 15.8 percent full, after a prolonged drought and a recent abnormal dry spell.

The Catalan authorities said they may need to bring in drinking water by boat before the summer, something also seen in 2008.

The city and province of Barcelona, the city of Girona, and most of the surrounding area, as well as much of the Costa Brava, are entering an emergency phase and will have to cope with new restrictions from Friday.

"I am absolutely convinced that with collaboration, anticipation, and a huge collective effort, we can overcome this drought," said Aragones.

The emergency declaration aims to limit water consumption to 200 liters (52 gallons) of water per capita, a figure that includes economic and commercial activities.

Any municipality that exceeds the water consumption cap will have to reduce the water pressure or cut off water for certain hours each day. If not, they will face fines from the regional government.

Prohibitions on use

At the moment, the City of Barcelona consumes 173 liters of water per day, so it will avoid being forced to impose water cuts for now. But, as reservoirs dry up, new emergency phases will be enacted, lowering caps to 180 liters per day and then 160 liters per day.

Economic sectors will already be hit with water cuts regardless. Agricultural activities will have to reduce water use by 80 percent (50% for livestock) and industry will see water cuts of 25 percent.

Filling most swimming pools will also be forbidden unless the establishments use salt water and aren't connected to the public system or if the pools are used for sports and can show responsible water use or have recirculation systems in place.

Ornamental lakes, fountains, or other "aesthetic uses" of water will also be illegal unless they are used to protect specific species of animals.

Watering gardens with drinking water has already been banned for months, as the areas already had "pre-emergency" restrictions in place.

One exception has been the watering of trees or historic gardens to ensure they stay alive. However, if the emergency reaches phase three, only special trees will be deemed worthy of the scarce water.

New projects that will require intensive water usage such as new farms, urban plans, or tourism projects will also be banned as well.

Besides the lack of rain, last year was the hottest year on record for Catalonia, further pulling moisture from the land.

In Barcelona, this past January was also 2.2°C (4°F) warmer than the average month, smashing all records since record-keeping began in 1914, according to the Fabra Observatory. The hottest day reached 21.2°C (70.16°F).

Looking ahead to next week's forecast, not a drop of rain is expected for Barcelona either, according to the Spanish meteorological agency Aemet.

DENR partners with NASA for air quality research in Metro Manila

The Philippines will be part of an international collaboration with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to study and address air quality issues in the Asian region, Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga announced on Sunday.

Loyzaga disclosed that NASA will be conducting scientific research flights that are specifically designed to study the atmosphere of Metro Manila and its surrounding regions, with engineers and air quality specialists of the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) of the DENR boarding the flights and learning from the NASA scientists on board.

"This collaboration with NASA and other respected partners will lead to significant advances in our understanding of air pollution and our ability to tackle this pressing issue," Loyzaga said.

"The data gathered from the research flights will be used in our programs to mitigate air quality issues that affect public health and to address climate change," she added.

The partnership, called Airborne and Satellite Investigation of Asian Air Quality (ASIA – AQ), brings together experts from NASA in the United States, the DENR, South Korea's National Institute of Environmental Research (NIER), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), and Thailand's Geo-Informatics and Space Technology Development Agency (GISTDA).

Loyzaga said the NASA mission will be using advanced satellite technology, ground-based observations, and airborne missions to gain a better understanding of the air quality problems specific to Metro Manila.

"The collaboration will help to improve air quality models, provide accurate forecasts, and develop effective policies to ensure better air quality in the future," she added.

In the Philippines, this collaboration also involves the Philippine Space Agency, Manila Observatory, Ateneo de Manila University, and the University of the Philippines.

They will be joining hands to understand and tackle air pollution challenges in the region.

THE BUSINESS STANDARD

[ADB Commits Record Climate Finance of Almost \\$10 Billion in 2023](#)

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) committed a record amount of climate finance in 2023 to help its developing member countries (DMCs) in Asia and the Pacific cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of a warming planet.

ADB committed \$9.8 billion in climate finance from its own resources last year—\$5.5 billion for mitigation and \$4.3 billion for adaptation—a more than 46% increase on its 2022 climate financing commitments, says an ADB statement.

The bank's climate adaptation finance commitments in 2023 mean that ADB has provided more than \$10.4 billion in cumulative adaptation financing from 2019 to 2023—surpassing its target of \$9 billion in 2019–2024 a year early.

Adaptation financing is critical in Asia and the Pacific which is experiencing more extreme heat, droughts, and heavy rains, but where investments in adaptation remain a fraction of what is required.

"Climate change threatens the future of all development. 2023 was the hottest year on record and saw a swath of extreme, deadly climate impacts in our region," said ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa.

"This crisis threatens energy and food security and creates fiscal challenges. As the climate bank for Asia and the Pacific, ADB is deeply committed to helping our developing members de-fossilize their economies, progress along their climate transition pathways, and achieve their net-zero goals. We must act together, with urgency and at scale."

Asia and the Pacific originates more than half of global carbon dioxide emissions while also being acutely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

The region needs to invest an estimated \$3.1 trillion per year in energy and transport assets alone to meet net zero by 2050—around 50% more than current levels.

As Asia and the Pacific's climate bank, ADB aims to provide \$100 billion in climate financing from its own resources from 2019 to 2030.

In 2022, ADB committed \$6.7 billion of climate finance from its own resources, including \$4 billion for mitigation and \$2.7 billion for adaptation.

ADB's flagship climate projects in 2023 include a \$400 million policy-based loan to help Bangladesh implement its national adaptation plan and pursue climate-focused development; a \$1 billion loan to help deploy the Philippines' first large-scale electric bus system in Davao City; and an \$18 million grant from the Asian Development Fund (ADF) to improve the resilience, inclusiveness, and sustainability of water supply and sanitation services in the Federated States of Micronesia.

The ADF provides grants to ADB's lower-income DMCs to promote poverty reduction and improvements in the quality of life.

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 68 members—49 from the region.

SUNSTAR

El Niño drives dreaded snakes out of habitat

By: Kaiser Jan Fuentes

THE surge in the number of cobra sightings in Cebu may be related to the ongoing El Niño phenomenon, climate change, and human interference with the natural habitat, according to the Department of Health Central Visayas (DOH 7).

Shelbay Blanco of the DOH 7 health emergency management services pointed out that snakes often seek cooler places when exposed to extreme hot weather.

Cobras, with their heightened sensitivity to temperature changes, may venture outside their usual habitats during periods of intensified heat.

Extreme warmth could drive these cold-blooded snakes to explore alternative environments with cooler or more suitable temperatures.

"With more provinces being affected by drought, we are also expecting and anticipating that more snakes will come out," Blanco said in mix Cebuano and English, adding that not only cobras are affected with the ongoing weather phenomenon but also other types of snakes.

El Niño is a natural climate pattern characterized by warmer sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific resulting in below-normal rainfall.

Meanwhile, climate change is the long-term shift in the Earth's weather patterns, primarily caused by human activities releasing greenhouse gases.

Earlier, Alfredo Quiblat Jr., chief of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) Mactan, said the El Niño phenomenon, which has been classified as "strong," is expected to affect parts of the country, including Cebu until the first half of 2024.

Quiblat forecasts an increased likelihood of below-normal rainfall in various parts of the country, including Visayas, with dry conditions expected in Cebu from February onward.

By March, the region may be in the midst of a dry spell, and Quiblat anticipates an intensification of the phenomenon, leading to a drought in May.

Public health experts convened in a press conference on Thursday, Feb. 01, 2024 at DOH 7 office in Cebu City to address the public concerns arising from the escalating number of cobra encounters in recent months.

Apart from climatic factors, habitat disruption emerged as a crucial element contributing to the increased snake activity. This includes deforestation.

"As they say, 'what we do comes back to us.' We are experiencing it now," Quiblat said.

Last Tuesday, Jan. 29, Carlo Babiera, an ecosystems management specialist at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Central Visayas, said the mating season of king cobras typically occurs between January and April. He said this could have influenced the recent sightings.

Barbiera also said the encroachment of human settlements into natural habitats has disrupted ecosystems, pushing snakes out of their accustomed territories to search for food in other places, including residential areas infested with rodents.

Beethoven Bongon, toxicologist at the Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center, urged the public to always clean their surroundings as a preventive measure to reduce the attractiveness of homes to rats.

"Those snakes, not talking about climate, will go to areas where their prey is, and their usual prey is rats. If your house is clean and free of rats, there's less chance," he said.

THE MANILA TIMES

'Help farmers cope with climate change'

By: Bernadette E. Tamayo

SEN. Christopher "Bong" Go has called on Agriculture Secretary Francisco Laurel Jr. to help farmers recover from the impact of climate change to ensure food security.

The senator raised the urgency of implementing long-term strategies to mitigate the effects of weather irregularities.

"We should not neglect our farmers," said Go in a chance interview on February 1 in Quezon, Nueva Ecija, after aiding displaced workers.

He said the Department of Agriculture (DA) should keep the farmers in a stable and productive state since they are the "backbone of the nation's food supply."

Go deplored the "precarious situation of the farmers who live a hand-to-mouth existence" as he sought government support to uplift their condition.

He noted the significance of Nueva Ecija, the rice granary of the Philippines. Farmers should receive financial aid, fertilizers and other farm equipment, he said.

The DA reported that the El Niño phenomenon has inflicted substantial losses on Western Visayas and Zamboanga Peninsula, with farmers bearing the brunt of the blow.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration forecasts that Northern Mindanao will feel the "harshest" impacts of El Niño in the coming months.

The Philippine National Irrigation Administration projected that the drought would affect 20 percent of the rice farms.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Better data, resource valuation needed for Southeast Asian wetlands — ACB

By: Gaea Katreena Cabico

Investing in data collection and natural resource valuation initiatives is crucial to achieving more effective wetland restoration in Southeast Asia, the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) said.

Wetlands, such as rivers, lakes, peatlands, marshes, mangrove forests, seagrass meadows, mudflats and shallow coral reefs, are considered the "kidneys of the Earth" because of their capacity to purify the soil and provide drinking water to communities.

These ecosystems play a crucial role in the fight against climate change, storing vast amounts of carbon dioxide while also serving as buffers against storm surges, floods and sea level rise.

Despite providing essential services and roles, wetlands are considered the most threatened ecosystem on the planet, according to ACB. Human activities are largely responsible for the rapid loss of the world's wetlands, with an estimated 35% decline since the 1970s.

ACB stressed that gaps in the implementation of initiatives and activities must be addressed to ensure that Southeast Asia's nearly two million square kilometers of wetlands are protected and restored.

"First, ASEAN Member States must be able to resolve data deficiencies to support better management of their wetlands," the inter-governmental organization.

"Furthermore, valuation of natural resources throughout ASEAN must be encouraged to come up with better policy frameworks and evidence-based conservation measures," it added.

ACB noted that there are 59 Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar convention in eight ASEAN member states. The region is also home to 60% of the world's tropical peatlands and 42% of its mangrove forests.

In the Philippines, there are eight Ramsar sites, including the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area and Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary.

'Not wastelands'

“People often view wetlands as wastelands or areas that need to be drained or converted for development and other land uses. However, they are nature’s secret wonders because of their ability to provide vital services to sustain life and maintain balance of ecosystems,” ACB said.

Wetlands also serve as vital stopover sites for migratory waterbirds, homes for countless fauna and flora species, and breeding grounds for fish populations.

In a separate statement, Wetlands International Philippines said it is working in the Cagayan de Oro River Basin to reduce the risk of flooding and in the northern coast of Manila Bay and in Macajalar Bay to replant mangroves with local communities using science- and community-based techniques.

“Let us act together to conserve, use sustainably, and restore these ecosystems for our well-being and our children’s future,” said Annadel Cabanban, Wetlands International Philippines country manager.

Marcos pushes solar-powered irrigation program

By: Helen Flores

The government will undertake a nationwide solar-powered irrigation program to help achieve its goal of rice self-sufficiency, President Marcos announced yesterday.

During the ceremonial palay harvesting and distribution of various assistance to farmers in Barangay Mandili, Candaba, Pampanga, Marcos said the project is expected to add about 180,000 hectares of irrigable land or about 1.2 million metric tons (MT) in rice production.

"Because if we are talking about rice, irrigation is really an important factor so that all areas will have three cropping (cycles in a year)," he said, noting that the Philippines imports about 3.5 million MT of rice every year.

Marcos explained a solar-powered irrigation unit would be able to irrigate 20 hectares of farmland.

"We're planning to install thousands of these and we're thinking where to get it from our budget," he said.

To increase rice production this year, the Department of Agriculture (DA) has allotted P17 billion for the Philippine Solar Irrigation Project and P1.2 billion for the construction and improvement of small-scale irrigation projects, according to a statement released by the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) yesterday.

Under the DA's National Rice Program, a total of P31 billion was also allocated this year for various interventions, the PCO said.

The DA earmarked P10 billion under the Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund, which aims to enhance the competitiveness of the rice industry through rice seed development and the provision of farm equipment, credit and extension services.

Marcos emphasized the secret to a bountiful rice harvest is irrigation.

"We're just getting started. But that's really the answer to our problems. Not only during typhoons, not only during El Niños, but also in the transportation of our crops," the Chief Executive added.

Marcos said Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. visited farmlands in Vietnam to learn from the country's agriculture system ahead of his state visit on Jan. 29 to 30. Vietnam supplies around 90 percent of the Philippines' rice imports.

A five-year rice deal was sealed during Marcos' visit that guarantees a steady supply of affordable rice to the Philippines.

Marcos reassured the public that the government has readied assistance to areas that will be severely affected by the prevailing El Niño phenomenon.

Apart from improving the country's irrigation system, Marcos said the country continues to develop drought-resistant crops as response to climate change.

Meanwhile, the DA has partnered with the Department of Trade and Industry and the National Irrigation Administration to promote the Integrated Rice Supply Chain Development Program which will boost an efficient rice supply chain that will decrease costs and make rice affordable to the public.

The program also aims to foster alternative market access for both buyers and sellers that will help enhance farmers' income through cooperation between different agencies in the production, classification, marketing and distribution of domestic rice.

Amid the challenges in the country's agriculture sector, the Philippines was able to register a record-high rice production in 2023, according to Marcos.

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