



## NEWS ROUNDUP

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## BUSINESS MIRROR

### [DENR-EMB ties up with NASA for Metro air quality research](#)

By: Jonathan Mayuga

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## CNN

### [Data from centuries-old sea creatures suggest the world has overshoot a climate limit. Some scientists say not so fast](#)

By: Rachel Ramirez

Using sponges collected off the coast of Puerto Rico in the eastern Caribbean, scientists have calculated 300 years of ocean temperatures and concluded the world has already overshoot one crucial global warming limit and is speeding toward another.

## **GMA**

### **[Deaths in Mindanao floods, landslides now 17 —PNP](#)**

By: Joviland Rita

The number of fatalities due to the flooding and landslide incidents in Mindanao has increased to 17, the Philippine National Police (PNP) said on Monday.

## **NIKKEI ASIA**

### **[\[Opinion\] Clean air can become a reality for the Global South](#)**

By: Soumya Swaminathan

The air we breathe is a silent but formidable killer. A staggering nine out of 10 people worldwide are exposed to unsafe air, both indoors and outdoors.

## **PTV**

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By: Biran Jules Campued

The Philippines will team up with its Asian neighbors and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to study and address air quality issues in the region, Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga announced over the weekend.

## **POLITIKO**

### **[DENR, NASA Partner To Improve Air Quality In NCR](#)**

By: Prince Golez

The Philippines has collaborated with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to study and address air quality issues in the National Capital Region (NCR).

## **SENATE**

### **[Villar cites the crucial role of wetlands](#)**

Despite occupying only around 6 percent of the earth's surface, Sen. Cynthia Villar said wetlands perform crucial functions like freshwater supply, habitat provision, and climate regulation.

## **THE MANILA TIMES**

### **[Region's potential growth seen slowing](#)**

By: Niña Myka Pauline Arceo

East Asia and the Pacific's potential growth is expected to slow over the medium term due to the impact of factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the World Bank said.

## **THE PHILIPPINE STAR**

### **[\[Opinion\] BBM's seven issues](#)**

By: Tony Lopez

After 19 months into his presidency of six years, Ferdinand “Bongbong” Romualdez Marcos Jr. has focused on seven major issues:

**Information and Knowledge Management Division**

## **BUSINESS MIRROR**

### **DENR-EMB ties up with NASA for Metro air quality research**

By: Jonathan Mayuga

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 said in a statement.

Specifically, research on air quality will be conducted in Metro Manila, which is one of the areas of concern when it comes to air pollution due to population and the huge number of motor vehicles that contribute to air pollution.

Yulo-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) 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,” the DENR chief said. “The data gathered from the research flights will be used in our programs to mitigate air quality issues that affect public health and 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).

Yulo-Loyzaga said that the NASA mission would 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. These organizations are joining hands to understand and tackle air pollution challenges in the region.

**CNN**

**[Data from centuries-old sea creatures suggest the world has overshoot a climate limit. Some scientists say not so fast](#)**

By: Rachel Ramirez

Using sponges collected off the coast of Puerto Rico in the eastern Caribbean, scientists have calculated 300 years of ocean temperatures and concluded the world has already overshoot one crucial global warming limit and is speeding toward another. These findings, published Monday in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, are alarming but also controversial. Other scientists say the study contains too many uncertainties and limitations to draw such firm conclusions and could end up confusing public understanding of climate change.

Sponges — which grow slowly, layer by layer — can act like data time capsules, allowing a glimpse into what the ocean was like hundreds of years ago, long before the existence of modern data.

Using samples from sclerosponges, which live for centuries, the team of international scientists was able to calculate ocean surface temperatures going back 300 years.

They found human-caused warming may have started earlier than currently assumed and, as a result, global average temperature may have already warmed more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Researchers say the results also suggest global temperature could overshoot 2 degrees of warming by the end of the decade.

Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, countries pledged to restrict global warming to less than 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels, with an ambition to limit it to 1.5 degrees. The pre-industrial era — or the state of the climate before humans started burning large amounts of fossil fuels and warming the planet — is commonly defined as 1850-1900.

The study authors argue their findings suggest the pre-industrial era should be pushed further back to between the 1700s and 1860. Changing that baseline would mean the world has already warmed at least 1.7 degrees (scientists say long-term global warming currently stands at between 1.2 to 1.3 degrees).

“The big picture is that global warming, and the urgent need for emission reductions to minimize the risk of dangerous climate change, has been brought forward by at least a decade,” Malcolm McCulloch, lead author of the study and marine geochemist at the University of Western Australia, said at a news briefing. “So, this is a major change to thinking about global warming.”

However, several climate scientists have questioned the study's findings, especially using one type of sponge from one location in the Caribbean to represent global temperatures. Gavin Schmidt, a NASA climate scientist, said estimating global average temperature requires data from as many locations as possible, as climate varies across the planet.

"Claims that records from a single record can confidently define the global mean warming since the pre-industrial are probably overreaching," he said in a statement.

Gabi Hegerl, a professor of climate system science at the University of Edinburgh, said the study was "a nice new record that illustrates how temperatures in the Caribbean started to rise over the industrial period." But, she added in a statement, "the interpretation in terms of global warming goals overstretches it."

Some went further. Yadvinder Malhi, professor of ecosystem science at the Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford, said the way the findings have been communicated were "flawed" and have "the potential to add unnecessary confusion to public debate on climate change."

A co-author of the study defended its robustness and argued that temperature changes in the part of the Caribbean the sponges came from have always mimicked changes around the globe.

"It's probably one of the best areas if you're trying to figure out global averaging on the Earth," said Amos Winter, a professor of geology at Indiana State University. Ocean temperatures in the region are predominantly affected by planet-heating pollution, rather than natural climate variability like El Niño, he said.

Whatever the baseline for measuring global warming, what remains clear, experts say, is that the impacts will worsen with every fraction of a degree of warming.

"It's exciting to see new research that allows us to peek centuries in the past," said Joeri Rogelj, director of research at the Grantham Institute at Imperial College London, in a statement. But, he added, "relabeling the warming that has occurred until today by using a different starting point does not change the impacts we are seeing today, or the impacts we are aiming to avoid."

Winter hopes the study will function as a call to action. "Hopefully this will help change our viewpoints of what is happening in the globe, make us act now, and not wait for some disaster to happen for us to change our habits."

**GMA**

**Deaths in Mindanao floods, landslides now 17 —PNP**

By: Joviland Rita

The number of fatalities due to the flooding and landslide incidents in Mindanao has increased to 17, the Philippine National Police (PNP) said on Monday.

“As of now, we have recorded 17 deaths and the injury of four. May mga nawawala rin, mga eight personalities (there were also eight people missing),” PNP chief Police General Benjamin Acorda Jr. said in a press briefing.

In Davao de Oro, 12 people were reported dead while three were still missing, the provincial government’s public information office told GMA News Online on Monday. Twelve persons were also injured, it added.

According to Acorda, 1,471 police personnel have been deployed to help the victims of the flooding and landslide incidents in Davao Region.

At least 33 people have been rescued by the police, Acorda said.

A total of 812,638 people or 214,132 families were affected by the Northeast Monsoon or amihan and the trough of a low pressure area (LPA).

The affected regions were Northern Mindanao, Davao, Soccsksargen, Caraga, and Bangsamoro.

Of the affected population, 85,285 people or 22,573 families were staying inside 331 evacuation centers while 312,873 people or 92,898 families were taking shelter in other places.

Damage to infrastructure worth P2.61 million was reported in Davao and Caraga.

A state of calamity was declared in Agusan del Sur on January 31.

Classes in 113 areas as well as work in 34 areas were suspended due to the bad weather, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC).

In Datu Montawal, Maguindanao del Sur, residents had to use a rope while crossing floodwaters after the Agusan River overflowed its banks, Jhomer Apresto reported on Unang Balita on Monday.

In Veruela, Agusan del Sur, a man still managed to sing via a videoke in the middle of the flood. The houses and fields in Talacogon town were submerged in flood. In San Luis, affected residents were using boats to move around the area.

Meanwhile in Kapalong, Davao del Sur, four relatives were killed in a landslide.

“On 28 January 2024, the Northeast Monsoon and the Trough of the Low Pressure Area (LPA) affected Mindanao,” the NDRRMC said.

“The trough of the LPA continued to bring light to heavy rains until 02 February 2024. This resulted in flooding and landslide incidents in some areas in Mindanao. On 03 February 2024, 11:00 AM, the Low Pressure Area (LPA) has dissipated,” the NDRRMC said.

## NIKKEI ASIA

### [\[Opinion\] Clean air can become a reality for the Global South](#)

By: Soumya Swaminathan

The air we breathe is a silent but formidable killer. A staggering nine out of 10 people worldwide are exposed to unsafe air, both indoors and outdoors.

This crisis is claiming the lives of 8 million people annually, casting a pervasive shadow over community health and economies globally. The burden of unsafe air, though, falls disproportionately on developing nations, which are grappling with limited resources, a shortage of technical capabilities and equity concerns.

From the frosty winters of New Delhi to the bustling streets of Sao Paulo, bad air is not just a seasonal woe. It is a constant menace to lives and livelihoods, especially for those most vulnerable in society.

If 2023 saw air pollution finally become a topic of discussion in climate negotiations, 2024 must see it addressed and investments flow in.

Beyond immediate mortality, air pollution is a public health emergency, increasing the risk of ailments such as Type 2 diabetes, obesity, systemic inflammation, Alzheimer's and dementia. Indeed, the International Agency for Research on Cancer categorizes air pollution as a leading cause of cancer.

As a pediatrician, I am especially concerned that growing children, who have smaller airways and lungs, are acutely vulnerable. Poor air quality also casts a negative shadow on people's mental health and well-being, triggering depression, bipolar disorder and personality disorders. In 2018, the World Health Organization classified air pollution as a key risk factor for noncommunicable diseases globally.

The toll on economies is equally staggering. The World Bank estimates that the annual cost of air pollution-related illness and premature death is in the trillions of dollars globally.

In 2019, the public health cost alone was estimated at \$8.1 trillion, or around 6.1% of global gross domestic product. Additional costs include the loss of productive days and pollution effects on agriculture and the overall ecosystem.

The nature of this invisible adversary that crosses borders highlights the urgent need to construct a compelling global case for clean air.

At December's U.N. Climate Change Conference in Dubai, health was on the table for the first time. This acknowledgment of the issue shows how climate impacts are inseparable from public health and highlights the necessity of reducing greenhouse gases.

While aligning air quality goals with climate objectives is crucial, we must also ensure that clean air is not merely viewed as a byproduct of decarbonization but as an indispensable element of a just climate transition.

The vision of clean air can become a reality because we possess the knowledge, technology and resources to make a change. We only need the political will. In fact, during the early months of the COVID pandemic, cities around the world saw clear blue skies, heard birds singing and witnessed animals roam freely in the streets. The air was cleaner than it had been in centuries.

Our Common Air, a global commission that I co-chair, aims to build an "airshed" of solutions. Announced at COP28 last year, the initiative is a collaborative effort bringing together policymakers, financial institutions, intellectuals, communities and universities. Involved leaders have convened for the first time this week in Bellagio, Italy.

By focusing on the benefits of mitigating air pollution for both health and climate, we aim to unite efforts, leverage resources, create funding channels and establish a pool of viable clean air solutions. The importance of such initiatives becomes evident when considering that only 1% of international development funding and a mere 2% of international public climate finance goes to clean air projects.

For this initiative to succeed, three crucial elements need to come together.

First, we need to bridge the gap between science and action. The evidence is unequivocal: Air pollution is a public health hazard, especially for vulnerable populations.

But the evidence needs to be tailored for different actors. Evidence-based policies and narratives must be developed to raise local awareness about the health risks of air pollution.

Also, even the best interventions need standardized tracking and evaluation. We must measure air quality improvements not just in parts per million but also in dollars, cents and hours. It is essential that we highlight how much cleaner air is worth in terms of increased productivity, reduced health care costs and ecosystem services.

Second, it is imperative to recognize that clean air action is climate action. Air pollution and climate change are intricately linked, with many activities contributing to both.

The momentum behind climate change mitigation efforts presents a unique opportunity to elevate air quality as an integral component of these actions. While the co-benefits of clean air, such as improved public health and reduced health care costs, often take center stage, there are others like improved agricultural yields. It is also crucial to emphasize that clean air is a fundamental goal in itself.

Third, funds must be channeled into cleaner air. Significant investment is required for research and development of cleaner technologies. Clear targets and objectives must be set, and mechanisms for tracking progress, such as a collaborative platform, should be developed. Shifting the narrative from air pollution as a burden to clean air as an invaluable asset can enhance political support and attract investment.

Numbers alone are insufficient. We also need global success stories that shout, "It can be done."

For instance, as a founding member of the International Solar Alliance, India has partnered with developing countries, providing technical and financial assistance for the adoption of clean cooking technologies like solar cookstoves.

Similarly, the C40 Clean Air Cities declaration, signatories of which include Asian cities such as Jakarta and Bengaluru, signifies a global push to meet WHO air quality guidelines by 2030. Facilitating the transfer of finance, knowledge and technology across borders will be crucial for the success of such initiatives.

Cleaning our air is not solely about reducing pollutants. It is also about building a shared asset that allows children to run free without wheezing, elders to enjoy active lives and communities and workforces to thrive. Clean air ultimately is not a privilege but a right. Every breath we inhale should come as a force of life, not a risk to it.

**PTV**

**[DENR to join NASA, Asian countries to study air quality](#)**

By: Biran Jules Campued

The Philippines will team up with its Asian neighbors and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to study and address air quality issues in the region, Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga announced over the weekend

According to a statement from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) on Saturday, the partnership called Airborne and Satellite Investigation of Asian Air Quality (Asia-AQ) will involve experts from South Korea's National Institute of Environmental Research, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and Thailand's Geo-Informatics and Space Technology Development Agency.

Loyzaga said that engineers and air quality specialists from the Environment Management Bureau will board with NASA as it conducts scientific research flights over Metro Manila and its surrounding regions.

The Philippine delegation will also include the Philippine Space Agency, Manila Observatory, Ateneo de Manila University, and University of the Philippines.

The Asia-AQ project will use advanced satellite technology, ground-based observations, and airborne missions to gain a better understanding of the air quality problems in Metro Manila and 11 other Asian cities.

The other candidate cities, according to the NASA Langley Research Center, are Seoul (South Korea), Tokyo (Japan), Taiwan, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam), Bangkok (Thailand), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Singapore, Dhaka (Bangladesh), and Kolkata and Delhi (India).

Loyzaga noted that the collaboration with NASA and other partners will provide significant advances in the understanding of air pollution through better air quality models and accurate forecasts.

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

The DENR secretary did not mention when the research flights will commence, but NASA Langley said on its website that the multinational field study will be conducted in early 2024.

## **POLITIKO**

### **[DENR, NASA Partner To Improve Air Quality In NCR](#)**

By: Prince Golez

The Philippines has collaborated with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to study and address air quality issues in the National Capital Region (NCR).

NASA will be conducting scientific research flights that are specifically designed to study the atmosphere of Metro Manila and its surrounding regions, Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga said in a press statement.

According to Loyzaga, engineers and air quality specialists of the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will be sent on board to observe and learn from the NASA scientists.

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

"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," the secretary 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.

Loyzaga said the NASA mission will use modern satellite technology, ground-based observations, and aircraft missions to better understand air quality challenges in NCR.

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

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

## SENATE

### Villar cites the crucial role of wetlands

Despite occupying only around 6 percent of the earth's surface, Sen. Cynthia Villar said wetlands perform crucial functions like freshwater supply, habitat provision, and climate regulation.

In recognition of their importance, she noted that 172 countries have committed to the Ramsar Convention, to protect wetlands globally.

As of 2023, she there are about 2,500 recognized Wetlands of International Importance.

She said the Philippines proudly hosts eight of them and "one is our Las Piñas-Parañaque Wetland Park (LPPWP).

The LPPWP's Wetland Center Museum was inaugurated on February 2, also the celebration of the World Wetlands Day 2024.

The chairperson of the Senate Committee on Environment further said that every February 2, we commemorate the 1971 signing of the Ramsar Convention, named after Ramsar, Iran, where it took place.

"This global treaty aims to preserve wetlands and raise public awareness on their vital role in biodiversity, climate change mitigation, fresh water provision, and economic support. "

The other wetlands in the country liated in the Ramsar are Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary in Cebu; Naujan Lake National Park in Oriental Mindoro;Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary in Agusan del Sur;Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park in Sulu Sea; Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park in Palawan; Negros Occidental Coastal Wetlands Conservation Area in Negros Occidental andSasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands in Pampanga.

The senator said the presence of these Ramsar Sites in the Philippines has inspired her to establish the Wetland Center in LPPWP, the first in the country.

"This structure houses this auditorium, a DENR office a BFAR office, the museum we will unveil later, and soon, a coffee shop and a souvenir shop," said Villar.

"The design of this Wetland Center was generously provided for free by our PAMB member, Architect Aaron Lecciones of the Society for the Conservation of Philippine Wetlands (SCPW)," she added.

According to Villar, the Wetland Center intends to educate and to help raise public awareness on wetlands.

She also lamented that although LPPWP has a "protected status," it faces threats from nearby reclamation in Manila Bay that could impair its ecological attributes.

## THE MANILA TIMES

### [Region's potential growth seen slowing](#)

By: Niña Myka Pauline Arceo

East Asia and the Pacific's potential growth is expected to slow over the medium term due to the impact of factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the World Bank said.

In a recently released report on long-term growth prospects, the Washington-based lending institution said the region's growth was likely to moderate to an average of 4.6 percent over 2022 to 2030, down from 6.2 percent in 2011-2021.

"China accounts for much of the projected slowdown, but slowing potential growth is expected to spread to the rest of the region as well," the World Bank said.

"Part of the projected slowdown is due to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the effects of which are expected to be most severe and longest lasting in the countries that have suffered most from the collapse of global tourism and trade," it added.

Countries recently affected by natural disasters, domestic policy uncertainty, and trade shocks also face worsened growth prospects.

The slowdown will primarily be the result of reduced capital accumulation, followed by declines in total factor productivity — a measure of economic output — and labor supply.

China is projected to experience the steepest decline in capital accumulation due to efforts to control credit growth.

Problems in the real estate sector and weak demand for exports are weighing on the region's largest economy, where growth is forecast to slow to 4.5 percent this year and further to 4.3 percent in 2025.

In contrast, the Philippines is expected to see an increase in investment, positively impacting potential output growth.

"Heightened geopolitical tensions may weaken investment in the region through higher interest rates, reduced business confidence, and heightened uncertainty," the World Bank said.

In its latest Global Economic Outlook, the Washington-based financial institution estimated 2023 growth of 5.6 percent for the Philippines and said this would likely improve to 5.8 percent this year.

The 2023 projection, which was realized, fell short of the government's 6.0- to 7.0-percent target. The forecast for 2024 also falls below the 6.7- to 7.5-percent goal for the year.

Policy reforms are needed to avert the slowdown in potential growth, the World Bank said.

These include continued improvements in investments, educational outcomes, female labor force participation, and investments in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

"More climate-resilient infrastructure could also help mitigate a possible climate change-related reduction in annual potential growth resulting from increasingly frequent extreme weather events that damage capital stocks and erode labor productivity," the World Bank said.

It also said that there was potential for significant productivity improvements through resource reallocation, especially in countries like Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, East Timor and Vietnam.

To encourage more urbanization, possible actions include investing in infrastructure and social services, ensuring fair and transparent access to land, supporting facilities for recent migrants, and coordinating urban services across municipal boundaries.

## THE PHILIPPINE STAR

### [\[Opinion\] BBM's seven issues](#)

By: Tony Lopez

After 19 months into his presidency of six years, Ferdinand “Bongbong” Romualdez Marcos Jr. has focused on seven major issues:

One, he unified the country. For the first time in over half a century, or since the first Marcos Sr. presidency, Bongbong Marcos is the president elected with a majority vote of the people, with the largest share of the vote (59 percent since Marcos Sr.'s 61 percent in 1969), the largest margin (32 percent since Ramon Magsaysay's 37 percent). BBM won in May 2022 in all regions except two, Bicol and Western Visayas.

Unity also means divisive elements in the political structure will be neutralized, if not eliminated.

Two, BBM has reconnected with America, allowing up to nine military bases for US troops and probably, the stationing of sensitive weapons and war materiel.

The pivot to Washington DC means he reverses the controversial pro-China policy of his predecessor. Warmer ties with the US achieve two things: help in the modernization of the Philippine Army to cope with external threats and assertiveness in protecting Manila's territorial and sovereign rights (over fisheries, minerals and other ocean wealth) in the West Philippine Sea.

Three, BBM is modernizing the economy, opening it up to new players and easing the rules of engagement to allow for a more competitive business environment, one that promotes efficiencies, lowers costs, promotes quality of products and services and is more inclusive. This is the Bagong Pilipinas.

Four, he is the “Infra President,” keen to spend for roads, bridges, airports and other infra, a record P8.3 trillion during his six-year presidency.

Metro Manila will have more airports than it probably needs in the next half century – a rehabilitated Manila International Airport or NAIA, a new Manila International Airport in Bulacan by San Miguel Corporation, Sangley Airport by the Henry Sy family and the government-built Clark International Airport that is now run by the Gokongwei and Aboitiz families.

Five, he emancipated 600,000 agrarian reform farmers, condoning P58 billion of their debts.

Sixth, BBM is keen on climate change adaptation and mitigation. He knows fully well that the Philippines is among the top three countries to be devastated by a climate gone berserk. Hence, the country must prepare for climate doomsday.

Seven, he seeks to amend the 1987 Constitution to soften if not remove restrictive provisions that bar foreigners from owning land, schools, ad agencies, media and chunks of natural resources and utilities.

This last platform is controversial and requires investment of enormous political capital to cover just the first base, a snowballing popular initiative, wherein at least 8 million voters sign a petition to amend the Constitution and mandating the legislature to do it.

The 24-member Senate thinks amendments can only be done with the two houses (Senate and the House of Representatives, HOR) voting separately to achieve the enabling three-fourths vote – 18 of 24 senators, and 233 of 310 congressmen.

The HOR, under Speaker Martin Romualdez, thinks the two chambers can vote as one (24 plus 310), as a single constituent assembly, diluting the senators' objections.

In lawmaking, the Senate and House vote separately. But as a constituent assembly, not exactly a body of lawmakers, the delegates vote as one chamber.

At the moment, BBM seems confused. To clear things up, he wants to listen to various sectors, particularly constitutionalists and eminent jurists.

That opportunity comes this Thursday, Feb. 8, at 5:30 p.m. at the Shangrila Makati ballroom, when he speaks before the Philippine Constitution Association (Philconsa) and the Manila Overseas Press Club (MOPC) to commemorate Constitution Day.

Feb. 8 is the birthday of the late senator Claro M. Recto, the father of the 1935 Philippine Constitution, being the president of the constitutional convention that produced what is considered the best Constitution ever.

Although the 1935 Constitution also restricted foreign investments, the Philippines became the most prosperous country in Asia outside Japan. That growth was because of the American presence (with its two major bases, Clark Air Force Base Subic Naval Base) which made investors feel safe and checked threats, like Japan then and China later.

In BBM's view, the return of troops and opening up the economy through Charter change will convince investors to come back in droves.

Marcos Jr. today is the second most popular leader in the free world. His approval rating of 68 percent (per Pulse Asia), is eclipsed only by the 77 percent of India's Narendra Modi. Plus his 59 percent electoral mandate in 2022, BBM has awesome capital to take risks as gigantic as Charter change.

In ASEAN, the Philippines has the most restrictive regime for foreign direct investments (FDI), with a restrictiveness index on primary sectors of 0.64. Compare that with the 0.01 of Singapore, 0.04 of Cambodia, 0.06 of Vietnam, 0.30 of Malaysia, 0.44 of Thailand and 0.46 of Indonesia, per Albay Rep. Joey Salceda's data.

No wonder, FDI's share of GDP in Singapore is high, 28.3 percent; Cambodia 13.5 percent; Vietnam 6.2 percent and Indonesia 2.2 percent. FDI's share of Phl GDP – just 2.0 in 2019.

In 1980, seven years before its 1987 Constitution was adopted, the Philippines was the third richest country in ASEAN, with GDP per capita of \$774, after Singapore's \$5,000 and Malaysia's \$1,930. Phl's \$774 was ahead of Thailand's \$705, Indonesia's \$673 and Vietnam's \$652.

Then Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam all opened up their economies.

These results have been dramatic. In 2023, per IMF data, the Philippines had a per capita GDP of just \$3,910 – sixth and behind No. 1 Singapore, \$91,100; No. 2 Malaysia \$13,380; No. 3 Thailand \$8,180; No. 4 Indonesia \$5,020 and No. 5 Vietnam, \$4,480.

Between 1980 and 2023, Singapore's per capita income grew 18.22x, and that of Thailand 11.6x, Indonesia 7.5x, Vietnam 6.87x. And the Philippines? Just a 5x gain in per person income of Filipinos – the worst of ASEAN's major countries.

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