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By: Masatsugu Asakawa

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THE JAPAN TIMES

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By: Eric Roston and Sheryl Tian Tong Lee

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THE PHILIPPINE STAR

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By: Dominique Nicole Flores

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DENR: Forested lands down to 7 million hectares

By: Bella Cariaso

Of the country's 15 million hectares of forest lands, only seven million have forest cover, Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said yesterday.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

ABS CBN

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US representatives are not at a key climate science meeting in China, a source told AFP on Monday, sitting out a fight over the UN's next blockbuster assessment of global warming research.

US officials declined to comment last week on reports that America's delegation had been pulled from the UN talks in Hangzhou.

But a source at the meeting, which opened on Monday, told AFP: "We haven't seen anyone from a US delegation, and there hasn't been anyone representing the US in plenary session so far."

US President Donald Trump, who has called climate change a "scam" and made no secret of his disdain for the United Nations and climate science, has already pulled Washington out of the landmark Paris Agreement for a second time.

However, observers said the decision to withdraw scientists from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), set up in 1988 to inform policymakers, was a new "blow".

"Regardless of political views on climate policy, abandoning the world's most authoritative scientific body on climate risks, impacts, and pathways will damage US research and society," warned leading climate scientist Johan Rockstrom.

"International scientific progress is key to prosperity, equity, and resilience -- for the US and all nations," said Rockstrom, of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research.

The meeting in Hangzhou comes on the heels of the hottest year on record and rising alarm over the pace of warming.

It will be dominated by a battle over the content and timing of the UN's next major assessment of climate change research.

Many wealthy countries and developing nations most exposed to climate impacts want that three-part assessment -- covering physical science, climate impacts and solutions for reducing greenhouse gas levels -- out before 2028.

That is when countries are due to provide their next "stocktake" -- an accounting of their progress in responding to climate change.

Producing the IPCC reports before the stocktake would mean countries can be guided by the most up-to-date science, these countries argue.

- 'Pushing against limit' -

They face objections from some oil producers and major polluters with rising emissions, including India, China, Saudi Arabia and Russia.

They say producing the next report, the IPCC's seventh since 1990, before the stocktake deadline will rush the process.

Top UN officials sought to inject urgency into proceedings as they opened the meeting, which will largely take place behind closed doors.

The Paris Agreement's goal of keeping temperature rises no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels "is still mathematically possible but of course we are pushing against that very limit", warned UN Environment Programme chief Inger Andersen.

"Time is not on our side," she warned, urging "ambitious" outcomes from the talks.

Without directly mentioning any country, Andersen also said: "Science cannot be politicised."

"The IPCC stands unequivocally for the best science the world can deliver. Science is physics, not politics," she said.

The UN's first stocktake, published in 2023, was a damning indictment of the lack of progress on tackling warming.

In response, countries at the COP28 climate summit in Dubai issued a groundbreaking call for the world to move away from fossil fuels, albeit cushioned by concessions to oil and gas interests.

Observers fear the meeting will be the last chance to agree that the IPCC's next assessment arrives before the 2028 stocktake.

"I think why it's been so bitter is where we are at this moment in time -- the geopolitical pressure and the financial pain of impacts, and the transition away from fossil fuels," said one person close to the talks, who was not authorised to speak on the record.

They noted that new findings in fast-developing areas of research with global implications would be particularly important for policymakers as they draw up new climate plans.

The IPCC has warned the world is on course to cross the Paris deal's long-term warming threshold of 1.5C above pre-industrial levels in the early 2030s.

Recent studies have also suggested that milestone could be crossed before the end of this decade.

BUSINESS WORLD

[Parched southern Greece highlights EU water conservation challenges](#)

In the Argolida region of southern Greece, water escapes through cracks in an irrigation canal feeding a plain of orange trees. Underground, old pipes lose more than half the water that is pumped through them, officials say.

In summer, when reservoir levels tumble, authorities in the regional capital Nafplion advise residents not to drink the contaminated brackish water that is pumped from backup sources into their homes.

“You can smell the difference in the water, feel the dryness on your clothes,” said Lydia Sarakinioti, a jeweler in Nafplion who uses bottled water even to cook.

This month, the European Union (EU) launched a campaign to combat a climate change-driven water crisis that it says already affects 38% of its population. It has given EU countries until next year to assess leakage levels before a legal threshold is imposed.

The program to increase water security is expected to cost hundreds of billions of euros and comes as countries across southern Europe experience more erratic rainfall and hotter temperatures linked to climate change.

The situation in Greece, which lies on Europe’s baking southern frontier, shows just how complex and costly change will be. Last summer and winter were the warmest on record and many places saw no rainfall for months.

Moreover, a crippling 2009-18 debt crisis has led to years of underinvestment. Greece loses around half its drinking water to leaky pipes and theft, government figures show — nearly twice the EU average of 23%. Most maps of its underground pipeline network are either not digitized or do not exist, experts and officials said.

Greece has spent more than 1.5 billion euros on drinking water infrastructure since 2019, the government said. But Argolida, an agricultural hub that produces roughly a third of Greece’s oranges, shows much more is needed.

“There are many problems, and we are trying to gradually tackle them all,” said Socrates Doris, the head of Nafplion’s municipal drinking water provider. He said that the company was seeking EU funding to help.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis promised to make fixes to Argolida’s water problems when he visited in November, including extending the irrigation network and providing a desalination unit to dissolve salts in water.

Government officials say fundamental fixes are needed first.

“If an area’s network leaks everywhere, what’s the point of buying a new desalination unit or drilling a well?” said Petros Varelidis, the Environment ministry’s secretary general for water resources.

Leakages in some areas reach 80%, he said.

“The needs are a lot bigger than the resources available.”

In Argolida, water scarcity leads to poor water quality.

When the lake feeding Nafplion shrinks, authorities boost it with brackish water from a submarine spring, Anavalos.

Tests commissioned by water authorities from June to November in 2022-24, seen by Reuters, showed higher than permitted levels of chlorides and sodium in those sources, which can affect people with blood pressure or kidney issues.

Nafplion is not alone. In the coastal town of Ermioni, only 8% of the 13,500 residents have permanent access to safe drinking water, according to local authorities’ data submitted to parliament.

Most residents rely on plastic bottled water, which creates its own environmental problems.

“The quality is really bad. It harms electric devices, such as the washing machine,” said resident Evi Leventi, 58.

Outside town, in fields dried by two years of drought, farmers dig up to 300 meters below the surface in search of water. It often comes up too salty because sea water has seeped into depleted underground aquifers.

“Every drop of water is indispensable... We pin our hopes on rainy winters,” said farmer George Mavras.

ECO BUSINESS

[\[Opinion\] Meltdown at the top of the world](#)

By: Masatsugu Asakawa

The United Nations has declared 2025 to be the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation, making it a fitting moment to confront the stark reality that the world's ice sheets are melting. Climate change is accelerating this trend, particularly in the Hindu Kush Himalayas – a region known as the Earth's Third Pole because it contains the largest volume of ice outside of the Arctic and Antarctica.

This mountain range, which stretches across 3,500 kilometers and spans eight countries, from Afghanistan to Myanmar, is warming roughly three times faster than the global average. If temperatures rise by 3° Celsius above pre-industrial levels by the end of this century, up to 75 per cent of the region's glaciers will melt, reducing water availability, undermining food and energy security, and exacerbating biodiversity loss.

Glacial melt thus threatens irreversible damage to nearby communities and local economies. But it would also fuel instability around the globe by increasing migration, disrupting trade, and causing food prices to rise.

The 2021 flood disaster in Nepal's Melamchi River offers a glimpse of what is to come. Unusually heavy monsoon rains, coupled with excessive snowmelt, triggered a debris flow that wiped out thousands of hectares of agricultural land and destroyed critical infrastructure, leaving hundreds of thousands of people without access to water.

As the glaciers retreat, there will be too little water – a problem that is projected to afflict the Hindu Kush Himalayas by 2050. Dwindling river flows would make it more difficult to irrigate crops in an area that produces around one-third of the world's rice and one-quarter of its wheat. Water-supply and sanitation systems will become difficult to maintain, adding to the one billion people who already lack access to basic sanitation in the region. Food insecurity will almost surely worsen as well, while communities and even entire industries will likely need to migrate in search of fresh water. Asia's poorest and most vulnerable populations will be hit the hardest.

The world must take urgent action to avert the disastrous effects of accelerating glacial melt in this region. That means deepening our knowledge by investing in multi-hazard risk assessment, because the extent of the damage will largely depend on whether global temperatures rise by 1.5°, 1.8°, 2°, or 3°C. We must also strengthen integrated river-basin management by enhancing data collection, facilitating knowledge sharing, optimizing water management, and coordinating among people and communities living upstream and downstream.

Ensuring that new and existing infrastructure is climate-resilient is essential for maintaining access to safe drinking water and energy security, as well as sanitation, irrigation, and transport systems. It is equally important to protect ecosystems and

promote nature-based solutions such as afforestation, reforestation, wetland preservation, and flood-plain restoration.

Every component of this strategy requires more financing. Development institutions must continue to scale up investment in the Hindu Kush Himalayas, and to work together to recast this glacial region and its river basins as a global public good, especially given their importance for agricultural and industrial activities.

Lastly, the international community must advance the equitable use of shared glacial resources through cooperation and diplomacy. This would help defuse potential tensions and promote sustainable development, ensuring that the region's glaciers serve as a force for peace rather than conflict.

The Asian Development Bank (of which I am president) has taken steps to meet some of these goals. Together with the Green Climate Fund and country partners, ADB recently launched the Glaciers to Farms program, which will mobilise US\$3.5 billion to strengthen climate resilience in agriculture in Central and West Asia. Meanwhile, its Building Adaptation and Resilience in the Hindu Kush Himalayas-Bhutan and Nepal initiative is helping plan and design climate-resilient infrastructure and services. And ADB is also piloting new financing instruments, such as eco-compensation mechanisms, carbon markets and water trading, and sustainability-linked bonds.

When UNESCO and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) launched the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation last month, WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo said that it should serve as "a wake-up call to the world." The global community must do everything in its power – from building climate resilience to accelerating the green transition and promoting regional cooperation – to ensure a sustainable future for the billions of people who depend on glaciers and their related ecosystems. Failure to act now would have catastrophic consequences for us all.

GMA NEWS

[PH looks forward to elevating labor deals with Palau](#)

By: Anna Felicia Bajo

The Philippine government is looking forward to discussing steps with Palau in order to elevate labor agreements between the two countries, President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. said Monday.

"Our long history of mutual support has remained a cornerstone of our bilateral relationship to this day. With Filipinos making up a significant percentage – I understand it's now 25 percent. We are a good Catholic country. You know, we believe in multiplying. Their contributions to Palau's economy and society highlight the benefits of our long-standing people-to-people ties," Marcos said during his bilateral talk with Palau President Surangel Whipps Jr.

"So, in this regard, the Philippines looks forward to discussing concrete steps to advance our negotiations on bilateral labor agreements and the social security agreement with the hope that both agreements will be concluded within the year," Whipps added.

Whipps is in the Philippines for a two-day official visit.

Marcos mentioned that his administration had launched the Philippine Pacific Initiative to establish focused cooperation with the Pacific in the areas of health, food security, labor mobility, and disaster risk resilience mitigation and management.

He said this was a significant step towards a greater collaboration with Manila's Pacific kin.

"With bilateral health agreements on the horizon with various Pacific island countries including, of course, Palau, we are positive that they will yield more exchanges between our healthcare workers and ultimately greater health resilience in our region," Marcos said.

The Philippine president is also hopeful about expanding engagements in practical and impactful ways from agriculture and fisheries to development and technical cooperation.

For his part, Whipps said he is grateful for the presence of Filipinos in Palau for their contribution in the country.

"We are grateful for all that they do in the development of our young nation, from engineers to doctors to accountants to nurses, and helping us in the tourism sector, and of course, most importantly, construction and helping us build our bridges and our hotels and everything else," Whipps said.

Whipps also lauded the Philippines for being the host of the Loss and Damage Fund to address the impacts of climate change.

PCO

[Palau prexy to PH: We must unite to tackle geopolitical challenges, climate change](#)

The Philippines and Palau must collaborate in the face of current geopolitical challenges, notably the existential threat posed by climate change, Palau President Surangel Whipps Jr. said on Monday.

In a joint press conference in Malacañang with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., President Whipps likened such collaboration to the behavior of surgeonfish, which feed alone, but come together to form a large school to protect each other when danger lurks.

“And I think this demonstrates the principle that we are stronger together. And I think now more important than ever, we must collaborate in navigating the geopolitical issues and pressures that we face, especially the existential threat that we face with climate change,” President Whipps said.

“By standing united, we can overcome the challenges and build a brighter, more hopeful and resilient future for our people. Let us move forward with purpose and solidarity,” he said.

In the same news conference, President Marcos reiterated the Philippines’ commitment to be Palau’s trusted partner, an innovative pathfinder, and a dedicated peacebuilder.

President Marcos said he looks forward to advancing initiatives with Palau which will help achieve a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive future for the Pacific region.

The President said he and President Whipps have agreed to continue consultations and engagements between their two countries in the spirit of long-standing friendship, Pacific kinship, and to pursue a common vision of peace, prosperity, and progress for the peoples of the region.

The Philippines and Palau established diplomatic relations on July 15, 1997.

As of 2025, an estimated 4,010 Filipinos in Palau, which is roughly 22 percent of its population.

SUNSTAR

[Climate, mental health resilience program brought to Cotabato City](#)

Extreme weather events such as typhoons, floods, and droughts continue to threaten 60% of our land and 74% of the Philippine population. These climate-induced disasters hit rural and farming communities the hardest, disrupting livelihoods, destroying homes, and leading to increased mental health concerns.

To shed light on these challenges, Pru Life UK facilitated a session for about 50 staff of the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) in Cotabato City. The session focused on the critical intersection of climate change and mental health, emphasizing the need for community resilience and practical interventions.

The session shed light on the growing psychological toll of extreme weather conditions, equipping attendees with the knowledge, practical tools, and strategies to help communities navigate the emotional and mental challenges brought about by these adversities.

“This collaboration underscores the importance of multi-sectoral efforts in addressing the dual challenges of climate change and public health,” said Abdel Jamal Disangcopan, Statutory Committees Support Service (SCSS) director for the Bangsamoro Transition Authority. “By working together, we can build policies and programs that strengthen resilience and safeguard the well-being of communities in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region.”

Dr. John Jamir Benzon Aruta, Associate Professor of Psychology at De La Salle University, shared insights into how climate change profoundly impacts mental health. “These adversities are not just environmental issues — they are human issues. The emotional toll of climate-induced stressors highlights the urgent need for psychological and community-based interventions,” he emphasized.

Attendees shared their personal experiences, highlighting the real-life effects of climate-related challenges on mental well-being. Participants, including permanent and contractual staff of the SCSS, expressed eagerness to apply these insights to enhance local policies and programs.

Atty. Paul Mandal, Senior Vice President and Chief Legal, Government Relations, and Sustainability Officer of Pru Life UK, reiterated the company’s commitment to fostering resilience in vulnerable communities. “Pru Life UK actively engages with diverse stakeholders to advance its climate and health advocacy. By equipping communities with knowledge and tools, we are able to promote resilience and financial security which are key components of climate adaptation. Our goal is to empower individuals and inspire collective action for a healthier, more sustainable future.”

THE JAPAN TIMES

[Trump creates uncertainty for world's most cited climate report](#)

By: Eric Roston and Sheryl Tian Tong Lee

Climate diplomats beginning work on the next report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) — the crucial assessment on global warming that helps shape policy for governments to companies — will meet in China this week without U.S. officials.

U.S. government scientists participating in the IPCC's global assessments were issued a stop-work order from the Trump administration, according to media reports late last week, and NASA's chief scientist Kate Calvin, who holds a leadership role in new report cycle, is no longer attending as a result, CNN said, citing a spokesperson from the space agency.

NASA, Calvin and the IPCC did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The U.S. absence comes amid broader cuts to research funding and a retreat from climate diplomacy under the Trump administration, raising new questions on what the IPCC's future might look like without U.S. leadership. The group's assessments are widely viewed as the world's most trusted source of information on climate change.

"Without the U.S., the IPCC fails," said Benjamin Horton, director of the Earth Observatory of Singapore, who has contributed to past assessment reports. "The U.S. puts more money, more personnel, collects more data and runs more models for climate science than the rest of the world combined."

About 18% of IPCC authors have been from the U.S., more than twice the next biggest national contributor, the U.K., according to a 2023 analysis by Carbon Brief.

The Feb. 24-28 meeting in Hangzhou will revolve around outlines and budgets for components of the IPCC's seventh assessment report, which is expected to be released in 2029, and carbon removal and capture technologies. The reports summarize scientific consensus on the state of climate change, guiding policy decisions and negotiations.

It would be difficult to overstate the confidence the IPCC has in the vast basics of climate science and the influence of its findings in shaping global policy, business and investment. The world began a global charge toward net zero in 2018 after the panel published a special report on global temperatures.

The authoritative climate science body has now produced six assessments since its founding in 1988, each thousands of pages long. Over time, the IPCC's reports have become more confident and detailed on humankind's contribution to the warming planet. In 1995, the IPCC agreed there was evidence of "a discernible human influence

on global climate,” while in 2007, it found “warming of the climate system is unequivocal.” In 2021, they wrote: “It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land.”

Not every scientist thinks the IPCC's existence depends on the U.S. Detlef van Vuuren, a Utrecht University professor, climate researcher at PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency and a past IPCC contributor, said the group would survive if the U.S. decides to leave the organization for good, despite the country's monumental role over the decades.

“It's obviously highly problematic that a country that has contributed so much to IPCC, but also to global emissions, would decide that facts are not a good basis to inform climate policy,” he said.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

[80% of Filipinos adopt YOLO mindset amid uncertainties — study](#)

By: Dominique Nicole Flores

The unpredictable nature of life has sparked a cultural shift among Filipinos, with most adopting the “you only live once” (YOLO) mindset.

A 2024 study by global research firm Ipsos found that eight in 10 Filipinos prioritize living in the moment due to uncertainties about the future.

This figure surpasses the global average of 64% who share the YOLO mindset, with the Philippines ranking third, following Hong Kong and Thailand.

This aligns with another finding that people worldwide highly value personal control over their lives, seeing it as the “ultimate sign of success.”

The study, which surveyed about 1,000 respondents from each of the 50 countries, described this global trend as “nouveau nihilism” — a modern take on nihilism, the belief that life has no inherent meaning.

Growing appeal of instant gratification

Survey results suggest that as the future feels increasingly uncertain, more people are choosing to focus on the present, seeing it as more rewarding than long-term planning.

“There is now a generational disconnect when it comes to milestones like buying homes, getting married and starting families,” the study said, attributing this shift to financial hardships.

This trend is also linked to hedonism, a form of happiness driven by pleasure-seeking and avoiding discomfort, often resulting in short-term gratification.

It is frequently contrasted with eudaimonia, where happiness stems from self-fulfillment and living a life perceived as meaningful.

When combined with declining trust in government, hedonism fuels a new form of nihilism that erodes public support, Ipsos said.

According to the study, this implies that people are increasingly driven to assert personal autonomy to counter feelings of helplessness amid an unpredictable future.

What’s shaping this cultural shift?

Key factors affecting this trend include climate change, escalating geopolitical conflicts, persistent inequality and fears of another pandemic.

For Ipsos, some tell-tale signs of this phenomenon include brands offering free products or services to encourage voting — such as Ben & Jerry’s, which gave Dutch citizens free ice cream in exchange for their red voting pencils.

Another example cited in the study is the “Brat summer” movement, inspired by singer-songwriter Charli XCX’s 2024 album Brat.

The movement reportedly inspired women to embrace a carefree, unapologetic and playful lifestyle, refusing to be boxed into traditional ideals and expectations.

“Nihilistic tendencies drive people to live in the moment and potentially make rash decisions, exemplified by the rise of buy-now, pay-later and personal debt products,” the study said.

However, it also noted that traditional milestones remain prevalent globally despite the growing trend of individuals finding them “out of reach.”

Need to regain a collective sense of control

For businesses and the government, the study recommended addressing this issue by finding ways to “bridge the gap” between people’s “lived reality and aspirations.”

Equally important, it suggested fostering optimism about the future and encouraging collective action to shape what lies ahead.

“Even if feeling overwhelmed is part of being human, it’s still a powerful emotion that brands should be aware of and look to alleviate,” the study said.

Since people tend to focus on solving problems within their control, Ipsos said institutions should create spaces for self-expression and clarify the roles individuals can play in addressing broader issues.

DENR: Forested lands down to 7 million hectares

By: Bella Cariaso

Of the country's 15 million hectares of forest lands, only seven million have forest cover, Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said yesterday.

Because of this, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is implementing efforts to increase the number to at least 10 million hectares, she said.

"Efforts are being made to manage these areas under the National Greening Program. We have 30 million hectares of land in the country and 15 million of these are classified as forest lands," Loyzaga said.

"Last year, we started mapping out the first 1.2 million hectares, which will be opened to different people's organizations to help us reforest these areas. We hope to target an additional three million hectares for reforestation by 2028," she added.

Loyzaga noted that the world is facing a triple planetary crisis: climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

"Our lands, forests, fisheries and aquatic resources are affected. Of course, the water quality and water security, too. So, all of these, including the rapid growth of our cities, have a positive impact on our economy but pose a threat to the environment," she said.

According to Loyzaga, the DENR has established a database from satellite imagery, increased its monitoring and implemented efforts to help communities affected by climate change.

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