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06 MARCH 2026 | 08:00 am

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Information and Knowledge Management Division

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'Normal' dry season expected, but rising El Niño risk could intensify habagat

By: Ariel Rojas

Rising temperatures are beginning to be felt across the Philippines as the northeast monsoon or Amihan season nears its end.

On March 1, PAGASA resumed the issuance of its heat index forecast.

However, the weather bureau has yet to declare the end of Amihan and the start of the country's warm and dry season.

"Anytime ngayong Marso, posibleng ideklara ng PAGASA ang pagtatapos ng Amihan and also 'yung simula ng ating tag-init," Ana Liza Solis, chief of the Climate Monitoring and Prediction Section of PAGASA, told ABS-CBN News.

(Anytime this March, PAGASA may declare the end of the Amihan season and the start of the warm and dry season.)

The positioning of various weather systems around the country, especially the high pressure areas, and the rising temperatures are among the parameters PAGASA uses in assessing the transition.

Since 2010, the onset of the dry season was typically announced on the third or fourth week of March. On three occasions, the dry season was declared only in April.

Solis said this year's dry season may be comparable to last year's, especially coming off a weak La Niña episode, but the mercury may still hit 40 degrees Celsius.

"May mga potential pa rin na medyo mainit 'yung daytime temperature sa may Cagayan Valley area. Posibleng around April, May, mga around 40 degrees [Celsius] 'yung nakikita natin na pinaka-extreme. But then hindi sya 'yung average kundi at least one day or two consecutive days makakaranas ng ganung matataas na temperature."

(The daytime temperatures in Cagayan Valley may be potentially hotter and may reach around 40 degrees Celsius by April and May. It's not the average but just for one or two consecutive days.)

She added heat index values are likely to remain high but temperatures will not reach the record-breaking heat of 2024 when the dry season coincided with a strong El Niño episode.

While this may be welcome news, state climatologists warned that the public should also pay closer attention to warming nighttime temperatures in the country.

“In fact, base sa datos ng PAGASA, mas mataas ang trend ng increasing nighttime temperature or yung minimum temperature kumpara sa daytime temperature or yung maximum temperature,” Solis said.

(In fact, based on PAGASA data, there is a higher trend of increasing nighttime or minimum temperature compared to the daytime or maximum temperature.)

She added this could lead to serious implications in the energy and agriculture sectors but remains confident the water sector will be stable this dry season.

FADING LA NIÑA, RISING EL NIÑO RISK

Observations in the equatorial Pacific indicate that the current weak La Niña is decaying and may transition to ENSO-neutral conditions before May.

“Anytime ngayong Marso o April, pwede tayong mag-terminate o magtapos ng La Niña episode. Sa ngayon ay malapit na ‘yung possibility na magkaroon ng at least ENSO-neutral condition, more than 60 percent at least up to May,” Solis said.

(Anytime this March or April, we may announce the end of the La Niña episode. There is more than a 60 percent chance of ENSO-neutral conditions by May.)

However, climatologists around the world are warning against the increasing likelihood of an El Niño episode in the second half of the year, with the United States’ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimating a 50 to 60 percent chance of El Niño developing during the July to September 2026 season.

The World Meteorological Organization also cited the potential for a “warming El Niño episode later this year” in an advisory issued Tuesday.

PAGASA said it had seen the potential El Niño development this year as early as December.

“Although napakalayo pa at mataas pa ang uncertainty, but then ‘yung mga models na tinitingnan natin na ginagamit ay nagpapakita, nagpapahiwatig na magkakaroon ng increasing chance ng El Niño this year,” Solis explained.

(Although it’s still far out so the uncertainty remains high, the climate models that we use show an increasing chance of El Niño this year.)

El Niño and La Niña are the warm and cold phases of the naturally occurring climate pattern El Niño-Southern Oscillation or ENSO. It manifests through shifting sea surface temperatures, wind speed and direction, and air pressure in the tropical Pacific Ocean.

Neutral conditions mean the absence of El Niño and La Niña.

MORE INTENSE HABAGAT BUT FEWER STORMS

With the warming event expected in the second half of the year, the upcoming dry season will likely remain unaffected. However, the pre-developing El Niño may lead to a more intense southwest monsoon or Habagat season.

“Bago dumating or during pre-developing El Niño, ‘yung possible nga na around August-September-October or July-August-September season, tumitindi yung Habagat season natin. Ibig sabihin, maaring makaranas tayo ng medyo mas maraming ulan sa panahon ng Habagat, maaaring dulot ng enhanced Habagat o ‘yung mga combined effects lalong-lalo na nung mga bagyong paparating.”

(Before or during a pre-developing El Niño, which is likely during the July-August-September or August-September-October season, the Habagat season intensifies. This means we may experience more rains due to the enhancement of the Habagat or the combined effects of Habagat and tropical cyclones.)

The looming El Niño could also mean fewer storms in the Philippines in the second part of the year.

“But then may possibility na may mga intense na mga bagyo, maaaring typhoon or super typhoon category. ‘Yan ay prevalent kapag pre-developing or nandyan na ‘yung El Niño lalong-lalo na pagdating ng September, October, November.”

(But there’s still the possibility of intense storms, typhoon or super typhoon strength, which are prevalent during pre-developing El Niño or in the months of September, October, and November.)

Early forecasts suggest the warming could extend beyond 2026. Present projections, with high uncertainty, show that the potential El Niño may initially last through the first quarter of 2027.

If it persists through the second quarter of 2027, it could trigger record-breaking heat during next year’s warm and dry season.

“Hopefully hindi naman maging ganun but we need to keep monitoring ‘yung mga ganung possible na scenario,” Solis said.

ECO BUSINESS

[Singapore outlines first national climate adaptation plan](#)

By: Robin Hicks

Singapore has outlined the foundations of its first climate adaptation plan, a whole-of-government strategy to prepare the country for escalating climate risks ranging from extreme heat and flash floods to rising seas and threats to food and water security.

Announcing the plan during her ministry's budget debate on 3 March, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu designated 2026 as Singapore's 'Year of Climate Adaptation', signalling a shift in national attention toward preparing the low-lying country for intensifying climate impacts.

The full plan will be released next year. In the meantime, the government will launch focus group discussions and a public exhibition on the plan before its finalisation.

Fu warned that global climate action is faltering even as climate hazards intensify. Citing World Economic Forum estimates that climate-related losses could exceed US\$1 trillion by 2050, she noted that geopolitical tensions and economic instability – including recent conflicts in the Middle East – risk pushing environmental priorities to the sidelines.

Resilience to heat, floods, rising seas

With temperatures expected to rise and humidity compounding health risks, heat stress has emerged as a key concern. Fu said the government will expand its network of heat sensors islandwide and deepen research to understand how heat affects both people and critical systems.

Senior Minister of State Janil Puthucheary revealed that a new Heat Resilience Policy Office has been established to drive this work. Housed under the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment, the office brings together agencies from national development, health, manpower and social services to align research, set policy direction and represent Singapore in global heat discussions.

To strengthen flood resilience, the government will introduce multiple drainage improvement projects. These upgrades come amid heavier and more unpredictable rainfall patterns that have strained existing drainage systems in recent years.

Fu said a "continuous line of defence" is being developed to shield Singapore's coast from rising seas – one of the country's most existential climate threats. The average sea level for the city-state could rise by up to 1.15 metres by 2100, while storm surges and high tides could push water levels as high as 5 metres – nearly 30 per cent of Singapore sits within this elevation, according to Singapore's third National Climate Change Study.

Singapore's Parliament is set to debate a new Coastal Protection and Flood Resilience Bill, tabled in February, which will legally require landowners along the coastline to implement coastal defences to meet national protection standards.

Conceptual studies to protect the northwest coastline have been completed, with tidal gates to be replaced and dykes raised to safeguard reservoirs. Construction of these defences is expected from the mid-2030s.

To encourage community-led initiatives, the SG Eco Fund, a S\$50 million (US\$39 million) fund set up in 2020 to support sustainability projects, will broaden its eligibility criteria to include adaptation projects for the first time.

Commenting on the plan, Winston Chow, Professor of Urban Climate at Singapore Management University, said it was important to explore ecosystem-based measures in policies that preserve and integrate nature. He added that diverse communities should be included in planning efforts to protect the most vulnerable, such as outdoor workers.

Chow, who is also co-chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) working group on impacts, adaptation and vulnerability, said that for the plan to be effective, metrics that assess the level of risk for water, food and energy systems were key.

He is currently working on developing global climate adaptation metrics for the IPCC at a meeting in Ghana which aims to assess the latest evidence on climate impacts and vulnerabilities, and update the IPCC's technical guidelines on effective adaptation.

"These 'key performance indicators' will strengthen Singapore's adaptation plan – as plans merely state intentions, but indicators will reveal positive or negative impact," Chow said.

Addressing both mitigation and adaptation

The launch of Singapore's climate adaptation plans comes a month after its politicians observed broader shifts in the world towards adaptation efforts as global efforts to cut emissions waver.

Last month, Puthuchery said addressing climate change had become increasingly difficult given policy shifts such as the United States withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and its refocus on fossil fuels.

The prime minister signalled in his budget speech in February that Singapore could moderate the pace of future carbon tax increases on major polluters if global climate ambition continues to weaken, although the carbon levy is still being raised and plans to increase solar deployment and import more clean energy remain in place.

See Yong Feng, a campaigner with climate justice group SG Climate Rally, said he was concerned that Singapore's adaptation strategy continues to lean heavily on technology-driven solutions that align with economic growth, rather than nature-based measures. Secondary

forests – which could provide natural cooling and flood protection – are instead being cleared for development, he noted.

Singapore's draft adaptation plan emerges as Malaysia is hatching its own climate defence strategy, with a focus area being safeguarding national water resources, the country's environment ministry said this week. Malaysia's adaptation plan is expected to be published later this year.

Typhoon-prone Philippines is focused on disaster mitigation in its own adaptation strategy as it looks to reduce vulnerability to climate impacts over this decade. As a regional bloc, Asean is integrating adaptation requirements into its taxonomy to boost financial support for resilience projects.

PCO

[PH endorses Manila-ASPECT Framework to boost ASEAN'S disaster response, intensify regional coordination](#)

The Philippines on Thursday proposed the Manila-ASEAN Strategic Protocol for Emergency and Comprehensive Transformation (Manila-ASPECT) Framework to heighten the regional bloc's disaster response and to step up coordination.

Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Secretary Rex Gatchalian said, "This is a strategic initiative to strengthen ASEAN's disaster response and enhance regional coordination. It will also signal our commitment to One ASEAN, One Response to leaving no one behind, especially sectors in vulnerable situations."

Gatchalian, chair of the 35th ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council Meeting in Makati City, said in his opening remarks.

The Philippines' initiative shows the country's commitment to protecting vulnerable sectors, Gatchalian added.

The Manila-ASPECT Framework provides ASEAN Member States with a standardized approach to improve regional interoperability, data sharing, logistics, and cross-border processes, supporting people-oriented and rights-based disaster response.

"Further discussion and coordination on this initiative will take place in the coming months to ensure effective implementation and collective action across Member States," Gatchalian said.

During the 35th ASCC Council Meeting, regional ministers will formally adopt key frameworks and finalize priority social policies for Southeast Asia.

The Philippines' proposed strategy aims to ensure food security, climate resilience, and disaster preparedness for the stability of the ASEAN community, given the region's high vulnerability to climate change and natural disasters affecting ASEAN Member States.

In line with President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr.'s advocacy, the Philippines is pushing for a more robust and adequate ASEAN-wide response system, as well as coordinated action on disaster risk reduction, climate resilience, and sustainable food assistance to protect communities and livelihoods.

"To strengthen regional cooperation and partnerships, ASEAN can enhance its collective ability not only to respond and recover but to build long-term resilience for our people," Gatchalian said.

ASEAN officials have initially concluded this week the 40th ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (SOCA) Meeting and the High-Level ASCC Council Forum 2026.

The meetings, hosted by the DSWD, were held under the Philippines Chairship's theme: "Navigating our Future, Together."

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

[The sea is higher than we thought, millions more are at risk – study](#)

Climate change's rising seas may threaten tens of millions more people than scientists and government planners originally thought because of mistaken research assumptions on how high coastal waters already are, a new study said.

Researchers studied hundreds of scientific studies and hazard assessments, calculating that about 90% of them underestimated baseline coastal water heights by an average of 1 foot (30 centimeters), according to Wednesday's study in the journal *Nature*. It's a far more frequent problem in the Global South, the Pacific and Southeast Asia, and less so in Europe and along Atlantic coasts.

The cause is a mismatch between the way sea and land altitudes are measured, said study co-author Philip Minderhoud, a hydrogeology professor at Wageningen University & Research in the Netherlands. And he attributed that to a "methodological blind spot" between the different ways those two things are measured.

Each way measures their own areas properly, he said. But where sea meets land, there's a lot of factors that often don't get accounted for when satellites and land-based models are used.

Studies that calculate sea level rise impact usually "do not look at the actual measured sea level so they used this zero-meter" figure as a starting point, said lead author Katharina Seeger of the University of Padua in Italy. In some places in the Indo-Pacific, it's close to 3 feet (1 meter), Minderhoud said.

One simple way to understand that is that many studies assume sea levels without waves or currents, when the reality at the water's edge is of oceans constantly roiled by wind, tides, currents, changing temperatures and things like El Niño, said Minderhoud and Seeger.

Adjusting to a more accurate coastal height baseline means that if seas rise by a little more than 3 feet (1 meter) — as some studies suggest will happen by the end of the century — waters could inundate up to 37% more land and threaten 77 million to 132 million more people, the study said.

That would trigger problems in planning and paying for the impacts of a warming world.

People at risk

"You have a lot of people here for whom the risk of extreme flooding is much higher than people thought," said Anders Levermann, a climate scientist at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impacts Research in Germany, who wasn't part of the study. And Southeast Asia, where the study finds the biggest discrepancy, has the most people already threatened by sea level rise, he said.

Minderhoud pointed to island nations in that region as an area where the reality of discrepancy hits home.

For 17-year-old climate activist Vepaiamele Trief, the projections aren't abstract. On her island home in the South Pacific archipelago of Vanuatu, the shoreline has visibly retreated within her short lifetime, with beaches eroded, coastal trees uprooted and some homes now barely 3 feet (about 1 meter) from the sea at high tide. On her grandmother's island of Ambae, a coastal road from the airport to her village has been rerouted inland because of encroaching water. Graves have been submerged and entire ways of life feel under threat.

"These studies, they aren't just words on a paper. They aren't just numbers. They're people's actual livelihoods," she said. "Put yourself in the shoes of our coastal communities — their lives are going to be completely overturned because of sea level rise and climate change."

Paying attention to the starting point

This new study is pretty much about what is the truth on the ground.

Calculations that may be correct for the seas overall or for the land aren't quite right at that key intersection point of water and land, Seeger and Minderhoud said. It's especially true in the Pacific.

"To understand how much higher a piece of land is than the water, you need to know the land elevation and the water elevation. And what this paper says the vast majority of studies have done is to just assume that zero in your land elevation dataset is the level of the water. When in fact, it's not," said sea level rise expert Ben Strauss, CEO of Climate Central. His 2019 study was one of the few the new paper said got it right.

"It's just the baseline that you start from that people are getting wrong," said Strauss, who wasn't part of the research.

Maybe not so bad, some scientists say

Other outside scientists said that Minderhoud and Seeger may be making too much of the problem.

"I think they're exaggerating the implications for impact studies a bit — the problem is actually well understood, albeit addressed in a way that could probably be improved," said Gonéri Le Cozannet, a scientist at the French geological survey. Most local planners know their coastal issues and plan accordingly, Rutgers University sea level expert Robert Kopp said.

That's true in Vietnam in the high-impact area, Minderhoud said. They have an accurate sense of elevation, he said.

The findings come as a new UNESCO report warns of major gaps in understanding how much carbon the ocean absorbs. That report said that models differ by 10% to 20% in estimating the

size of that carbon sink, raising questions about the accuracy of global climate projections that rely on them.

Together, the studies suggest governments may be planning for coastal and climate risks with an incomplete picture of how the ocean is changing.

“When the ocean comes closer, it takes away more than just the land we used to enjoy,” said Thompson Natuoivi, a climate advocate for Save the Children Vanuatu.

“Sea level rise is not just changing our coastline, it’s changing our lives. We are not talking about the future — we’re talking about the right now.”

THE GUARDIAN

[Climate aid cuts are a disaster for global south](#)

Withdrawing support for programmes in developing countries sends a harmful signal about whose futures are allowed to be protected, says Millie Edwards

Fiona Harvey's article on cuts to climate aid programmes (UK slashes climate aid programmes for developing countries, 2 March) exposes a troubling reversal at a critical moment. Schemes to protect nature and climate resilience across Africa and Asia are being substantially reduced or effectively axed. These cuts sit within a wider contraction of climate finance, and for those of us who work with emerging environmental leaders in the global south, these developments resonate deeply.

Conservation, adaptation and community-based projects already operate with minimal resources. Cuts affecting hundreds of millions of pounds earmarked for vital biodiversity and climate-protection programmes will only undermine projects that communities rely on.

Climate solutions such as restoring mangroves, safeguarding freshwater systems and developing climate-resilient farming methods are among the most cost-effective and locally grounded interventions available. Without stable investment, this work becomes harder and in some cases impossible. At a time of escalating climate impacts, withdrawing support sends a harmful signal about whose futures are allowed to be protected.

If the UK is serious about climate leadership, it must urgently reverse course and commit to protecting the communities and ecosystems that stand to lose the most.

[Vanuatu moves forward with UN climate resolution despite Trump opposition](#)

Pacific island says the US weakened its proposal to advance a key climate ruling but vows to hold major polluters accountable

The Trump administration's attempt to sink a UN resolution demanding countries act on the climate crisis has caused cuts to the proposal but hasn't entirely killed it, according to the tiny Pacific island country spearheading the effort.

The US has demanded that Vanuatu, an archipelago in the south Pacific, drop its UN draft resolution that calls on the world to implement a landmark international court of justice (ICJ) ruling from last year that countries could face paying reparations if they fail to stem the climate crisis.

Vanuatu, one of several Pacific island countries that consider themselves existentially threatened by the climate crisis despite doing little to cause it, said it had to remove sections of its proposed resolution in the hope that a reduced version could be adopted at the UN in a vote later this month.

"Having the Trump administration actively intervening in the market to stop the phase-out of fossil fuels is very frustrating, it's beyond what you'd expect a government to do," Ralph Regenvanu, Vanuatu's minister for climate change adaptation, said.

"It's going to have a huge harmful effect on the world and future generations."

The resolution to fulfill the opinion issued by the ICJ is non-binding but "could pose a major threat to US industry", the Trump administration said in guidance to American embassies and consulates last month.

"President Trump has delivered a very clear message: that the UN and many nations of the world have gone wildly off track, exaggerating climate change into the world's greatest threat," the US state department cable added.

This opposition, alongside those of other major fossil fuel producers such as Saudi Arabia and Russia, has resulted in the proposed UN resolution being watered down.

The resolution previously called for countries to submit a registry of the "loss and damage" they suffer from the impacts of an overheating world, such as storms, floods and droughts. This accounting of damages was strenuously opposed by the US, the world's second-largest carbon emitter, which has long feared legal liability for its pollution, and has now been dropped.

However, a new version of the resolution's draft shared for debate this week still outlines that UN member countries "comply fully with their obligations under international law as they relate to climate change" consistent with the ICJ ruling, and restrain the global temperature rise to 1.5C above preindustrial times via "a rapid, just and quantified phase-out of fossil fuel production and use".

Regenvanu said: "The US asked us to withdraw the resolution, which is disappointing, and pushed back on the language."

He added: “We are hoping the compromise on the loss and damage registry will mean some of that other language will stay in. It’s concerning but we don’t think it will derail the resolution completely, and I hope it will pass with more than just a simple majority.”

Vanuatu has been supported by a coalition of countries, including the Netherlands, Colombia, Barbados, Kenya, Jamaica and the Philippines in pushing for the non-binding resolution. But opposition to the resolution has been “more effective than from those in support”, said Regenvanu, who added that the EU has “not been as helpful as we expected”.

It is the US, though, that stands as the lead threat to the proposal and global climate cooperation more broadly. Trump has told other world leaders that clean energy is a “scam”, dismissed climate science as a “con job” and urged countries to remain wedded to the fossil fuels that are dangerously heating the planet.

His administration has torn up environmental rules in order to “drill, baby, drill” in the US while making extraordinary interventions internationally, such as withdrawing the US from the foundational UN climate treaty and taking control of Venezuela’s oil industry after seizing the country’s president, Nicolás Maduro.

Trump has sought to sabotage global initiatives aimed at cutting planet-heating pollution, such as a levy on shipping emissions, and excoriated the International Energy Agency for accounting for the climate crisis in its energy outlook scenarios.

Unlike the planned shipping carbon levy, Vanuatu’s UN resolution would not impose any specific fees or regulations on countries such as the US and will probably be ignored by the Trump administration should it pass.

But the resolution represents the “beginning of the world building up a body of law for when the politics are different and the world takes more serious action on climate”, said Noah Gordon, an expert in global climate politics at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “Judges and lawyers will look back at this as the foundation of international climate law that has teeth.”

He added: “The Trump administration has tried to blow up climate diplomacy but other countries are still trying to move forward. We are seeing a big divide between countries that produce fossil fuels, and those who consume them.”

While the world’s attention is drawn to Iran after the US and Israel’s attack, on the heels of other armed conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, the primary threat to many countries is the climate crisis, said Regenvanu, who noted that a tropical cyclone in 2015 wiped out 64% of Vanuatu’s GDP.

More recent storms, fueled by hotter ocean and air temperatures, have caused similar economic and humanitarian catastrophes in other countries. Such disasters are taking a growing toll in the US, too, where home insurance is becoming unavailable in some places due to a growing barrage of extreme weather events.

“This is the single greatest threat to our continued existence, security and livelihoods,” Regenvanu said.

“The world needs to be brave and move away from entrenched fossil fuel interests and find a path for future generations. But the state of multilateralism is pretty terrible at the moment, it’s at one of the lowest ebbs ever. This is reflected in climate negotiations, too.”

A US state department spokesperson said that the US asked Vanuatu to “withdraw this performative resolution that if adopted, could pose a major threat to US industry.

“The United States did not support seeking this advisory opinion from the ICJ and has strong concerns about its conclusions,” the spokesperson added.

“Furthermore, the ICJ’s advisory opinion does not provide a basis for the demands included in the draft resolution, which could have broader legal and economic impacts.”

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