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MANILA BULLETIN

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Information and Knowledge Management Division

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The run of intense storms affecting France, Spain, Portugal and Morocco in particular stood in contrast with unusual dryness in the rest of the continent, said Copernicus.

Elsewhere in the world, the pattern of extremes was repeated. Wetter than usual conditions swamped Australia, Mozambique and Botswana, while the dry spell affected the southern US and northern Mexico, easternmost China, parts of South America and south-east Africa.

Samantha Burgess, deputy director at the EU’s Earth observation service Copernicus, said February’s events should draw attention to the “pressing need for global action” on climate change.

Global temperatures reached 1.49C above pre-industrial levels for the month, putting it in the top five hottest on record for the month. This was a fraction below the 1.5C level that scientists believe, if sustained over a period of more than two decades, would lead to irreversible changes to the planet.

The temporary effect of the Pacific Ocean cyclical cooling phenomenon known as La Niña, which is expected to dissipate later this year, has damped the long-term global temperature rise.

Climate change drives more erratic and intense rainfall because increased evaporation as a result of heat drives more frequent and intense storms, while also helping dry out some land area, according to the US space agency Nasa. A warmer atmosphere holds more water, with every 1C temperature rise associated with 7 per cent more moisture.

The narrow bands of very moist air known as atmospheric rivers that provided the European deluge put strain on its winter growing regions and disrupted fruit and vegetable supplies.

Farmers in the UK warned of crops rotting in the ground, after February proved to be 23 per cent wetter than average. England itself recorded 70 per cent more rain than its long-term average, the Met Office has said.

Land temperatures across Europe also varied sharply by region last month, with western, southern and south-east Europe experiencing above-average temperatures, while the Scandinavian peninsula, the Baltic states and north-west Russia had cold conditions.

Outside Europe, parts of the world including the US, north-east Canada and the Middle East were warmer than average, with cold conditions across Alaska, northern Canada and Greenland.

The pace of long-term global warming may be accelerating, according to a paper published on Friday in the scientific journal Geophysical Research Letters.

Researchers, including Stefan Rahmstorf, a climate scientist at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany, found a “statistically significant” acceleration of global warming since 2015.

Average sea surface temperatures of 20.88C last month made February the joint second-highest value on record. Sea ice in the Arctic was 5 per cent below average and the third-lowest level for the month.

GMA NEWS

Marcos says PH has edge in bid for UN Security Council seat
By: Anna Felicia Bajo

Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Wednesday (Manila time) expressed confidence that the Philippines has an advantage in its bid for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

“Well, we have the advantage, and this is what I highlighted in my speech — that the advantage the Philippines has is our very strong record of partnership with the UN over the years,” Marcos said during a press conference.

He said the Philippines’ contributions to the United Nations go beyond its own national interests, citing its role in peacekeeping missions and in raising key global issues.

“Hindi lamang ito tungkol sa Pilipinas. For example, ‘yung mga peacekeeping na tinutulungan natin ang UN under the auspices of the UN," he said.

"‘Yung ating mga pagdala ng iba’t ibang isyu na tayo ang nagpasimuno sa UN — women’s issues, climate change issues, social issues,” Marcos added.

(It is not only about the Philippines. For example, the peacekeeping efforts where we help the UN, as well as issues we have brought forward such as women’s issues, climate change issues, and social issues initiated by the Philippines.)

Marcos said he believes the Philippines can contribute even more if it secures a seat in the council.

The President earlier said the country is ready to serve as a “voice of balance” among nations and a “voice for principled peace.”

On Tuesday, Marcos delivered a 23-minute speech at a special plenary session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, where he highlighted Manila’s history of responding to the UN’s calls and championing causes such as peacekeeping, women’s rights, climate resilience, and the protection of refugees and migrants.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Maria Theresa Lazaro said Marcos’ remarks underscored the Philippines’ long-standing support for the UN.

“It has been proven time and again how the Philippines has supported the United Nations — whether in peacekeeping, migrant issues, or climate change. And that is why we believe we deserve to be a candidate for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council,” Lazaro told reporters.

However, Lazaro said the Philippines should not be complacent as the selection process will still involve voting by UN member states.

The Philippines is seeking a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the 2027–2028 term. Elections for the seat are scheduled on June 3, 2026.

MANILA BULLETIN

As Iran war shakes the energy system, some see a powerful argument for renewable energy

World leaders have tried and failed to curb climate change by appealing to nations to act for the common good. Now, the Iran war and its costly energy crunch have some experts wondering if selfishness and nationalism may be a more likely way to save the planet, by boosting support for homegrown renewables over imported fossil fuels.

Bombed refineries, disrupted shipping channels for oil and liquefied natural gas and skyrocketing fuel prices should point even the most reluctant leaders to a cleaner fossil free future, hope some experts.

But others are dismissive, noting the same speculation emerged, and then quickly flopped, as recently as Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That prompted some European nations to replace gas with even dirtier coal.

"Just wishful thinking," said Stanford University climate scientist Rob Jackson, who tracks global emissions of carbon dioxide.

The head of the United Nations will argue otherwise on Monday.

"The turmoil we are witnessing today in the Middle East makes it evident that we are facing a global energy system largely tied to fossil fuels — where supply is concentrated in a few regions and every conflict risks sending shock waves through the global economy," U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said in an email to The Associated Press. "In past oil shocks, countries had little choice but to absorb the pain. Now they have an exit ramp.

"Homegrown renewable energy has never been cheaper, more accessible, or more scalable," Guterres said. "The resources of the clean energy era cannot be blockaded or weaponized."

Going alone versus together

Annual U.N. climate conferences aimed at global cooperation have accomplished little. The most recent meeting in Brazil, known as COP30, ended with a statement that didn't even mention the words "fossil fuels," much less include a timeline to reduce their use. Guterres said then that he "cannot pretend that COP30 has delivered everything that is needed." Under President Donald Trump, whose attack on Iran has sparked new energy concerns, the U.S. didn't even participate in the Brazil meeting.

Even though renewable energy use and new installations are soaring globally, outpacing fossil fuel growth, the world continues to increase its fossil fuel use every year with emissions of heat-trapping carbon dioxide and methane rising to new highs year after. That's driving

atmospheric warming that increases costly and deadly extreme weather, including dangerous heat, around the world.

"The bottom line is that for at least another five years and maybe longer, emissions reduction will in fact be dealt with largely unilaterally," said Michael Oppenheimer, a Princeton climate and international affairs professor. "If countries see the Israel-U.S.-Iran war as a further reason to head for the exits on fossil fuels by loosening domestic opposition to the necessary policies, that will be accomplished unilaterally at the domestic level."

A moment of opportunity may be here

Caroline Baxter, director of the Converging Risks Lab at the Council on Strategic Risks in Washington, said there has already been a "dramatic slowdown" in the movement of fossil fuels to various ports due to the conflict. And for countries like Japan or South Korea that depend on tankers arriving in their ports to deliver energy, this is a really big deal, she said.

Baxter said she "wouldn't be surprised" if some shift to green energy because of the conflict, if only because renewable energy offers more stability than fossil fuels do.

"I think there is an opportunity, rightly or wrongly, for countries to really turn inward and try to power themselves in a way that cuts off their dependence on other nations for that source," said Baxter, who was U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense for force education and training from 2021 to 2024 under the Biden administration.

Baxter said if she's right and if "everyone does it in their backyard," it will limit future climate change "without the thorny diplomatic negotiations and the glad-handing and the machinations behind closed doors" of international climate conferences.

The war will lead to more solar panels and heat pumps installed in coming months, said energy analyst Ana Maria Jaller-Makarewicz, of IEEFA Europe.

A reality check from Ukraine: 'Exactly the wrong lesson'

More skeptical analysts point to the Russian invasion of Ukraine a few years ago, which put a massive kink in Europe's natural gas supply, yet didn't change the world's fossil fuel dependence. Politicians often pivot to other fossil fuels to address war-oriented energy insecurity, such as coal, which releases even higher amounts of heat-trapping gases.

"We have seen this at the European level where actors post-2022 slowly wanted to move away from the energy transition which is exactly the wrong lesson," said war studies lecturer Pauline Heinrichs at King's College in the United Kingdom.

Just as Europe did then, many countries, like China and India — already the world's No. 1 and No. 3 carbon-emitting countries — could turn to more coal use, said Ohio University's Geoff

Dabelko, an expert on climate and conflict, and University of St. Andrews' Neta Crawford, author of "The Pentagon, Climate Change, and War: Charting the Rise and Fall of U.S. Military Emissions."

War and militaries pollute the air

Whatever happens with nations' energy choices, the war itself will spike emissions.

Even before it began, reports showed that the world's militaries are responsible for 5.5% of Earth's heat-trapping emissions each year, more than any country except China, the United States and India.

Crawford, co-founder of the Costs of War project at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, said fighter jets consuming vast quantities of fuel, releasing carbon dioxide and other pollutants, is just one example.

"The consequences of war on emissions will far exceed any incremental offset in emissions due to increased enthusiasm for a green transition," she said.

PIDS urges clear roles in water reform

State-run Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) has backed proposals in Congress to establish a national framework for water resource management, including the creation of a Department of Water Resources (DWR), saying institutional reforms could help address long-standing governance weaknesses in the sector.

In a position paper dated March 9 and prepared by PIDS senior research fellow Adoracion M. Navarro, the policy think tank examined several Senate measures—Senate Bill (SB) Nos. 83, 145, 225, 240, 310, 426, 1080, and 1475—along with House Bill (HB) No. 6789, which seek to restructure how water resources are governed and regulated in the Philippines.

Navarro said most of the SBs recognize that three major functions in the water sector should be treated as distinct responsibilities: policy coordination and planning, water resources regulation and allocation, and economic regulation of water utilities.

Under the proposals, these roles would be handled by separate bodies, with the DWR responsible for water resource planning and policy, a water allocation or adjudication entity managing water rights, and a Water Regulatory Commission overseeing economic regulation of utilities.
"This separation reflects international best practice, where policymaking, resource allocation, and economic regulation are handled by separate institutions," Navarro said.

She added that such an arrangement addresses persistent structural weaknesses in the Philippine water sector, where existing government bodies have faced criticisms over "limited capacities, fragmented authorities, weak enforcement powers, and regulatory overlaps."

According to PIDS, creating a DWR and a separate Water Regulatory Commission aims to provide "stronger institutional capacity; clearer accountability; and more specialized regulatory functions."

Navarro also recommended that the SBs be consolidated and harmonized into a substitute measure. She said lawmakers could draw lessons from HB 6789, which has already been approved by the House of Representatives on third and final reading.

Among the issues raised by PIDS is the need to reconcile differences among the proposed measures on institutional design. For instance, SB 426 differs significantly from the other SBs because it proposes a Water Resources and Management Authority rather than a department and does not include a Water Regulatory Commission.

Navarro said the arrangement proposed in the other SBs—establishing a DWR and a separate Water Regulatory Commission—is preferable because it strengthens institutional capacity and clarifies accountability.

PIDS also addressed several technical provisions in the proposed legislation. Navarro pointed out that the declaration in most of the SBs describing water as a “public good” is incorrect.

“This is incorrect because public good means non-rival and non-excludable,” she said, explaining that water should instead be classified as a “common-pool resource,” which is non-excludable but rivalrous in consumption.

Navarro said clarifying this distinction is important because it highlights the risks of overexploitation, pollution, and depletion when water use is not properly regulated.

PIDS also emphasized that institutional reforms alone will not fully resolve problems in the country’s water rights system unless amendments are made to Presidential Decree (PD) No. 1067.

Navarro noted that the 1976 Water Code predates modern concerns such as climate change, drought allocation, and water security planning. She said persistent structural problems in the current system include “perpetual or effectively permanent water permits” and the “lack of scientific volumetric accounting.”

Many permits remain valid indefinitely, are automatically renewed, and sometimes stay active even when unused, which can lead to speculative permits, hoarding of water rights, and overallocation within river basins, PIDS said.

Navarro also observed that actual water withdrawals are often not measured because many users lack meters and government monitoring capacity remains weak, making it difficult for authorities to determine whether water use exceeds sustainable limits.

The proposed reforms would allow regulators to revoke unused permits and impose penalties for violations, but Navarro said these measures could still face legal constraints under the existing Water Code.

She added that international best practice is to issue time-bound water permits, link renewals to compliance with rules, and establish basin-level allocation limits based on river basin plans that determine seasonal water availability and withdrawal ceilings.

Navarro said a future DWR could help drive amendments to the antiquated Water Code as its technical capacity develops.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Climate effects could shave 5-20% of PH GDP by 2070

By: Nyah Genelle C. De Leon

The Philippines could lose as much as one-fifth of its economic output within the next five decades if climate change effects continue unchecked, undermining long-term growth and fiscal stability.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a high-emissions scenario could shrink gross domestic product (GDP) by about 5 percent as early as 2040, with losses accelerating to 20 percent by 2070.

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VULNERABLE "The Philippines is projected to remain severely impacted by climate change… posing grave risks to businesses, communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems," warns the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. —AP

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"As a tropical island nation, the Philippines is projected to remain severely impacted by climate change, with more intense and more frequent typhoons, accelerated sea-level rise, and more extreme rainfall events—all posing grave risks to businesses, communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems," the OECD said in its first Economic Survey of the Philippines.

Further, extreme weather events can cut local economic activity by up to 2.2 percent on impact, with about 1.7 percentage points of that contraction persisting even five years later despite post-disaster adaptation, relief, and reconstruction efforts.

Direct fiscal cost
Separate data from the World Bank show that the direct fiscal cost of natural hazards amounts to about 0.5 percent of GDP annually. The OECD said this underscores the need to integrate climate change and its consequences into economic activity, employment, inflation, fiscal space, and public indebtedness.

The Paris-based organization also flagged the lack of projections of the future fiscal change of climate change in the country's Medium-Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF) and Debt Sustainability Analyses (DSA).

"Effective fiscal policy is crucial for enhancing a country's resilience to climate change. A regular assessment of government climate actions is essential—in particular those to protect vulnerable groups, strengthen infrastructure resiliency, and reform agriculture—in the context of medium-term budget planning and debt sustainability analyses," the OECD said.

The country is already ranked first among 193 countries in the World Risk Index due to high exposure to hazards, compounded by an average of 20 typhoons annually, frequent earthquakes, volcanic activity, flooding, and sea-level rise.

Beyond science, societal vulnerability among the poor is heightened by fragile infrastructure and limited adaptive systems.

Calls for insurance

Despite the mounting risks, the OECD said most households remain uninsured, leaving millions vulnerable to climate-related losses.

As of 2025, the country's insurance penetration rate reached only 1.79 percent, still behind regional peers and short of the Insurance Commission's 2-percent target.

But this coverage is largely dominated by life insurance, the OECD noted. Property insurance, which could cover natural hazards, is optional and mostly limited to mortgage or commercial requirements.

"Low-income communities are typically uninsured in many parts of the world, despite being the most exposed to losses when a large weather disaster occurs," the OECD said.

"Low demand for insurance coverage stems from financial illiteracy, weak financial inclusion, insufficient income to afford insurance premiums in many segments of the population, and the fact that property insurance is typically not mandatory," it added.

Although the Philippine government has dedicated funds for calamities and disasters, the OECD said these efforts are insufficient.

"While these initiatives have improved the country's protection against climate risks, much remains to be done to broaden insurance coverage for extreme weather events. Further initiatives to expand insurance coverage are urgent to help low-income groups better protect themselves from escalating climate risks," the OECD said.

As an alternative, the organization suggested microinsurance as a low-cost option for low-income and informal sector households.

“Microinsurance has generally been successful in the Philippines, with 27 percent of the population covered by at least one microinsurance product (mostly health-care insurance), with policy holders generally low-income, informal sector, or those without access to conventional insurance,” it added.

Farm conversion OK'd for renewable energy, socialized housing

By: Jordeene B. Lagare

The Department of Agriculture (DA) has agreed to exempt renewable energy and government socialized housing projects from a wider moratorium on agricultural land conversions.

"By carving out limited exemptions to land-use reclassification moratorium, we seek to strike a balance in allowing critical energy and housing projects to proceed while keeping most farmland conversions on hold pending policy reforms that will ensure food security in the future," Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. said in a statement on Wednesday.

Via Department Circular No. 1, the DA temporarily suspended the acceptance and processing of applications for certifying land-use reclassification until June.

During the suspension, the agency will revisit and review relevant policies to strengthen its oversight, ensure consistency and protect agricultural lands from undue conversion.

Food security agenda

"All other applications for reclassification will continue to be held in abeyance, including appeals already pending before the Office of the Secretary," the DA said.

The latest measure aims to ensure that all current and future land-use reclassification policies are aligned with the national food security agenda.

"The rapid demand for urban expansion, infrastructure development and local land -use zoning revisions has resulted in a growing volume of applications for DA Certification for Land-Use Reclassification which may adversely affect agricultural production areas, agribusiness investments and long-term national food supply stability if not properly regulated," it said.

DA allows exemption

However, in Department Circular No. 11, the DA excluded land conversion for renewable energy projects, as long as endorsed by the Department of Energy or any appropriate authority.

Furthermore, approved socialized housing projects and other similar projects are exempted from the ban, as long as certified by the National Housing Authority, Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development or other appropriate authority.

The DA said the exclusions recognize the strategic importance of renewable energy expansion and the urgent need for government-backed housing.

It maintained that only projects with proper certification will qualify to ensure effective oversight.

“The department underscored that food security remains a top priority, warning that unchecked land conversions could erode agribusiness investments and undermine long-term national food supply stability,” the DA said.

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The Climate Change Commission (CCC) joined key government officials from the Philippines and the United Kingdom (UK) at the 6th UK–Philippines Climate Change and Environment (CCE) Dialogue, which reinforced both countries' commitment to advancing climate resilience, sustainable growth and green finance.

The dialogue on March 4 featured several sessions covering key areas of climate and environmental action.

Participants explored the partnership of two island nations working as one and discussed science-based localization and resilience building, including opportunities in the blue economy. Other topics also addressed nature and sustainable growth that highlighted the potential of biodiversity credits, as well as mobilizing climate finance to support a just transition.

Meanwhile, the CCC presented updates on the implementation and localization of the Philippines' National Adaptation Plan (NAP), which underscored the importance of translating national adaptation strategies into concrete actions at the local level. Developed under the administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr, the NAP outlines the country's long-term roadmap for strengthening climate resilience across key sectors and communities.

"Localization is essential to ensure that the National Adaptation Plan delivers meaningful outcomes for communities on the ground," said CCC Deputy Executive Director Romell Antonio Cuenca on behalf of CCC Vice Chairperson and Executive Director Robert E.A. Borje.

"By aligning national priorities with local realities, we can help local governments identify risks, develop practical adaptation solutions, and strengthen resilience in vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, water, and coastal ecosystems."

The commission also highlighted ongoing efforts to support provinces in translating climate risk assessments into locally driven adaptation initiatives and investment-ready projects.

Through localized climate analytics and partnerships with national government agencies, development partners, and local institutions, the CCC continues to strengthen risk-informed planning and programming across the country.

"This shows how much we can achieve together; we bring the data and expertise and share the purpose of the table, and today we found that ultimate partnership which is really strong," UK Ambassador to the Philippines Sarah Hulton said

Hulton expressed her appreciation for the strengthened collaboration with the Philippines and highlighting her keen interest in advancing joint efforts as she wrapped up the discussions.

“We remain firmly committed to working with you and to turning today’s agreements into concrete action in the years ahead,” she said.

The dialogue concluded with the signing of the Partnership Statement between the Philippines and UK, reaffirming that climate action is not the responsibility of a single nation but a shared commitment that requires collaboration, partnerships, and coordinated efforts across countries and communities.

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