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BUSINESS WORLD

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By: John Victor D. Ordoñez

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REUTERS

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By: Kate Abnett

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SUNSTAR

[DTI lauds renewable energy investment from German firm](#)

Highlighting the Philippines' goal of transitioning to cleaner energy resources, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. together with and his economic team led by Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Fred Pascual held discussions with WPD officials to discuss investment in renewable energy sources. The Philippine delegation met with Mr. Björn Nullmeyer, Chief Finance Officer, and Mr. Hans-Christoph Brumberg, WPD General Manager Asia, as part of the President's business itinerary during his visit to Germany from 12-13 March 2024.

THE MANILA TIMES

[German firm to invest in PH renewable energy](#)

By: Catherine S. Valente

Leading German wind and solar farm developer wpd GmbH has committed to invest P392.4 billion in the Philippine renewable energy sector, Malacañang said on Wednesday.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

[ACEN gets higher rating for climate change report](#)

By: Patrick Miguel

Ayala-owned ACEN Corp. has secured a “B” rating from environmental non-profit disclosure system CDP for its climate change disclosure, moving two levels up from last year’s rating.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

BUSINESS WORLD

US firms to work with MPower, Meralco on power projects

By: John Victor D. Ordoñez

MARYLAND-BASED hydrogen production startup Ally Power, Inc. will work with MPower, the local electricity supply arm of Manila Electric Co. (Meralco), to build a \$400-million (P22.16 billion) hydrogen and electric refueling station in the Philippines, the United States Department of Commerce said on Wednesday.

“This station will produce hydrogen, electricity, and sodium aluminate to support the Philippines’ energy security and climate change agenda,” the US agency said in a statement, detailing US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo’s two-day visit to the Philippines with the 22-member US Presidential Trade and Investment Mission.

Ally Power is engaged in developing stations responsible for recharging hydrogen fuel cell and electric battery vehicles, as well as generating excess electricity for sale to power grids.

It will also work with the University of the Philippines to promote renewable technologies from the US.

The US Commerce department also said Seattle-based Ultra Safe Nuclear Corp. will work with Meralco on carbon-free electrical generation system.

The two companies are expected to launch an electricity project in the country using Ultra Safe’s advanced nuclear battery.

American Chamber of the Philippines Inc. Executive Director Ebb Hinchcliffe said at a business forum on Monday that the cost of power remains a hurdle in making the Philippines an attractive destination for investments in the semiconductor sector.

The Philippines is one of seven countries that the US is working with to diversify its semiconductor supply chain under the CHIPS and Science Act.

Under the law, the US would shell out \$52.7 billion in subsidies to boost chip manufacturing and entice chipmakers in China to move to the US or other friendly countries.

At the same time, the US Commerce department said that Microsoft will work with Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, Department of Budget and Management, and the

Department of Trade and Industry to train jobseekers and students in artificial intelligence.

“It was an honor to lead the first-ever trade mission of this nature to the Philippines and to underscore the immense potential, which is evident in the more than \$1 billion of investments from this mission alone,” Ms. Raimondo said.

“We share an important relationship with the Philippines, and I believe the work we accomplished over these last few days will make our partnership even stronger.”

Meralco’s controlling stakeholder, Beacon Electric Asset Holdings, Inc., is partly owned by PLDT Inc.

Hastings Holdings, Inc., a unit of PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund subsidiary MediaQuest Holdings, Inc., has an interest in BusinessWorld through the Philippine Star Group, which it controls.

ECO BUSINESS

How is Europe cracking down on climate protests?

Across Europe, governments are introducing new rules, doling out stricter punishments and ramping up surveillance in response to a rise in climate demonstrations and direct action protests, such as blocking roads or throwing paint at artworks.

The clampdown could have a chilling effect on the ability of climate activists to protest and could constitute a threat to democracy, according to rights experts, the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

Rights groups also note that while climate protests often lead to arrests, authorities have acted less harshly towards farmers, who blocked roads this year to protest against green policies they blame for lost earnings. The European Union agreed to delay some green regulations to ease tensions.

Here are some of the ways European governments are cracking down on climate protesters.

Which countries have introduced new protest laws?

Lawmakers across Europe have introduced legislation targeting tactics frequently used by people demonstrating to demand more action on climate change and have also increased penalties for those who take part in direct action protests.

In January, Italy approved the so-called “eco-vandals” law, which toughened penalties for people who damage monuments and cultural sites with new fines of up to 60,000 euros (US\$65,406).

In Germany, state police in Bavaria have frequently used an amendment to rules governing police powers to hold activists in preventative detention.

In 2022, Britain introduced the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act that empowers police to restrict a protest if it is considered too noisy. The act, which also makes causing a public nuisance an offence, has been criticised by the UN Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders Michel Forst.

The separate Public Order Act, which came into effect last year, makes it illegal for protesters to attach themselves to others, objects or buildings and introduces the offence of obstructing transport, interfering with national infrastructure, and causing disruption by tunnelling.

The Guardian newspaper said that hundreds of protesters were arrested in just four weeks under this act as they demonstrated against new oil and gas production in November.

What other legal tools are used to deter climate protesters?

The UN's Forst has also criticised Britain's use of harsher sentences and tougher bail conditions, including the requirement to wear electronic ankle tags.

Protesters in Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands have also faced harsh fines, strict sentencing and mass arrests.

Dutch police arrested thousands of protesters over one weekend last September after activists blocked a road in The Hague to protest against government subsidies for fossil fuel industries

France and Germany have invoked anti-terror laws to investigate activists and ban environmental groups.

German authorities assigned an anti-terror unit to investigate activists from The Last Generation as part of a wider inquiry to determine whether the group should be classified as a criminal organisation. The Last Generation has denied its activities were criminal.

Civil injunctions, which are used to place restrictions on individuals, are also increasingly used to block activists from protesting outside corporations, and companies also use lawsuits against environmental activists.

How else are climate protesters being blocked?

The Council of Europe said climate activists have faced heavy-handed policing despite the fact that their disruptive protests are mostly peaceful and non-violent.

In March last year, security forces used pepper spray to break up protests at the European Gas Conference in Vienna while protesters have been beaten in Poland, France and Spain. In Germany police officers have used so-called "pain grips", which involve folding protesters hands down flat against their wrists, according to a recent position paper by Forst.

German authorities have said they tapped activists' phones and raided their homes, while fossil fuel companies have hired private spy firms to monitor activists online.

Is this crackdown also happening around the world?

Just as the protest movement is global so too is the crackdown.

Laws protecting critical oil and gas infrastructure have been introduced in the US and Canada in response to major climate protests.

Greenpeace USA said in a report last October that 60 per cent of all US oil and gas production and related local infrastructure were now protected by a legal wall from protests.

Human Rights Watch says new laws introduced across Australia that increase fines for blocking roads and ban locking-on tactics are part of a “politically motivated crackdown” designed to intimidate the climate movement.

And climate activists from around the world said their protests were restricted during the COP28 UN climate summit in the United Arab Emirates in December, after the UN issued guidelines restricting when and where protests could be held.

FINANCIAL TIMES

[Baku climate summit must make finance a priority, UN leaders say](#)

By: Lee Harris and Attracta Mooney

The UN climate summit held in Baku this year must prioritise finance and unlock new sources of funding to tackle climate change, leading veteran participants said.

“This year, it’s finance,” Tina Stege, the climate envoy of the Marshall Islands, told the Financial Times Climate Capital Live audience on Thursday.

“As we spoke about all the things we were going to commit to last year — to have more ambitious [nationally determined contributions] — we knew that we couldn’t do that without finance, as a developing country,” she said. “We have no [other] pathway.”

The UN COP29 summit to be hosted by Azerbaijan in mid-November has drawn critical attention for being held in yet another petro state, with a poor record on human rights.

It will take place the week following the US presidential election, with the potential that a return of Donald Trump to the White House will derail the green agenda of the world’s biggest economy. The previous Trump administration withdrew the US from the Paris climate accord.

However, Nigel Topping, the former UN COP26 high-level champion who represented the UK at the Glasgow summit, said the push to raise capital to accelerate the shift to green economies would continue.

“It’s finance, finance, finance. Every COP from now on is a finance COP,” Topping said. “We’ve really focused on [nationally defined contributions] and NDCs are nice, but you can’t invest in an NDC.”

María Mendiluce, head of the We Mean Business Coalition, also argued that the inclusion of business leaders, which had led to criticisms about the UN climate talks turning into a “trade show”, was necessary for progress.

“The fact that CEOs are going to COPs — it’s because it matters. And we need to cherish that. It would be awful if they didn’t come,” she told the FT audience.

Concerns about the influence of the fossil fuel producers on successive global climate negotiations following the COP28 held in Dubai have also dogged the choice of Baku, which relies on oil and gas for 90 per cent of its export revenues and finance about 60 per cent of the government.

But the COP29 president-designate Mukhtar Babayev has defended the choice, telling the FT that green growth was a priority for the Caucasus country which was suffering from the effects of climate change.

The 200-odd nations that will gather in Baku are expected to bring improved targets for emissions reductions.

The head of the UN's climate change arm, Simon Stiell, wrote to countries on Thursday asking them to "deliver quantum leaps in the quality and quantity of climate finance" this year.

He called for "ambitious" climate plans to reduce emissions for the period up to 2035, saying these should include all greenhouse gases, such as methane.

The plans would be important to delivering the agreement reached at COP28 last year, where countries agreed to "transition away" from fossil fuels, Stiell said. He also called for targets for 2030 to be updated at the same time.

"These 2030 targets — together with your new national climate plans with a time horizon to 2035 — will determine how protected your peoples, economies and national budgets will be from rapidly worsening climate impacts."

MANILA STANDARD

[ACEN secures 'B' rating for climate change disclosures](#)

By: Alena Mae S. Flores

ACEN Corp. said Thursday it secured a “B” rating for its climate change disclosure through CDP—a global non-profit that runs the world’s leading environmental disclosure platform.

ACEN said in a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange the rating is two levels higher than last year’s, underscoring its dedication to decarbonization and adherence to the highest environmental standards.

ACEN said it actively participated in the Climate Change questionnaire since beginning its disclosures with CDP in 2022, contributing to the world’s most comprehensive inventory of self-reported environmental data.

It said the company’s ongoing efforts align with the increasing demand for environmental transparency from financial institutions, customers and policymakers.

ACEN completed the world’s first Energy Transition Mechanism (ETM) transaction in 2022 that enabled the full divestment of the 246-megawatt South Luzon Thermal Energy Corp. (SLTEC) coal plant.

Under the ETM framework, the coal plant will be retired by 2040, reducing its operating life of up to 50 years by half and reducing up to 50 million metric tons of carbon emissions.

ACEN was also the first energy company in Southeast Asia to launch a robust net zero roadmap in 2023, which includes near-term emission reduction targets aligned with the GHG protocol and the latest climate-science.

“Our commitment to environmental transparency through CDP is a pivotal element of our sustainability strategy. It not only reaffirms our accountability to stakeholders but also enhances our capability to manage environmental risks as we expand our renewable energy portfolio globally,” ACEN vice president and head of corporate communications and sustainability Irene Maranan said.

Sherry Madera, chief executive at CDP, said there are over 23,000 businesses disclosing through CDP this year, which shows that sustainability – and the data that underpins it – is an essential part of long-term success in the business community.

“Disclosure works, and today we should take a short pause to celebrate the dedication to transparency and accountability shown by ACEN reporting through CDP this year. A 1.5-degree future is still possible if the global community works in lockstep to get there. By sharing their environmental data with CDP, ACEN is starting/continuing an environmental journey that will contribute to keeping that future in sight,” Madera said.

ACEN, the listed energy platform of the Ayala Group, has about 4,800 MW of attributable capacity from owned facilities in the Philippines, Australia, Vietnam, Indonesia and India, with a renewable share of 99 percent.

It aspires to be the largest listed renewables platform in Southeast Asia, with a goal of reaching 20,000 MW of renewables capacity by 2030.

ACEN said it is committed to transitioning the company’s generation portfolio to 100-percent renewable energy by 2025 and becoming a net zero greenhouse gas emissions company by 2050.

MONGABAY

[Climate change brews trouble for tea industry, but circular solutions await](#)

By: Sean Mowbray

It's estimated that we drink around 5 billion cups of tea every day. Producing this vast quantity of leaves to quench global thirst for black, green and other varieties is an industry that spans more than 60 tropical and subtropical countries and largely depends on smallholder farmers.

Globally, agriculture plays a large part in driving our planet's "triple crisis": climate change, biodiversity destruction and releasing chemical pollution into oceans and waterways. Like many other agricultural crops, tea has an impact, implicated in deforestation of tropical areas (both historic and present), and heavy use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers that harm soils and rivers and add to climate change. On top of these environmental issues, farmers and tea workers face deeply embedded human rights and gender issues, such as low wages and poor working conditions, exacerbated by globally low prices, according to experts.

Sabita Banerji, founder and CEO of The International Roundtable for Sustainable Tea (THIRST), says the tea sector is in many ways akin to "a 19th-century industry that's now struggling to survive in the 21st century," as it faces a host of sustainability challenges, both social and environmental.

"It needs to grow and adapt to the current times," she adds.

While the tea industry is contending with its environmental and social problems, human activities driving climate change threaten to hammer tea-producing countries and farmers who depend on the crop for their livelihoods.

"The tea sector faces daunting economic challenges stemming from climate impacts, low tea prices, rising production costs, pests and pesticide use, shifts in worker availability and more," says Christopher Whitebread, the tea sector lead at the Rainforest Alliance.

Experts say that solutions to reducing tea's environmental footprint would also build resilience against waves of droughts, erratic rainfall and rising temperatures caused by our rapidly heating world. Many of these follow circular economy principles that aim to reuse waste, boost renewable energy sources and switch to alternative farming methods, ultimately benefiting farmers and biodiversity.

World's second favorite tippie

The world is hooked on tea, which comes from the *Camelia sinensis* plant, and the beverage is renowned as the second most consumed drink globally, only tipped by water. Globally, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that in 2021, farmers grew 6.5 million metric tons of tea, with China producing nearly half, followed at some distance by India, Kenya and Sri Lanka. The tea industry employs an estimated 13 million people, with around 9 million smallholder farmers growing roughly 60% of the world's tea.

Often grown in large-scale monocultures, tea production relies heavily on large amounts of fertilizers and pesticides, which can harm workers, the environment and soils, and further fuel climate change.

Studies, for example, indicate that a lack of personal protective equipment and exposure to pesticides on farms is widespread in some areas of the world, posing health concerns for workers, many of whom are women.

“On the clinics on tea estates, they very often see respiratory problems and skin problems caused by pesticides,” Banerji says. At the other end of the supply chain, researchers also warn of the possibility of a “bitter side” to tea consumption: residue sampling of tea leaves indicates some may be contaminated with pesticides, leading to health concerns for tea drinkers.

Similarly, this overuse of chemicals can have implications for wildlife. Around Uganda's Kibale National Park, tea plays an important role as a buffer zone, warding off potential wildlife conflict. But studies show that species, such as endangered primates, can be exposed to a chemical cocktail including pesticides and flame retardants. Researchers are working to parse out the details of where these come from and how harmful they may be to wildlife.

Once tea is plucked it must go through various stages of processing, including withering and drying: energy-intensive processes that often use vast amounts of wood or, in some cases, fossil fuels such as coal. This not only results in CO₂ emissions, but also has the potential for “hidden deforestation” for wood to burn, according to experts such as Rachel Cracknell, environment and climate lead at the Ethical Tea Partnership.

“As global tea demand grows by over 2% annually, the pressure on land for cultivation may lead to increased deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions, further intensifying the impacts of climate change,” Whitebread adds.

Climate change and tea

Climate change is both a present and future threat to tea production across the globe, say experts. Studies indicate that climate change will hit tea-producing regions hard.

A report by the Ethical Tea Partnership indicates that by 2050 “the optimal suitability of tea growing regions in Kenya, Sri Lanka and China will be reduced by 26.2%, 14%, and 4.7%, respectively, and by 2070 suitability in Sri Lanka will decline by nearly 30%.” Multiple studies show that various tea-growing regions face the challenge of climate change, including major producers such as Assam state in India.

“There are these global trends that mean each farm, landscape or valley is going to be impacted differently by climate change,” Cracknell says. “We are seeing a lot of incidences of farmers being adversely affected by climate change.”

Climate change brings with it a host of challenges, such as unpredictable rainfall, landslides, more severe droughts, increasing numbers of pests, varying temperatures and shrinking areas for production, say experts. These aren’t future impacts — they’re already being felt today.

“While the impacts vary from one place to another, in many places climate change is already decreasing tea yields and lowering tea quality, with important impacts on the livelihoods of farmers and workers,” Whitebread says.

In Kenya, for example, droughts can decrease tea yields by up to 30%. Chalo Richard Muoki, chief research scientist at the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization, says climate change has resulted in positives and negatives for tea production in Kenya, though it’s mostly the latter.

“We are experiencing a lot of challenges in terms of production and ... sustainability of the industry,” he says. “You find a farm that is almost wiped out and a lot of plants die within the fields because of incidences of drought.”

His own institution is working on multiple fronts to tackle climate change impacts on tea, including identifying resistant crop variants and promoting agroforestry, hoping to reinforce the nation’s smallholder tea farmers.

“For us to be able to manage climate change, it’s not a one-off, it’s not one technology that will work out a miracle,” Muoki says. “It’s about how we combine the synergy between these technologies.”

Chasing resilient tea

Experts say a variety of changes on the production side can help the tea industry reduce its environmental footprint and build climate resilience. That involves moving away from farming practices that degrade and pollute soils with chemical fertilizers, they say.

“By adopting regenerative practices such as agroforestry, integrated pest management and soil restoration, tea farmers are better equipped with tools to enhance biodiversity and protect the land,” says Madhuri Nanda, the Rainforest Alliance’s director for South Asia.

Experts say planting native trees within and around tea farms can provide shade and windbreaks and create a microclimate for tea crops. Integrating timber and fruit trees among tea crops can also generate additional income for farmers. Such agroforestry systems must be carefully designed, however, as too much shade can have adverse effects, such as increasing the number of pests, Nanda says.

In Uganda, a project named Nature-based Solutions for Climate-Resilient Tea (NbS4T), a collaboration between research institutions, government bodies and the tea industry, is trialing a range of measures to tackle climate change and support farmers. This involves using widely available banana waste alongside tea waste to produce organic fertilizers or create biochar as a soil amendment.

“We believe that the combination of organic fertilizers and agroforestry could bring about enhancements in biodiversity, soil, and condition the microenvironment around the plant,” says Tumuhimbise, director of research at Uganda’s National Agricultural Research Organization. He says such practices are currently limited across the country. The hope is that lessons from the project will enable farmers to increase productivity and incomes while creating more sustainable tea, thereby regenerating depleted soils and benefiting biodiversity.

In India, work conducted by the NGO Solidaridad Network has seen success in reducing reliance on chemical fertilizers among smallholders, following similar methods of waste-based biosolutions.

Waste from the tea industry is a useful product and can be used in different sectors, such as the food and pharmaceutical industries, but returning waste to farms is preferred, says Ranjan Circar, global tea lead at Solidaridad Network. Supporting farmers in India to produce biofertilizers, biopesticides and compost using earthworms has enabled reductions in inorganic chemical fertilizers by around 68%, he adds.

Other researchers note that in countries such as Vietnam, where tea growers use large amounts of fertilizers, farmers increased their income by switching to organic methods.

On the processing side, which is a large energy consumer and source of CO2 emissions, there's potential for the use of solar energy to cut down on the demand for wood and fossil fuels, say experts such as Cracknell. To date, this potential remains untapped and requires "significant investment," she adds.

"Currently the tea industry requires a huge amount of wood to meet the demands of heating," says Harjit Singh, whose research team from Brunel University in the U.K. developed a solar solution for the tea industry in Kenya. "Even if you've got the wood from sustainable forests, burning still causes carbon to be emitted." Singh adds that renewable energy could be a game-changer in slashing emissions — and air pollution — at this stage of tea production.

Alternatives to the felling of trees may also come from other agricultural waste. In Kenya, efforts are underway to use materials such as rice husks, sawdust, crushed macadamia shells and coffee husks as substitute fuels, according to Cracknell.

"The tea industry is actively exploring alternative sources of biomass knowing that sourcing fuelwood is a sustainability challenge," she says.

Tea and biodiversity

Climate change isn't the only global crisis; experts say changing farming practices could also benefit biodiversity.

In South America, NGOs and conservationists are using the herbal tea yerba mate (*Ilex paraguariensis*) as a means to support biodiversity conservation and restore the highly fragmented Atlantic Forest. Like tea, yerba mate is usually grown in a similar way to any other industrial crop: farmers fell trees and deploy chemicals to boost yields.

But in Paraguay, the NGO Guyra Paraguay is supporting rural and Indigenous communities to cultivate yerba mate using organic processes, employing a range of native trees, cover crops and natural fertilizers to boost soil health.

"We wanted yerba mate to be a driver of restoration, because it's an endemic plant of the Atlantic Forest," says Fabiana Benitez, project manager with Guyra Paraguay, adding that her organization is now working with some 130 farmers. Research shows that such shade-grown yerba mate systems can benefit biodiversity, particularly birds.

Meanwhile, in Argentina, conservationists have introduced a quality seal, called Cultivo Amigo de las Aves (Bird-Friendly Crop), that follows a similar model and is bestowed on organic yerba mate production that also requires farmers to conserve patches of forest on their land.

Changing agricultural practices also holds potential for supporting biodiversity on conventional tea farms, experts say. A 2022 review of published scientific papers found that tea plantations are lower in biodiversity than other crop plantations such as rice, coffee or bananas, but higher than oil palm, sugarcane and corn.

“In a tea plantation we tend to have very much the clear definition of a monoculture,” says study co-author Jake Bicknell, referring to the lower habitat complexity that results in lower biodiversity.

As well as building resilience against climate change, measures can be taken to “nudge” tea production to support biodiversity, experts say, through steps such as converting monoculture to a “mosaic of landscapes.”

“Traditional tea agroecosystems are still the ideal setting for biodiversity persistence,” says Annesha Chowdhury, senior program manager at the Women’s Earth Alliance. “Tea monocultures managed with multiple habitats and shade trees can support biodiversity and ecosystem services.”

In Cracknell’s view, agroforestry is the “future of smallholder tea production,” but there remains a need to boost farmer incomes by other means, such as payments for tree planting and for maintaining ecosystem services, soil carbon and biodiversity.

Ultimately, experts say, such initiatives are aimed not just at making tea profitable for farmers and to reduce its environmental burden, but also to ensure that it’s a commodity that continues to survive in the face of an ever-changing climate.

“The shift to a circular economy and adopting more regenerative practices in agriculture is a game-changer for farmers,” says the Rainforest Alliance’s Nanda. “It’s not just about reducing harm anymore; it’s about actively restoring the land where we grow our food.”

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

[DAR grants P1.5-M for ARBs in Ilocos Norte town to boost food security](#)

By: Leilanie Adriano

Agrarian reform beneficiaries (ARBs) in a remote village of Nagsurot in Burgos, Ilocos Norte will soon have a PHP1.5 million worth multi-functional facility to produce high-value crops all year-round.

Meant to help ARBs improve their productivity amid the challenges of climate change, provincial agrarian reform program officer Vic Ines told Philippine News Agency on Thursday the official turnover of the greenhouse is expected in the second quarter of this year.

“We have allotted PHP1.5 million for the project and the amount includes the conduct of capability training and other components of the project,” she said.

Ines said the fund has been downloaded to the local government unit of Burgos for implementation.

She led a team of Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) representatives for the final inspection of the project in Barangay Nagsurot on Wednesday.

In line with the food security program of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., DAR has been introducing modern farm technologies and providing modern farm equipment to ARBs.

With the greenhouse facility, Ines said ARBs can grow more crops year-round that are protected from adverse weather conditions.

Seedling trays, seeds, potting media and seedling tables are also added to the facility.

POLITIKO

[Protect Earth Instead Of Colonising Mars, Obama Says](#)

Humanity must preserve Earth before dreaming of colonising Mars because even nuclear war and unbridled climate change cannot make the red planet more liveable, Barack Obama said Wednesday.

Humanity must preserve Earth before dreaming of colonising Mars because even nuclear war and unbridled climate change cannot make the red planet more liveable, Barack Obama said Wednesday.

Speaking at a renewable energy conference in the French capital Paris, the former US president mentioned Silicon Valley “tycoons, many of whom are building spaceships” that could take humans to Mars.

“But when I hear some of the people talk about the plan to colonise Mars because the earth environment may become so degraded that it becomes unliveable, I look at them like, what are you talking about?”

“Even after a nuclear war, Earth would be more liveable than Mars, even if we didn’t do anything about CC (climate change) it would still have oxygen — as far as we can tell, Mars does not,” Obama said.

“I would rather us invest in taking care of this planet here,” he continued, saying space exploration should be for gathering knowledge and discovery rather than creating new living space for humanity.

“We were designed for this place, and it would be good if we kept this place in a way that’s liveable,” he concluded.

During his hour-long talk, Obama discussed his climate record at the White House between 2009 and 2017.

As for his successor and potential future president Donald Trump, a long-time climate sceptic who withdrew the United States from the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement, Obama said the facts spoke for themselves.

Obama was speaking as a special guest at the opening the Powr Earth Summit, a gathering organised by two renewable energy entrepreneurs and attended by industry players.

REUTERS

COP29 host Azerbaijan plans to upgrade climate target

By: Kate Abnett

Azerbaijan, host of this year's U.N. climate change talks, hopes to upgrade its emissions reduction target in time for the event, the incoming president of the COP29 summit said on Thursday.

Azerbaijan's economy relies on oil and gas, and its existing target - to cut greenhouse gas emissions 35% by 2030 and 40% by 2050 versus 1990 levels - is far short of the net zero level scientists say the world must reach by 2050 to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Mukhtar Babayev, minister of ecology and natural resources, said his former Soviet nation had started preparations to consider updating its national climate change commitment (NDC).

"It is not only a chance for Azerbaijan, but all other countries to prepare and announce the upgraded NDCs in Baku in November this year," Babayev told a Financial Times conference in London in a recorded interview.

Azerbaijan's announcement comes as Simon Stiell, executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, sent a letter to all countries asking them to beef up their national climate plans up to 2035, strengthen their 2030 emissions reduction targets and commit more money for climate finance.

"Critically, your NDCs 3.0 (new climate plans) and 2030 targets will collectively determine whether the world can get back on a global emissions trajectory in line with limiting global temperature rise to 1.5C this century, as required by science under the Paris Agreement," he wrote.

Stiell will attend a gathering of countries' climate ministers in Copenhagen next week.

TEST OF RESOLVE

Babayev, who previously spent two decades at Azerbaijan's state-owned oil and gas firm, did not specify what the amended target would be.

Campaigners and some climate scientists have criticised his appointment, for continuing a trend of individuals with deep ties to the oil and gas industry leading global negotiations to combat climate change.

Oil and gas account for 91% of Azerbaijan's exports, according to U.S. data, opens new tab for 2022.

Babayev said Azerbaijan was committed to expand green energy sources to a 30% share of the mix by 2030. The country is rich in untapped wind and solar resources, but today its energy is nearly entirely produced from fossil fuels.

He said he had begun talks with financial institutions, banks, campaigners and the private sector to lay groundwork for a consensus at the summit on raising more finance to help developing nations with the energy transition.

The November meeting in Baku will test governments' appetite to fight climate change after a bumper year of elections from the EU and U.S. to India and South Africa. COP29 serves as the deadline for countries to agree a new global climate finance goal to help poorer nations cope with worsening climate change.

Last year's COP28 climate summit in the United Arab Emirates was led by Sultan Al-Jaber, head of the country's state-owned oil firm. That summit yielded the first global agreement to transition away from fossil fuels but fell short of the full phase-out more than 100 countries including the EU, U.S. and climate-vulnerable small island states had sought.

SUNSTAR

[DTI lauds renewable energy investment from German firm](#)

Highlighting the Philippines' goal of transitioning to cleaner energy resources, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. together with and his economic team led by Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Secretary Fred Pascual held discussions with WPD officials to discuss investment in renewable energy sources. The Philippine delegation met with Mr. Björn Nullmeyer, Chief Finance Officer, and Mr. Hans-Christoph Brumberg, WPD General Manager Asia, as part of the President's business itinerary during his visit to Germany from 12-13 March 2024.

"The DTI will continue to assist WPD in navigating its way through the regulatory bureaucracy in the Philippines. Through the Board of Investments (BOI), one of our attached investment promotion agencies, we will work closely with your company to fast-track your application for green lane under Executive Order No. 18, which constitutes Green Lanes for Strategic Investments," Secretary Pascual said.

The Philippine delegation also acknowledged the significance of WPD's proposed investments in Renewable Energy (RE), including WPD's additional onshore wind farms committed to be built before 2030. They added that this aligns with the Philippine government's objectives to achieve RE mix targets of 35% and 50% by 2035 and 2050, respectively.

During the meeting, the Philippine delegation discussed the WPD's ongoing development work for the establishment of offshore wind farms in Cavite, Negros Occidental, and Guimaras, valued at an initial investment cost of PHP 392.4 billion. This investment is similar to the largest foreign investment recorded with the BOI in 2023, and the single biggest investment from Germany to date, fostering momentum for continued German investments in the Philippines.

Apart from the previously committed offshore wind investments, WPD is already undertaking pre-development activities for five onshore projects in the Ilocos Region, Aklan, Iloilo, Antique, and Bulacan with a combined RE capacity of 565 megawatts and with an estimated combined investment value of PHP 56 billion, with completion dates between 2027 and 2030.

Further, the delegation led by President Marcos also invited WPD to collaborate with the Philippine government in attracting foreign manufacturers of RE components, such as propellers and storage batteries. They also emphasized that German companies can relocate their operations in the country, which is a critical move designed to contribute to reducing the cost of production for the RE sector.

WPD GmbH, headquartered in Bremen, Germany, specializes in the development and operation of offshore and onshore wind and solar PV projects across Europe, Asia, and the Americas, actively operating in 29 countries.

THE MANILA TIMES

[German firm to invest in PH renewable energy](#)

By: Catherine S. Valente

Leading German wind and solar farm developer wpd GmbH has committed to invest P392.4 billion in the Philippine renewable energy sector, Malacañang said on Wednesday.

Presidential Communications Secretary Cheloy Garafil said the pledge was made during the meeting between President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and wpd GmbH officials led by Chief Finance Officer Björn Nullmeyer in Berlin on Tuesday.

Garafil said the investment would be used in the construction of offshore wind farms in Cavite, Negros Occidental and Guimaras.

The offshore wind projects in Cavite and Negros have a combined capacity of 3,260 megawatts valued at P400 billion.

Marcos was optimistic of the modern technology that the German firm would bring to the Philippines.

"Thank you for coming in and to continue having an interest in the Philippines. I think that it is a very fertile investment, especially for your industry and business. We are, like everybody else, working very hard to move the share of energy production and fossil fuels to renewable and wind, solar, hydro, and nuclear," Marcos told the wpd GmbH officials.

Marcos said investments in the energy sector are crucial to the administration's industrialization thrust.

The wpd GmbH develops and operates onshore wind and solar photovoltaic projects in Europe, Asia and the American continent.

Based in Bremen, Germany, it has active business engagements in 29 countries worldwide.

The President is also looking forward to partnering with German firm Bosch in the implementation of the country's Public Utility Vehicle (PUV) modernization program.

In his meeting with Vijay Ratnaparkhe, the regional president of Bosch for Southeast Asia and Bosch Singapore managing director, Marcos welcomed Bosch's venture in Asia's transportation sector, especially as the country transitions to cleaner technologies such as electric vehicles (EVs) and hydrogen-powered vehicles.

The President welcomed Bosch's research and development (R&D) initiatives and expressed hope that the company will bring new technology to the Philippines.

Under the government's PUV Modernization Program, operators and drivers will be organized into cooperatives or corporations to ensure the efficiency of their operations with an upgraded fleet of low-carbon, safe and efficient PUV units.

The Bosch official said that hydrogen use is more efficient in larger vehicles than small ones.

He said Bosch is looking at the potential of participating in the reorganization of the supply chain that's happening in Southeast Asia.

"Right now, that's where we are concentrating on because the conversion from petrol to hydrogen is also feasible," Ratnaparkhe told Marcos.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

[ACEN gets higher rating for climate change report](#)

By: Patrick Miguel

Ayala-owned ACEN Corp. has secured a “B” rating from environmental non-profit disclosure system CDP for its climate change disclosure, moving two levels up from last year’s rating.

ACEN has been participating in the global non-profit’s Climate Change questionnaire since 2022, contributing to the world’s inventory of self-reported environmental data. This aligns with the demand for environmental transparency from financial institutions, customers and policy makers.

“Our commitment to environmental transparency through CDP is a pivotal element of our sustainability strategy. It not only reaffirms our accountability to stakeholders but also enhances our capability to manage environmental risks as we expand our renewable energy portfolio globally,” ACEN CFO and chief strategy officer Jonathan Back said.

CDP CEO Sherry Madera said that sustainability is an “essential part” of long-term success in the business community.

According to Madera, there are more than 23,000 businesses disclosing through CDP.

“Disclosure works, and today we should take a short pause to celebrate the dedication to transparency and accountability shown by ACEN reporting through CDP this year,” she said.

“By sharing their environmental data with CDP, ACEN is starting/continuing an environmental journey that will contribute to keeping that future in sight,” she added.

In 2023, ACEN was the first energy firm across Southeast Asia to launch a robust net zero roadmap, including near-term emission reduction targets aligned with the greenhouse gas emissions protocol and the latest climate-science.

CDP uses capital markets and corporate procurement to encourage companies to disclose their environmental impacts and to reduce GHG, safeguard water resources and protect forests.

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