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By: Ertharin Cousin

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THE ECONOMIST

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Information and Knowledge Management Division

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One month into the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, the Strait of Hormuz continues to be closed. Policymakers around the world have focused on the risks that this blockage poses to global energy markets; nearly 20 percent of global petroleum supply transits the corridor. But a more consequential disruption is unfolding beyond oil.

About one-third of fertilizer that is shipped by sea travels through the same waterway. Fertilizer markets have tightened rapidly as shipments of key inputs such as ammonia, urea, and sulfur face delays, rerouting, and sharply rising insurance costs tied to maritime risk. Prices for nitrogen and phosphate fertilizers have risen by 20 percent to 40 percent in recent weeks, reflecting not only supply constraints but uncertainty in transport itself.

Energy, fertilizer, and food systems are tightly linked: Natural gas drives nitrogen fertilizer production, transport costs shape delivery, and insurance premiums amplify market uncertainty.

Farmers respond quickly to input cost and uncertainty. They reduce fertilizer application, shift to less input-intensive crops, or delay planting altogether. These decisions determine crop output. Reduced fertilizer use lowers yields. Lower yields tighten supply. Tighter supply drives food prices higher. Many major producing regions, including the United States, Brazil, and parts of Asia, are entering or preparing for key planting periods. Farmers in these areas are already considering shifts from fertilizer-intensive crops such as corn, rice, and wheat toward lower-input alternatives such as soybeans, pulses, and sorghum.

Food security depends not only on what crops are grown, but on whether farmers can access the inputs required to produce them—and whether those inputs can reliably move through global supply chains.

Modern agriculture depends on three primary nutrients: nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. Nitrogen supports plant growth, phosphorus enables root development and energy transfer, and potassium improves plants' resilience to stress. Among those inputs, phosphorus is indispensable. Unlike nitrogen, it cannot be synthesized. It must be mined, processed, and delivered. Without it, crop yields decline regardless of advances in seed technology or irrigation. Yet phosphorus availability depends less on reserves than on a functioning production system.

Phosphate rock must be processed using sulfur and ammonia—inputs that are directly tied to energy systems and concentrated in key regions, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Sulfur enables phosphate conversion. Ammonia anchors compound fertilizer production. Both depend on stable energy production and uninterrupted transport. For this reason, disruptions to the Strait of Hormuz do not remain confined to shipping lanes—they propagate through agricultural systems worldwide.

Beyond the war in the Middle East, environmental trends could worsen the food crisis. Lingering La Niña conditions continue to shape rainfall expectations across key producing regions, increasing uncertainty in planting decisions just as input availability tightens. In South America, La Niña typically brings drought to southern Brazil and Argentina, reducing soybean and maize yields. In East Africa, it is associated with below-average rainfall and drought. In Southeast Asia and Australia, it can increase rainfall variability and flooding risks. The 2020-2022 La Niña cycle contributed to significant crop losses in South America and exacerbated drought-driven food insecurity in the Horn of Africa, where millions required humanitarian assistance.

The dual pressures of conflict and climate do not operate independently. They compound risk. As farmers decide what—and how much—to plant, they are responding not to a single constraint, but to layered risk.

The effects of the fertilizer crisis will be global but will vary depending on countries' crop cycles and import dependencies. Among the growing list of potentially affected nations are India and China. India depends heavily on imported fertilizer inputs and is now facing reduced domestic fertilizer production ahead of the monsoon season. Brazil, meanwhile, imports approximately 85 percent of its fertilizer to sustain agricultural production. Across sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, farmers operate with narrow margins and adjust fertilizer use quickly when costs rise.

These regions anchor global food production. Brazil accounts for more than 50 percent of global soybean exports. India is the world's largest rice exporter. When input use declines, the consequences extend beyond national borders, tightening global supply and amplifying price volatility. The result will not simply be a commodity shock: It will be a full-blown food crisis.

Policy responses and diplomatic dialogue related to food crises remain tied to visible outcomes such as price spikes and shortages. But global food systems function as tightly coupled networks, where disruptions move through them in sequence. Constraints in energy, transport, and climate conditions shape production long before they appear in markets.

Policymakers must recognize these early signals. First, governments should treat food system inputs, particularly fertilizers and their underlying components, as strategic assets, and the corridors that move them as critical infrastructure. Second, they should diversify their agricultural input supply chains, as overreliance on concentrated production and transit routes creates vulnerability. Third, they must invest to strengthen resilience at the farm level—improving nutrient efficiency, supporting soil health, and reducing exposure to volatile input markets.

Fourth and most importantly, policymakers must shift their focus from food crisis outcomes—such as agricultural production failures and the resulting food price crises—to the precursors: access to fertilizer.

While these longer-term policies will reduce the possibility of future food crises, regaining access to fertilizer today makes reopening the Strait of Hormuz a humanitarian necessity. The potential for a food crisis has not gone unnoticed by the United Nations. The body's Food and Agriculture Organization predicts no more than a three-month window for action before "risks escalate significantly, affecting global planting decisions for 2026 and beyond."

In response, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres appointed an envoy to lead the U.N.'s response to the conflict, including the effort to restore movement of fertilizers as well as humanitarian goods. "The prolonged closure of the Strait is choking the movement of oil, gas, and fertilizer at a critical moment in the global planting season," Guterres said. "The Gulf countries are strong suppliers of raw materials for nitrogen fertilizers."

A food security crisis does not begin when consumers face higher prices. Hunger crises begin when the conditions for producing food begin to erode. Today, that erosion is shaped by a war's creation of a geopolitical choke point—and exacerbated by climate variability. By the time the effects appear in markets, it will be too late for policymakers to intervene. As Guterres so accurately stated, "We are getting close to the planting season in different parts of the world. Without fertilizers today, we might have hunger tomorrow."

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

[Fair weather Tuesday with likely isolated rains, says Pagasa](#)

By: Isabelle Pechay

Generally fair weather with isolated rains in the afternoon are expected across much of the country, the state weather bureau said Tuesday.

According to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa), a ridge of a high-pressure area (HPA) is currently extending over Northern and Central Luzon.

“Areas where the ridge of the high-pressure area extends have a lower chance of thunderstorms,” Pagasa weather specialist Veronica Torres said.

Metro Manila, Central Luzon, Ilocos Region, Cordillera Administrative Region, and Cagayan Valley will experience partly cloudy to cloudy skies, with lower chances of thunderstorms.

However, the rest of Luzon, as well as Visayas and Mindanao, may still see isolated rain showers.

“We expect fair weather conditions to continue, but there are still chances of thunderstorms in the afternoon,” Torres added in Pagasa’s latest weather briefing.

The weather pattern is expected to persist in the coming days, though Pagasa said the influence of the high-pressure area ridge may weaken slightly.

“In the next two to three days, we expect this kind of weather to continue, but the areas affected by the ridge of the high pressure area may decrease in the coming days,” she added.

Despite generally fair weather, heat indices remain high. Heat index is the temperature felt by the body when humidity is factored in.

Pagasa recorded heat indices of 38°C to 39°C in Metro Manila on Monday, while Alabat, Quezon reached 43°C, falling under the “danger” category.

On Tuesday, similar conditions are expected, with Metro Manila again forecast to hit 38°C to 39°C, while San Jose, Occidental Mindoro and Dumangas, Iloilo may reach up to 42°C under the “danger” level.

Heat indices ranging from 42°C to 51°C fall under the “danger” category, increasing the risk of heat cramps and heat exhaustion, which may lead to heat stroke.

Pagasa also said that no low-pressure area or tropical cyclone is being monitored outside or near the Philippine area of responsibility. /mr

[SE Asia's protected areas hold climate value, but we're not using it](#)

By: Siti Maryam Yaakub

Across Southeast Asia's coastlines, nature is quietly delivering climate action at a scale we have yet to appreciate fully.

Mangroves and seagrasses, frequently overshadowed by tropical rainforests, capture carbon at roughly twice the rate of their terrestrial counterparts. The Indo-Pacific hosts 37 percent of the world's mangroves and 23 percent of its seagrasses – global climate assets of extraordinary importance.

When left intact, this “blue carbon” remains stored for millennia, making these ecosystems some of the most effective natural climate solutions we have.

Yet Asean's vast blue carbon wealth remains largely unrecognized, undervalued and underprotected.

Mangrove forests and seagrass meadows are not only biodiversity strongholds but also essential natural infrastructure. They protect coastlines, support livelihoods, and strengthen climate resilience.

Beyond absorbing carbon, these ecosystems shield shorelines from erosion and storm surge, reduce flood risks, support fisheries that feed millions and sustain coastal economies through ecotourism.

Seagrass meadows in the Indo-Pacific alone are estimated to sequester carbon worth up to US\$250 million (S\$321.5 million) annually. But like any asset, they retain their value only when properly managed.

Unlocking their full value requires a fundamental shift in how we manage and safeguard our coasts.

When we fail to protect them, we forfeit substantial climate benefits that countries could be accounting for in their national climate strategies.

The reality on the ground is sobering. More than two-thirds of mangroves, one-third of salt marshes and nearly one-third of seagrass meadows have already been lost globally. Within Asean, over a third of mangroves were lost between 1980 and 2020.

Their destruction does not merely eliminate future carbon capture – it also releases centuries of stored carbon into the atmosphere, increasing national emissions profiles at the very moment countries are striving to reduce them.

Preventing this loss through strong conservation efforts offers far higher returns than attempting restoration after ecosystems collapse.

Yet financing still favours restoration over protection, despite the far greater climate value preserved when ecosystems remain intact.

These trends are especially concerning because many blue carbon ecosystems already lie within protected and conserved areas. Yet, they continue to decline.

As blue carbon is rarely integrated into management plans or monitoring frameworks, its value goes unmeasured, unreported and ultimately unclaimed.

As a result, mangroves and seagrasses in these zones often receive little management directly targeting ecosystem health and blue carbon conservation, even though they are among the most carbon-rich ecosystems in the landscape.

We are protecting the place, but not the potential.

Much of this stems from how protected areas were originally conceived: primarily for biodiversity and resource conservation.

Their role in climate mitigation and adaptation, especially their carbon value, was seldom considered, resulting in blue carbon becoming one of the region's most overlooked climate gaps.

This disconnect is stark, given the multiple benefits these ecosystems provide. They are, quite literally, life-support systems for communities across Asean. Allowing them to degrade, particularly within protected boundaries, is a missed climate, social and economic opportunity.

A course correction is urgently needed.

Decision-makers must strengthen existing coastal and marine protected areas to ensure blue carbon ecosystems are actively managed, monitored and maintained.

But we must go further: Asean also needs to identify and bring additional mangrove and seagrass ecosystems under protection, especially those currently unprotected but vital for coastal resilience and climate mitigation.

This is the mission of Conservation International through the International Blue Carbon Institute, and Southeast Asia is uniquely positioned to lead.

Today, marine protected areas cover only 3.5 per cent of the Indo-Pacific coastline – a fraction of what is required to secure these ecosystems' climate value.

Expanding and strengthening protection requires stronger local capacity, dedicated funding and broader public and political awareness of blue carbon's role.

In March, policy leaders and park managers from across Asean met in Singapore as part of a targeted International Blue Carbon Institute workshop for blue carbon.

The workshop was hosted with Singapore's National Parks Board and the Asean Center for Biodiversity, and was supported by Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Sustainability Action Program.

The event brought together representatives from eight Asean countries to discuss blue carbon integration into regional marine protection, including scientists, policymakers and park managers.

Discussions highlighted how protecting mangroves and seagrasses must become a regional priority, and momentum must translate into concrete policies and management reforms.

The window for meaningful intervention is closing, and every year of inaction represents lost climate value that cannot be recovered.

Effective protection begins with understanding and measuring blue carbon accurately.

When countries can quantify the climate benefits their coastal ecosystems provide, they can integrate this value into national planning, attract finance and justify stronger conservation policies. Evidence drives action and safeguards.

By embedding blue carbon science into protected area management, Asean's parks can evolve from biodiversity sanctuaries into powerful climate shields – protecting communities, sustaining fisheries and supporting local economies.

More importantly, they can finally deliver the immense climate value they are capable of.

South-east Asia's coasts are among nature's greatest climate allies. It is time we recognised their worth, protected what we have and expanded protection to what we have overlooked – before these opportunities slip away.

PHILIPPINE INFORMATION AGENCY

[Forests as 'classrooms': Samar's Nature and Climate School nurtures future eco-stewards](#)

By: Reyan L. Arinto

As morning mist slowly lifted from the Ulot Watershed in Samar's Paranas town, a group of young learners made their way on a forest trail, pausing at every towering tree, listening to the sound of flowing water and the calls of birds hidden in the canopy.

For many of them, it was their first real encounter with the forest that sustains their community.

What began as a simple learning activity soon became something deeper – a personal awakening to the importance of protecting nature.

This is the heart of the newly launched "Nature and Climate School" under the Ulot Watershed Model Forest Project. This initiative seeks to shape children into future guardians of the environment through direct, hands-on experiences in nature.

The program was officially launched on March 27, 2026, in Barangay Tenani, Paranas, with strong backing from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in Eastern Visayas, the local government of Paranas, and other partner institutions.

DENR Regional Executive Director Arturo Salazar said environmental values are best taught not inside four walls, but in the very places children are being asked to protect.

"There is no better way to teach children to care for the environment than to allow them to experience it firsthand," Salazar said.

He said the initiative aims to help young learners develop not only awareness but also a sense of responsibility toward forests, watersheds, and biodiversity.

For one Grade 6 learner from Paranas, the experience was life-changing.

Before joining the pilot activities in February, the student said nature was something usually seen only in pictures, online videos, or school textbooks.

But standing beneath old-growth trees inside the Samar Island Natural Park (SINP), touching leaves and learning how forests protect rivers and communities, the child said the lessons suddenly became real.

"I want to help take care of the trees because they help us," the learner shared.

The child's experience reflects the broader objective of the program:

Turning young students into environmental advocates within their homes and communities.

During the February 20–21 pilot run, selected eco-learners visited key sites, including the SINP headquarters, an arboretum, farms, and eco-learning areas within the watershed.

The activities included guided forest walks, tree identification, biodiversity discussions, and experiential learning sessions focused on climate change and environmental stewardship.

Salazar said such efforts are increasingly important as children spend more time in digital spaces.

“In this digital age, many children are growing up disconnected from the natural world. This initiative helps rebuild that connection and reminds them that the environment is part of their future,” he said.

Local officials in Paranas said the project is also an investment in the long-term protection of the municipality’s natural resources.

Mayor Elvira Balbalcon said the local government fully supports the initiative because the Ulot Watershed is not only an environmental asset but also a lifeline for the community.

She stressed that educating children today is one of the most effective ways to ensure the watershed’s protection in the years ahead.

“Our children will inherit these forests and rivers. It is only right that they learn early how important it is to protect them,” the mayor said.

Vice Mayor Eunice Balbalcon, who also serves as project lead, said the program lets young people understand the direct connection between healthy forests, safe water sources, and resilient communities.

She added that when children bring these lessons home, they help spread environmental awareness beyond the classroom.

DENR Assistant Regional Director for Technical Services Angelito Villanueva expressed optimism that the program can serve as a model for other areas in Eastern Visayas.

He said sustained collaboration among DENR, local governments, schools, and community organizations will be key to ensuring the project’s long-term success.

Alongside the launch, livelihood initiatives such as vermicomposting, organic vegetable production, and charcoal briquetting were also introduced in nearby barangays, linking environmental conservation with sustainable community development.

Supported by the Government of Canada and the International Model Forest Network, the initiative is being seen as a replicable model for environmental education across the region.

For the children of Paranas, however, the lessons are simpler and more immediate: every tree matters, every river matters, and the future of the forest may one day depend on them.

THE ECONOMIST

[Labour needs to slow down its clean-power mission](#)

Mr Miliband has long known that fear of the apocalypse alone will not sell his clean-power mission. When Britain's energy secretary previously held the role in 2009, he observed that Martin Luther King did not gain followers by proclaiming, "I have a nightmare." Ever since, Mr Miliband has sold the dream that decarbonising will also make Britain richer and more secure.

The past two decades have not borne out that vision. The country has cut emissions more rapidly than others. In 2004 renewables generated only 4% of electricity; by 2024 it was over half. But prosperity and security have proved harder to achieve. In 2004 domestic electricity prices were lower than in every EU country but one. They would now rank third-highest (after Germany and Belgium). The International Monetary Fund has said that Britain is "especially exposed" to the Iranian conflict due to its "reliance on gas-fired power".

Gas accounted for 31% of electricity generation in 2025, compared with 3% in France (which has much more nuclear). Over four-fifths of British homes rely on gas for heating, far more than in the EU. Mr Miliband says that the war underscores the need to escape the "rollercoaster of fossil fuels". His answer is to "double down" on Labour's target of 95% clean electricity—renewables and nuclear—by 2030.

The long-run case for this mission is strong. Analysis from the National Energy System Operator, which designs Britain's grid, suggests that the country's energy-related costs (comprising transport, heating and electricity) could fall from 10% of GDP in 2025 to less than 6% by 2050 in a low-carbon world (see chart 1). A grid rooted in renewables would also offer shelter from geopolitical storms. When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 the shock added 1.8% of GDP to Britain's energy bill. An equivalent disruption in 2050, with an economy that was mostly decarbonised, would add only 0.3%.

But there is more than one path to a low-carbon future, and Mr Miliband's rigid route risks imposing unnecessary costs and insecurity. Take gas. The energy secretary's rhetoric centres on stopping fossil-fuel dependency. Yet because the sun doesn't always shine and the wind doesn't always blow, Britain in 2050 will continue to need gas as backup, according to the Climate Change Committee, a watchdog. Its modelling suggests that gas will still account for 13% of primary energy used across the economy, versus 39% in 2025.

Mr Miliband's opposition to new North Sea exploration is thus worrying. He is right that more drilling would do little to lower British oil and gas prices. In any scenario, Britain will remain a net importer, its bills swayed by global markets. But greater domestic production, coupled with beefing up woefully inadequate storage, would reduce the risk of physical shortages during a war (for example if America were to ban LNG exports). And new drilling would be an effective macroeconomic hedge: when fossil-fuel prices spike, tax revenues from the basin rise with them, providing a fund to cushion bills.

The bigger problem is the inflexibility of the 2030 target. Hitting it involves a huge buildout of offshore wind, much of it in remote places like northern Scotland. This in turn requires a vast investment in the grid to carry power south. Ben James, an energy specialist, calculates that network costs alone will add £135 in 2025 prices (or \$178) to annual bills by 2030, two-thirds more than that component costs today. Wholesale prices, which were about £70 before the Iran conflict, would have to tumble to some £40 a MWh for bills to be lower in 2030 than in 2025 (see chart 2).

Much of this investment will eventually be necessary, but rushing the buildout causes three problems. It locks in Britain's reliance on offshore wind, which on current plans will comprise half of all generation in 2030. A recent government auction fixed new offshore-wind prices at £91 a MWh for 20 years, far more than onshore wind (£72) and solar (£65). If the government extended its timeline, it would have more time to reorient the renewables mix towards onshore wind farms, which were unwisely all but banned until 2024. That could unlock big cost savings.

Hurried timelines have also prevented necessary market reforms. Britain currently has one nationwide electricity price; varying it by location would cut network costs by nudging companies to set up generators near population centres and businesses to base themselves where energy is cheap. This is one of the best ways to bring down the cost of renewables but the government ruled it out last year, citing investor confidence. Delaying the 2030 target would give investors time to adjust.

The biggest flaw in the 2030 mission is that, by pushing up electricity bills, it discourages electrification. Home heating is Britain's largest use of gas, and shifting households from gas boilers to electric heat pumps matters more for ending fossil-fuel reliance than replacing gas-fired electricity with wind. Yet Britons are put off heat pumps by electricity prices quadruple those of gas, one of the widest gaps in Europe (see chart 3). The government could narrow the gap by removing its levies on electricity. But avoiding needless bill increases caused by the rush to meet the 2030 target would also help.

The irony of Mr Miliband's vision is that it is not as far-fetched as his detractors claim. In the long run Britain can have affordable, secure and low-carbon energy. But getting there requires compromise. If he delayed his target, even by five years, it would make energy cheaper by 2050 than in this hasty scenario. But sticking rigidly to 2030 risks locking in high prices and alienating the public from the decarbonisation cause. For a dreamer like Mr Miliband, that would be a nightmare.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

[Hockey Rinks Turn to Plastic Ice as Planet Warms](#)

By Ken Belson and Hiroko Tabuchi

To Michael Townsend and his co-workers, maintaining an outdoor rink as the winters get warmer felt like a Sisyphean task.

Mr. Townsend and his crew increasingly worked overtime flooding the rink at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park in Ashland, Neb., with water and driving a Zamboni throughout the night to maintain the ice.

When the 26-year-old rink needed to be replaced in 2024, Mr. Townsend found that new compressors to chill the ice and pipes underneath the rink would cost \$2 million, a steep price for a rink that attracts about 7,500 skaters a season.

So the park replaced the ice with high-density polyethylene, which is durable, easy to assemble and cheap to maintain. This plastic surface also performs largely like ice, albeit with more friction, and skaters use regular ice skates. The price tag? About \$350,000, including maintenance supplies.

“It was a needed transformation,” said Mr. Townsend, who is himself an avid skater. “It was going to be no skating or look for something that was more cost efficient.”

Climate change has wreaked havoc with many sports. Increasingly, severe storms delay golf and tennis matches. Intense heat has led to mandatory water breaks at the World Cup.

But few sports have been affected as much as those played on ice and snow. At the 2026 Winter Games in Milan-Cortina, skaters and skiers complained of soft and slushy surfaces. Rising temperatures have reduced the amount of pond ice where young people in northern climates learn to skate.

Warming temperatures and aging rinks, which can leak dangerous chemicals into the atmosphere, have led more rink operators to turn to plastic ice. Conventional ice rinks require refrigerants, lots of fresh water and electricity, and, if they are indoors, energy-intensive dehumidifiers. Some older rinks also have leaky pipes that can allow ozone-depleting chemicals like hydrochlorofluorocarbons, or even toxic and flammable ammonia, to escape, posing an environmental and health hazard.

According to Glice, a large plastic ice maker, the market in the United States, including potentially a million backyard rinks, is worth \$5.4 billion. Randy Scharberg, a salesman at Xtraice, another synthetic ice company, estimated that several hundred full-size synthetic rinks were in operation across the United States. The National Hockey League uses plastic ice at some of its training facilities.

Some environmentalists are alarmed. Turning to plastic, made from fossil fuels, is fraught. Plastic production is projected to surge in the coming decades and will account for a growing share of emissions of planet-warming gases, said Allen Hershkowitz, a former senior scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council and the founder of the Green Sports Alliance.

“The paradox is that, while trying to limit leaking of refrigerants, they’re increasing the production of plastics,” he said. “I don’t want to see hockey go away, but this is a real issue and hockey needs to take a hard look at it.”

There is also the issue of microplastics, the plastic particulate pollution that has become ubiquitous in the environment. Microplastics have been found in human blood, lungs and placentas, raising concerns about their health effects.

Plastic ice rinks almost certainly generate microplastics because they are made of polyethylene and exposed to constant friction from skates — but there has been little rigorous study of how much is produced, said Sanjay Mohanty, an associate professor of environmental engineering at the University of California, Los Angeles.

“Even seemingly small amounts, like a couple of grams of plastic shavings per square meter per month, translate into millions of particles,” he said.

When Mr. Townsend took a spin around his new rink one day last month, a line of white residue was left on the blades of his skates. He later drove a specialized floor polisher over the rink that smoothed out the surface and swept up a small pile of shavings.

Viktor Meier, a co-founder and the chief executive of Glice, said he was developing new synthetic ice that reduced the indentations created by skates, which would reduce the amount of microplastics. He said this would increase the amount of glide and decrease the amount of shavings.

Still, the concerns about synthetic ice must be weighed against what it is replacing: A single traditional rink can emit hundreds of tons of carbon dioxide annually, according to research by the Canada Green Municipal Fund, a government agency that funds sustainable infrastructure. Producing a five-ton plastic ice rink would produce a fraction of that carbon footprint.

A one-time purchase of a plastic rink has a lower carbon footprint than the huge amount of electricity required to run refrigeration compressors for a traditional ice rink, said Matthias Scherge, a researcher at the Fraunhofer Institute for Mechanics of Materials in Germany. “It’s definitely a big difference.”

Fourteen winters ago, Robert McLeman, a professor in environmental studies at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, started Rink Watch, a citizen science project that asked skaters to report skating conditions at backyard and community rinks through the winter. The data from nearly

20,000 rinks was distressing. In cities like Toronto or Boston, backyard rinks were becoming so unreliable that many people stopped building them, Professor McLeman said.

“It’s not the most catastrophic impact of global warming, but for communities where pond hockey and backyard rinks are part of the cultural identity, it represents a real loss,” he said.

It also clouds the future of the N.H.L., which needs a steady stream of new players — and future fans — not just in colder climates but across the Sun Belt states. The league has no plan to play games on plastic ice, even though several teams use it in their training facilities. In January, the league also donated the plastic rink used by players to practice on before the Winter Classic game in Miami to SLAM Miami, a charter school in the Little Havana neighborhood.

“Synthetic ice is not a substitute for traditional ice, but it is a strategically valuable tool for us to grow the game,” said Kim Davis, who oversees sustainability initiatives at the N.H.L.

The rink’s panels, made by Green Hockey, a Swiss company, include up to 50 percent recycled plastic recovered from the oceans. Students, few of whom have ever skated, now play street hockey in their sneakers on the rink. Once they are familiar with the game, the school plans to teach them how to skate.

“We’re going to have some face plants at first,” Derek Elvin, a gym teacher, joked.

In Nebraska, Mr. Townsend said his new rink had a 12-year warranty. Glice told him that after a decade or so, he could flip over the tiles and skate on the other side.

On a sunny day with the temperatures near 75 degrees last month, Michelle Lewis brought her son and daughter to the Nebraska rink, which she did not know had been replaced with synthetic ice. The children, who previously used roller and in-line skates, wobbled across the ice like beginners. “This is how they look when they’re ice skating,” Ms. Lewis said.

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The Climate Change Commission (CCC) joined the global observance of Earth Hour 2026 on March 28, from 8:30 PM to 9:30 PM, calling on Filipinos to go beyond the symbolic switching off of lights and embrace long-term, sustainable habits to combat the climate crisis.

Now in its 20th year, the annual Earth Hour movement serves as a platform to raise awareness on climate change and biodiversity conservation, mobilizing millions of people across the globe to take collective action. This year's theme, "Give an Hour for Earth," aimed to create the "Biggest Hour for Earth" by encouraging people to spend 60 minutes doing something positive for the planet.

The event was supported by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., where he urged the public to adopt energy-saving habits and promote environmental responsibility amid global challenges, including the ongoing energy crisis.

"This year's event provides a timely and relevant opportunity for us to reflect not only on the issue of climate change and environmental preservation, but also on the need to conserve energy and to limit fuel consumption amid the current global crisis."

"Earth Hour reminds us that how we use energy affects us all and shows not just our ways but also the kind of future that we choose to build for our nation and our planet," President Marcos added.

CCC Vice Chairperson and Executive Director Robert E.A. Borje stressed that while the one-hour lights-off initiative demonstrates unity and environmental awareness, meaningful climate action must extend beyond the hour and translate into everyday practices.

"Climate action is not just about one hour of darkness. It is about what we do after the lights come back on. This is not just about turning off the lights. This is about giving life to our hopes and dreams for our country," Borje said.

Anchored on this year's themed focus, "Switch On Habits for Earth," the CCC underscored the importance of integrating climate-conscious practices into daily life, such as conserving energy, reducing waste, avoiding single-use plastics, and planting and taking care of trees.

The Commission further highlighted that climate change is not only a lifestyle concern but a systems issue, requiring coordinated action from individuals, communities, government, and the private sector.

“This is why climate action today, particularly through the youth, should no longer be just an advocacy. It really should be a life that we are going to live,” Borje added.

The CCC reaffirmed its commitment to advancing policies and programs that promote climate action and sustainable development, in line with national priorities and global climate targets.

As the country observed Earth Hour, the Commission called on every Filipino to take part in building a climate-resilient and low-carbon future by making climate action a daily responsibility.

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