



## NEWS ROUNDUP

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- Keeping hawksbill turtles alive amid man-made, climate threats
- Navigating opportunities and risks in sustainable insurance
- 'We stand as one': Philippines, US, Japan forge stronger trilateral alliance
- Singaporean PM to visit PH, discuss potential energy tie-up
- Startup Benguet firm catches mist to help solve water shortage
- Climate justice
- British Embassy and DENR convene 4th climate dialogue
- [Opinion] It's getting hot in here!
- President Marcos hopes Congress passes nuclear investments bill

### CCC IN THE NEWS:

- Reclamation activities in West Philippine Sea causing irreparable damage - CCC
- A hot mess: Climate change and human health
- WPS climate forum

## BUSINESS MIRROR

### [Keeping hawksbill turtles alive amid man-made, climate threats](#)

By:Erwin M. Mascariñas

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## BUSINESS WORLD

### [Navigating opportunities and risks in sustainable insurance](#)

By: Jomarc Angelo M. Corpuz

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## **MANILA BULLETIN**

### **['We stand as one': Philippines, US, Japan forge stronger trilateral alliance](#)**

By: Argyll Cyrus Geducos

"We stand as one." This is how US President Joseph Biden described the historic trilateral agreement between the US, the Philippines, and Japan as the three countries' leaders vowed to work together to build a better future for the Indo-Pacific Region.

## **PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY**

### **[Singaporean PM to visit PH, discuss potential energy tie-up](#)**

Singapore Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan will be on an official visit to the Philippines on April 15 to 17 to bolster relations and map out future engagements, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) announced Friday.

### **[Startup Benguet firm catches mist to help solve water shortage](#)**

By: Liza Agoot

Amid the frequent shortage of water aggravated by the El Niño phenomenon, a technology is being tried in Atok, Benguet, to help address the situation and avoid wastage.

## **SUNSTAR**

### **[Climate justice](#)**

By: Rhoderick Abellanos

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## **THE MANILA TIMES**

### **[British Embassy and DENR convene 4th climate dialogue](#)**

Together with key government agencies, the United Kingdom (UK) and the Philippines agreed to deepen the collaboration across climate and biodiversity priorities.

## **THE PHILIPPINE STAR**

### **[\[Opinion\] It's getting hot in here!](#)**

By: Brian Poe Llamanzares

The heat lately has been impossible to ignore. El Niño looms over the Philippines. It brings with it a host of extreme weather events, such as drought drastically decreasing rainfall by up to 60 percent and scorching heat waves that are projected to persist across the entire archipelago until May 2024.

### **[President Marcos hopes Congress passes nuclear investments bill](#)**

By: Alexis Romero

President Marcos expressed hope that Congress would pass bills allowing US nuclear firm Ultra Safe Nuclear Corp. (USNC) to undertake its project in the Philippines as the government continues to explore ways to ensure access to clean and affordable energy sources.

## **CCC IN THE NEWS:**

### **ANC**

### **[Reclamation activities in West Philippine Sea causing irreparable damage - CCC](#)**

The Philippine Climate Change Commission blames China and Vietnam for causing irreparable damage to the marine biodiversity of the West Philippine Sea. It said this has endangered food security and the livelihood of Filipino fishermen.

### **DAILY TRIBUNE**

### **[A hot mess: Climate change and human health](#)**

By: Secretary Robert EA Borje

The current El Niño phenomenon has triggered heat waves, leading many local governments to suspend face-to-face classes, reverting to the pandemic-era blended learning modality. With temperatures showing no signs of immediate decrease, more suspensions are anticipated as the month progresses.

## WPS climate forum

By: John Louie Abrina

Climate impact at the West Philippine Sea is at the forefront at a forum in Manila Hotel on 12 April 2024. Climate Change Commissioner Albert P. Dela Cruz Sr., PCG Special Staff for WPS, and PCG's Spokesperson for WPS, CG Commo Jay T. Tarriela of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), talked about the significance of regional maritime security and geopolitics.

**Information and Knowledge Management Division**

## **BUSINESS MIRROR**

### **Keeping hawksbill turtles alive amid man-made, climate threats**

By:Erwin M. Mascariñas

Every year, hundreds of hawksbill turtle hatchlings dig out of their nest and start their long arduous journey into the ocean. They crawl out of the dark sand beaches of Magsaysay town in Misamis Oriental province in Mindanao, one of several hawksbill nesting sites in the Philippines.

However, data reveal that man-made and environmental trends have been plaguing the hatchlings.

Significant roles in marine ecosystem

Hawksbills play significant roles in marine ecosystem. They help maintain the health of coral reefs. By removing prey, such as sponges from the reef's surface, they provide better access for reef fish to feed. They also have cultural significance and tourism value, said the World Wide Fund for Nature on its website.

Hawksbills got their name from their unique beak-like mouth, which resembles that of a hawk that is perfect for finding food sources in hard-to-reach cracks. They are the only species of sea turtle that can survive on a diet mainly of sponges, said the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries website.

Hawksbills are estimated to reach maturity between 20 to 35 years, depending on several factors, especially resource availability. However, they could live 50 to 60 years.

Hawksbill turtles' colorful shell is often collected and carved into combs, jewelry, and other items, while whole turtles are harvested and stuffed, all of which are sold in the illegal wildlife trade

The hawksbill is one of five marine turtle species found in the Philippines. It is classified as Critically Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List. Its population has declined by 80 percent over the past 10 years.

The coastline stretching along the villages of Candiis, San Isidro, and Damayohan in Magsaysay town in Misamis Oriental has been a nesting ground for the hawksbill turtles.

Their presence in the area and the emergence of possible human and environmental-related threats led the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to designate a 612-hectare critical habitat for hawksbill sea turtles in 2012, known as the Magsaysay Critical Habitat for Hawksbill Turtles.

More people and structures, fewer nests

Although the area has been declared a critical habitat for hawksbill turtles, the increase in human population has brought encroachment of settlements and the emerging small tourism-related beach establishments were obstacles for turtles to lay eggs in their traditional hatching area.

“Residents noted that there were instances the turtles were spooked by dogs, and there were blockages on the beach like a concrete structure or other man-made obstacles that pushed the nesting turtle back into the sea,” said Barangay Chairman Rolando Pagara, a local conservationist spearheading marine turtle protection in the area for more than two decades now.

Pagara, along with volunteers from coastal villages, has been trying to keep the nesting turtles and hatchlings safe amid limited compensation and support over the past few years.

“There were instances that we won’t be able to monitor the nests, only to find out later that hatchlings have started to crawl out, or worst, dead on the coastal area,” he said.

He explained that the volunteers, who are fishermen, could not give more time in monitoring because they need to work to support their families.

Pagara said he has observed that the number of nests they have discovered in the past years have declined compared to decades ago.

This year, five hawksbill turtle nesting sites were recorded, with four in 2023, which numbers were far from the 10 to 15 sites per year from 2000 to 2005.

Added threat from El Niño

On Easter Sunday, 83 hatchlings were the first batch released this year into the sea in the coastal village of Candiis. However, the number was lower than the expected 130 to 180 hatchlings.

Sadly, Pagaea noted, they have “recorded four spoiled and three pipped eggs and six dead hatchlings.”

He expressed alarm about the impact of intense heat, pointing out that it might have contributed to the death of the hatchlings and weakened those who survived from the nest.

Data from the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration Climate Review on the impact of El Niño say that Misamis Oriental was under a dry spell in March, with a daily maximum temperature of 32.6 degrees Celsius (°C) to 35 °C by the first week of April.

Pagara, together with villagers and fisherfolks, try to safeguard the nests with a protective barrier perimeter from stray dogs. However, it is not a protection from heat because the top is open.

“Unfortunately, due to lack of proper equipment, we can only do so much in protecting the nests. The beach is wide and not all areas can be monitored properly,” he said.

Rising sea, higher tides

While the threat of El Niño heats up, another concern of conservationists is the rising sea level that bring unusually higher tide that kill the turtles inside the eggs.

“We have monitored the loss of eggs when the lower part of the nest is reached by high tide. The largest was in 2019 when several nests were reached by high tide and subsequent waves that followed between June to July,” Pagara said.

According to the US NOAA website, the major threat to hawksbill turtles is the loss of nesting habitat and coral reefs due to coastal development, rising seas from climate change, and pollution.

“A warming climate is likely to result in changes in beach morphology and higher sand temperatures, which can be lethal to eggs or alter the ratio of male and female hatchlings produced. Rising seas and storm events cause beach erosion, which may flood nests or wash them away. Changes in the temperature of the marine environment are likely to alter the abundance and distribution of food resources, leading to a shift in the migratory and foraging range and nesting season of hawksbills,” the NOAA statement said.

Pagara pointed out that the beach has lost more than 10 meters of its original area. The need to evaluate the original protected zone should be looked into, he said.

#### Need for hatchery

Pagara reiterated that the best solution for protecting the turtle's eggs and ensuring the future of the hatchlings is to create a hatchery, where the eggs can be transferred and better monitored while protecting them from heat and rising water levels.

"Having the nest scattered in different areas throughout the vast coastline, monitoring and keeping them safe is a daunting task. We need a better solution in securing the eggs. The best we can think of is creating a proper hatchery, where we can safely transfer the eggs after the mother turtle lays them, monitor them, and successfully release them after they are hatched," Pagara said.

Patrick Ralph Pahalla, municipal agriculture officer of Magsaysay town, pointed out that they are looking into finding a better solution to save the hatchlings,

"Hopefully we can find a budget and a good site where we can have the hatchery. The best would be closer to where Pagara lives as he can spearhead the monitoring and teach our volunteers how to take care of the nests," Pahalla said.

Cleramie E. Garcia, Ecosystem Management Specialist II of the City Environment and Natural Resources Office in Gingoog City, agreed that with a hatchery there is a better hope of having more hatchlings released back into the ocean.

"In 2023, we only recorded 207 released hatchlings from Magsaysay and 56 from Medina town. I'm sure there were more based on reports of hawksbill hatchlings crawling toward the ocean. Unfortunately those nests were unrecorded. We even had one of the nests in Barangay Candiis, where all 130 eggs failed to hatch, killing all the possible hatchlings," Garcia said.

Amid the human restrictions during the pandemic, the highest number of recorded turtle hatchlings released in Magsaysay in the past nine years was in 2020 with around 633 hatchlings compared to 315 in 2019.

In 2021 the town did not record any nest or hatchling released, while in Misamis Oriental and nearby Carmen in Agusan del Norte province, several hatchlings were released.

With a hatchery, local conservationists are optimistic that they will be able to increase the survival rate of the eggs and be able to release more hatchlings.

#### More research for better interventions

A published study conducted in 2023 on loggerhead sea turtle nests cited that climate change and anthropogenic (pollution caused by human activities) impacts have been scored as among the highest hazards to sea turtle health, and could have played a role in the Sea Turtle Egg Fusariosis development.

Environmental changes, human activities, and emerging pathogens deserve the highest attention in terms of health research, and conservation management, the study said.

While several studies on marine turtles that face threats from the heat of El Niño and other factors, Philippine scientists recommend more research based on the local settings.

Dr. Ruth Gamboa, a retired professor and chairman of the Department of Biological Science and Environmental Studies at the University of the Philippines Mindanao (UP-Min), said that while heat could be a possible explanation for the death of marine turtle hatchlings other factors should also be observed.

She pointed to more research amid the changes in environmental temperature influenced by climate change.

“There could be several factors that might explain why the hatchlings die. Although we cannot rule out that heat could be a factor, we need more data and accurate measurements on the temperature of the nest to give a better conclusion,” Gamboa said.

She added: “Having more data on the plight of the hatchlings and the turtles nesting in the area will give better solutions for better future interventions. That will be a huge factor in the conservation and protection not only of the marine turtle but other species in the ecosystem.”

Gamboa pointed out the efforts made by Pagara and their volunteers, and expressed hopes that more support will reach the community to strengthen their advocacy toward securing better solutions in saving more marine turtles.

## **BUSINESS WORLD**

### **Navigating opportunities and risks in sustainable insurance**

By: Jomarc Angelo M. Corpuz

Multinational insurance company AXA's Future Risk Report 2023 ranked climate change as the public's top risk across all geographies surveyed based on the potential impact on society for the near future. Many Filipinos have witnessed and are experiencing extreme heat, irregular weather patterns, and flash floods due to the effects of global warming.

These physical manifestations of climate change can lead to damaged infrastructure, ruined properties, and even disrupted supply chains leading to huge losses for companies and economies alike. However, the effects of climate change can also present themselves in the form of policy change, technological advancement, and market sentiment which may raise costs and reduce incomes for Filipinos.

Despite these risks, some top officials have reported their companies' lack of climate actions with 36% of CEOs admitting that they had no plans to invest in nature-based climate solutions, while 31% said that they had not included climate risks in their financial planning, according to PricewaterhouseCooper's latest Annual Global CEO Survey.

The increased awareness of climate change's effects and the lack of solutions tackling global warming highlight the urgent need for insurers to proactively address environmental risks and incorporate sustainable practices into their operations.

Sustainable insurance is defined by the UN Environment Program's Financial Initiative (UNEP FI) as a "strategic approach where all activities in the insurance value chain, including interactions with stakeholders, are done in a responsible and forward-looking way by identifying, assessing, managing, and monitoring risks and opportunities associated with environmental, social and governance issues."

This type of insurance seeks to reduce risk, develop innovative solutions, improve business performance, and contribute to environmental, social, and economic sustainability. The UNEP FI has a set of principles for sustainable insurance which serve as a global framework for the insurance industry.

These principles include: embedding environmental and social issues in decision-making; raising awareness of environmental, governmental, and societal issues;

promoting widespread action across society regarding those issues; and demonstrating accountability and transparency about the progress in implementing these principles.

Following these principles, the Security and Exchange Commissions along with Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, the Insurance Commission, and the Philippine Deposit Insurance Corp. formulated the Philippine Sustainable Finance Taxonomy Guidelines which gives businesses easier access to sustainable financial services and allows stakeholders to make informed decisions related to sustainable insurance, investments, and financing.

Local laws encouraging sustainable insurance in agriculture, crops, and other products are proposed in the 19th Congress. House Bill No. 315, or the Free Index Based Agricultural Insurance Act of 2020, encourages aims to support small farmers against the effects of climate change by establishing a regulatory framework and program for free weather index-based agricultural insurance.

Meanwhile, House Bill No. 165 focuses on establishing a national framework for the mandatory environmental insurance coverage of environmentally critical projects. The policy aims to ensure sufficient financial coverage for communities affected by the effects of climate change leading to damages.

Alongside these efforts in embracing sustainable insurance in the country, a study found that Filipinos are interested in exploring insurance options that not only provide financial protection but also align with their values of environmental responsibility and social sustainability.

A study by Allianz PNB Life shows that 44% of their respondents agreed that health insurance can be green and sustainable, while 43% said they were likely to purchase this kind of insurance.

In a landscape that is prone to risks exacerbated by climate change and other critical issues, sustainable insurance offers a promising avenue for insurers to address the specific environmental and social challenges faced by Filipinos while simultaneously stimulating innovation and promoting sustainable growth.

## MANILA BULLETIN

### 'We stand as one': Philippines, US, Japan forge stronger trilateral alliance

By: Argyll Cyrus Geducos

"We stand as one." This is how US President Joseph Biden described the historic trilateral agreement between the US, the Philippines, and Japan as the three countries' leaders vowed to work together to build a better future for the Indo-Pacific Region.

Biden said this as he hosted President Marcos and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio in the White House for their first three-way summit on Thursday, April 11.

In his remarks, Biden said the "new era of partnership" between the three countries is anchored on building a free, open, prosperous, and secure Indo-Pacific Region.

"When we stand as one, we're able to forge a better future for all," he said.

"That's what this new trilateral is all about, in my view. Building a better future for people crossing the Pacific, and quite frankly beyond around the world," he added.

President Marcos echoed his American counterpart's sentiments, the trilateral meeting was "bound by a shared vision and pursuit of a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific" amid challenges to the international rules-based order.

He added that the meeting was an opportunity for the three leaders to define the future they want, and how they intend to achieve it as one.

"Facing the complex challenges of our time requires concerted efforts on everyone's part, a dedication to a common purpose, and unwavering commitment to the rules-based international order. This is a meeting that looks ahead," Marcos said.

"We seek to identify ways of growing our economies and making them more resilient, climate-proofing our cities and our societies, sustaining our development progress, and forging a peaceful world for the next generation," he added.

For his part, Prime Minister Kishida said the Japanese government remains committed to further strengthening its ties with the US and the Philippines and vowed full cooperation for peace and stability in the region.

“In order to secure peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific, I hope to reaffirm our intention to further strengthen trilateral cooperation and to present the specific way forward through today’s meeting,” he said.

The meeting was attended by their respective Ministers in Foreign Affairs, Defense, Trade and Energy.

Aside from giving their commitment to defense and maritime cooperation, the US and Japan also expressed their full adherence to helping the Philippines advance its efforts to address climate change and boost the economy to create industries and more jobs for Filipinos.

The diplomatic relations between the Philippines and the US were formally established on July 4, 1946, while the Philippines and Japan marked 67 years of normalized relations since July 23, 1956, and forged a strategic partnership in 2011.

## PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

### [Singaporean PM to visit PH, discuss potential energy tie-up](#)

Singapore Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan will be on an official visit to the Philippines on April 15 to 17 to bolster relations and map out future engagements, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) announced Friday.

The DFA said the visit will build on the gains of the 6th Informal-Consultations on the Philippine-Singapore Action Plan (IC-PSAP) held February, where senior officials from the two parties talked about possible cooperation in the fields of energy, climate change, health and maritime domain.

During their bilateral meeting, Balakrishnan and Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo will also “exchange views on regional and international developments,” the DFA said.

“The current visit is expected to build on the gains of the IC-PSAP and plan for future engagements as relations between the two countries continue to deepen,” it said.

“The Philippines and Singapore enjoy more than five decades of multi-faceted engagement in the areas of defense and security, trade and investment, and cultural and people-to-people exchanges,” it added.

During his trip to Singapore last year, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. invited Singaporean businesses to consider the Philippines as their investment hub for renewable energy, noting that foreign investors can enjoy 100 percent equity in the exploration, development, and utilization of solar, wind, hydro, and ocean or tidal energy resources.

Balakrishnan's upcoming Manila trip comes days ahead of the celebration of the 55th anniversary of Philippines-Singapore diplomatic relations in May.

## Startup Benguet firm catches mist to help solve water shortage

By: Liza Agoot

Amid the frequent shortage of water aggravated by the El Niño phenomenon, a technology is being tried in Atok, Benguet, to help address the situation and avoid wastage.

The fog catcher and water harvesting project of startup firm FarmConnect is deemed one of the solutions to ensure stable water supply, especially in highland areas.

It helps collect about 20 to 25 liters of water produced by mist from the morning fog.

“It will only take about five hours to install. It is not expensive and with the help of our architect and engineer we were able to give a sturdy attribute to the fog catcher that can withstand heavy wind, hurricanes and other effects of climate change,” Miguel Mercado, project lead and program management trainer, said in an interview.

The fog catcher is made of a steel scaffolding-like brace with a height of 6.25 meters (about 20 feet) and erected on 38 square meters of land.

It is wrapped with a nylon mesh that will allow the mist to be caught, dripping to the bottom where the collection is made.

The catcher is located in Hights Farm, a pioneer in modern highland farming techniques and where the famous Sakura Park is.

Atok registers zero to 24 degrees Celsius, depending on the time of the year.

Benguet, Ifugao and Mountain Province produce 85 percent of temperate vegetables, like potatoes, carrots and cabbages.

“The initial implementation is at Hights Farm but we intend to expand to neighboring areas and even the lowland Atok, but we will use a different technology,” Mercado said.

“Water scarcity and rationed water supply are the top reasons why we can’t sustain proper irrigation for our crops, combat harvest wastage from night frosts, and even simply support local tourism,” he said.

The project will also involve non-agricultural industries in fostering sustainable farming communities and supporting grassroots solutions to current social and environmental issues.

Aida Pagtan, Department of Agriculture-Cordillera chief of the Regional Agriculture and Fisheries Information Service, said in an interview Friday that a similar innovation was introduced by Saint Louis University in Mount Santo Tomas in Tuba, but failed.

“It did not work because the fog is just passing the area, preventing the capture of water. We hope that the one in Atok will work because it is beneficial for the farms and the people,” she said.

Atok Mayor Franklyn Smith, in a phone interview, said innovations are beneficial but assessments have to be done to see the output.

"We can introduce it to the farmers if it is functional, " he said.

The mayor said they have funded similar projects in the villages of Paoay and Cattubong, the highest villages in the province, but they remain under study.

## SUNSTAR

### Climate justice

By: Rhoderick Abellanos

During the 2022 election campaign period, the nine presidential candidates were made to answer questions on climate change: different aspects of climate change policy, including renewable energy, water security, and nutrition.

Since then, it is obvious that for all the noise that was produced and generated during the campaign period, the Philippines remains slow in addressing a problem that can wipe out countless lives.

The current administration has not paid enough attention to climate justice which “insists on a shift from a discourse on greenhouse gases and melting ice caps into a civil rights movement with the people and communities most vulnerable to climate impacts at its heart.”

It is not enough to talk about the science behind climate change, we must take concrete steps towards letting those who should take greater responsibility, take and carry the responsibility to mitigate its effects.

Between the rich and the poor, the poor will carry more burdens; between women and men, women will have to suffer more on a global scale.

Between the old and the younger generations, the future (younger) generations will have to suffer more because of the effects of the choices and the activities of the current (older) generation. This can be said in simpler terms: even in suffering people are not equal, but unfortunately, those who are more responsible suffer less than those who are less responsible.

Businesses keep on highlighting the three Ps of their industry: people, planet, and profit. The important question is, can the three Ps be ordered in any way we want them to? Is there no logical sequence that should reflect the “ethical order” of our priorities?

For a long time, it has been the belief that businesses may, to a larger extent, be insulated from people (ethics) and should be less concerned with the environment/ecology (planet).

There can be a long explanation for this, but I think this is largely due to those economic theories that espouse the autonomy of the market. Then came the notion of “progress” understood mostly in economic terms.

What I am saying at this point is this: it is not enough for companies to promote “consciousness or awareness towards climate change” – like a one-hour Earth Hour. If indeed they’d like to save this planet, they must be environmentally compliant.

And if the government is true in its advocacy for climate change, then it must make systemic changes in the institutional landscape.

The government ought to provide policies that are friendly to businesses but also mindful of the call to climate justice. This means that while politicians must take good care of the business sector because of the “revenues” that are needed for the expenses of the public sector, however, this must be reframed taking into consideration climate change and climate justice as new variables.

If we assume that the government’s main role is to take care of all people (businessmen included) – and I think that this is a “very reasonable” assumption, then it must not allow businesses to just go ahead to the point of putting in danger or risk those persons and areas who are already vulnerable.

Making people’s lives more vulnerable is expensive as this would mean additional costs for healthcare, food and water, and transportation.

## THE MANILA TIMES

### British Embassy and DENR convene 4th climate dialogue

Together with key government agencies, the United Kingdom (UK) and the Philippines agreed to deepen the collaboration across climate and biodiversity priorities.

The conversation set the direction for the year ahead. The scaling of coordination platforms to share experience and technology, streamline priorities, and scale delivery featured strongly. In this regard, the UK will support the Energy Transition Council, Blue Carbon Action Plan, and National Plastics Action Plan in the coming year.

These will build on the successes of 2023, which saw UK support for the delivery of the Philippines National Adaptation plan and Philippines Emission Pathway Calculator.

Exploring ways to mobilize finance behind the Philippines National Adaptation Plan (NAP) and Nationally Determined Contributions Implementation Plan (NDCIP) was a core part of the conversation to ensure that UK support will help deliver implementation. The UK committed to deliver programs and technical assistance to contribute to water security, urban resilience, ecosystems and biodiversity protection, and renewable energy and energy efficiency.

The Dialogue further highlighted a strong track record of financial innovation, with the UK-funded launch of the Animal Town application in 2024, demonstrating an innovative new way to get the public to participate in the conservation of Philippine wildlife and biodiversity.

It went on to showcase collective leadership and ambition on oceans and the blue economy. The representatives reached an agreement on a new governance framework to oversee future marine and coastal work on nature and climate under an upcoming Blue Planet Fund Country Plan.

Localization has played a key role in the partnership to date, with over twenty community-led initiatives funded by the UK. This year will see four challenge funds open to new community project proposals across the country to strengthen local capacity across adaptation and biodiversity.

British Ambassador to the Philippines Laure Beaufile said, "I'm proud that the UK and the Philippines are such strong partners on climate and biodiversity. Over the last year we have delivered great things together – supporting people across the country to adapt

to the unavoidable consequences of climate change, driving an uptick in renewable energy, investing in biodiversity through nature-based solutions including the conservation of mangroves and corals, and protecting wildlife ranging from Philippine pangolins to crocodiles. I'm absolutely delighted that, in this fourth Dialogue, we committed to do even more together."

"On top of existing partnerships, we will focus on growing the Blue Economy through the Blue Planet Fund, formulating a country specific plan to support marine protected areas and other effective conservation measures, reduce marine pollution, and manage sustainable fisheries. Together, I have no doubt we will continue to make a real life difference to people across the country," she added.

DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, who is also the President's Chair Designate of the Climate Change Commission said, "The Philippines is committed to a sustainable future and this dialogue is a pivotal step in achieving that goal. We will explore avenues for mobilizing finance and investments into climate, energy, and environment interventions outlined in the Philippines NAP and NDC Implementation Plan."

"The Philippines' efforts toward resilience and sustainable development have received strong financial, technical, and policy-related support from the UK government. We are fully committed to carrying out the UK-PH strategic cooperation. By working together with the UK, we can leverage priority areas of collaboration to create a comprehensive and effective approach to environment and climate action," continued Yulo-Loyzaga.

The dialogue concluded with both countries establishing a clear engagement approach on critical issues such as loss and damage, disaster risk financing, and the blue economy. The UK reinforced its commitment to advancing its work in these areas moving forward and delivering tangible progress in the years ahead.

Senior officials from the DENR, Climate Change Commission, Department of Agriculture – Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Department of Finance, Department of Energy, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, National Economic and Development Authority, the Public-Private Partnership Center, and UK Government representatives from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) were present during the dialogue.

## THE PHILIPPINE STAR

### [\[Opinion\] It's getting hot in here!](#)

By: Brian Poe Llamanzares

The heat lately has been impossible to ignore. El Niño looms over the Philippines. It brings with it a host of extreme weather events, such as drought drastically decreasing rainfall by up to 60 percent and scorching heat waves that are projected to persist across the entire archipelago until May 2024.

We are all witnesses to its terrible inescapable effects. Sweltering heat surpassing 42 degrees Celsius in certain places, for instance, has suspended classes across 5,000 Philippine schools in April 2024's first week, interrupting the education of our 3.6 million students. Cebu City declared a state of water crisis. Government agencies state that water rationing in Metro Manila is not yet needed as supplies remain sufficient for now, but nonetheless forewarn it may be on our horizon. If we fail to formulate sustainable solutions and bungle implementation, then we necessarily compromise Philippine economic, energy, food and water security.

El Niño economics must be carefully considered as its effects are pervasive and potent. Like the temperature, March 2024 inflation rate similarly rose. Government agencies highlight that the 3.7 percent inflation rate is far lower than last year's 7.6 percent in March 2023, and falls within our 2 percent to 4 percent inflation target range. The devils, however, are in the details.

While the March 2024 inflation rate is at 3.7 percent overall, the Philippine Statistics Authority-reported inflation rate for the bottom 30 percent of income households is at a painful 4.6 percent. Filipinos are hurting, and the poorest are bearing the worst of it. It is thus no wonder that recent surveys reveal that Filipinos' top concern right now is perceived uncontrolled inflation. "Food and alcoholic beverages" continue to be the main contributor to overall inflation, contributing 80.6 percent.

Among the food groups, 103.2 percent share was attributable to "cereals and cereal products" which includes bread, flour and – most importantly – rice. Currently, Department of Agriculture Secretary Laurel himself admits that rice prices are not expected to go down due to El Niño's effects, estimated at a staggering P2.76 billion. At such a critical juncture, it must be recognized that the single most crucial element of sustainable rice production is water.

As a multi-purpose dam for irrigation, hydroelectric power, flood control and Southeast Asia's largest, Pantabangan Dam's role cannot be overstated. PAGASA cautions that El Niño may cause Pantabangan to drop to its critical level by the end of April 2024. Pantabangan supplies the irrigation needs of Nueva Ecija, which our out-of-school-due-to-sweltering-heat Filipino school children know in their textbooks as the "Rice Bowl of the Philippines." Less than optimal levels of irrigation for agriculture augurs lower quality and/or less yield.

No less than President Marcos himself recognized the Philippines' water crisis – and its extent. In 2023, acknowledging inter alia "the fragmented water and sanitation sector, increasing demand for water due to population and economic growth, impacts of climate change," the President by executive fiat created a Water Resource Management Office, under the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources.

Our Senate office hailed it as a "timely intervention" and hoped that it would prepare the institutionalization of our nation's efforts to ensure water security for all through, among others, a Department of Water. In this regard, our Senate office reiterates our assertion for the urgent need to pass Senate Bill No. 102 filed on July 7, 2022 during the 19th Congress or the "National Water Resource Management Act" into law.

It is also hoped that learnings from our experiences in the President's newly reactivated and reconstituted Task Force El Niño, an inter-agency body tasked to lead the revision, coordination and implementation of the Strategic El Niño National Action Plan, can be integrated into legislative debates and be part of our national statutory solutions to the water crisis.

The El Niño Online Platform under the President's Executive Order No. 53 (Series of 2024), envisioned to serve as a "centralized repository" for relevant data, is a welcome innovation. While still in its starting stages, it sets the stage for a truly open, technological and evidence-based approach towards water security. It can help in spreading issue awareness, conservation efforts, data sets and planning. It is a step in the right direction.

Water service providers' intensified operations on deep wells all over Metro Manila and Rizal province, to meet the burgeoning daily needs of millions of Filipinos, are timely interventions as well. Deep well operations ease the pressure off Angat Dam and augments water sources for consumers. Angat Dam's role is incredibly important since it supplies more than 90 percent of Metro Manila's potable water requirements and over 27,000 hectares of rice farms in Bulacan and Pampanga Provinces. El Niño has decreased Angat Dam's reserves to below normal high water level, barely hovering

above the minimum operating level of 180 meters. While such deep well operations help, it alone is not enough to solve our heightening water woes.

On top of it all, it bears emphasis that an estimated 11 million Filipino families still lack access to clean water. It is one of the great paradoxes in our Philippines; an archipelago surrounded by boundless water but still falling short of bringing clean water to all Filipinos.

National water management is inextricably intertwined with national wealth management. El Niño reminds us of such indubitable fact. Due to the adverse consequences of climate change on the Philippines, managing our water resources prudently, systematically and sustainably can mean either the ceaseless continuation of a vicious cycle of descent to insecurity or the charting of a better course towards a virtuous cycle for Philippine economic, energy, food and water security.

It's clear that the most effective interventions of our government so far are those which take a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. It's clear that much has yet to be done. It's clear that it's getting hot in here!

## [President Marcos hopes Congress passes nuclear investments bill](#)

By: Alexis Romero

President Marcos expressed hope that Congress would pass bills allowing US nuclear firm Ultra Safe Nuclear Corp. (USNC) to undertake its project in the Philippines as the government continues to explore ways to ensure access to clean and affordable energy sources.

During a meeting with USNC executives last Thursday here, Philippine officials updated Marcos on the bills that seek to provide the legal framework for the company's planned investment and operation in the Philippines.

Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla said the House of Representatives had passed the bill on the regulatory framework, while the measure on the limitation of liability is on second reading in the chamber.

"With such development, the President said he is hopeful the bill gets passed in the Senate," the Presidential Communications Office (PCO) said in a statement.

The House and the Senate must approve their respective versions of the bill before a bicameral conference committee can be convened to reconcile varying provisions.

Once the bicameral conference committee harmonizes the measure, the bill would have to be ratified separately by both chambers before it is sent to the President for his signature.

"You're done already in the House... The elements that need to be there, the provisions that need to be (included), we can do (it) in the Senate and then there's one of course, the bicam down the road," the PCO statement quoted Marcos as saying.

"We spoke about this before. We're going to go ahead with the program, with the training of the people who will actually operate the plant," he added.

The PCO said Marcos also "hailed" the advancements in USNC's planned nuclear energy investment in the Philippines.

The meeting, which was attended by USNC chief executive officer Francesco Venmeri, was a follow-up to Marcos' engagement with officials of the energy firm here in May last year and the signing of a memorandum of understanding on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in San Francisco last November.

Under the MOU, the Manila Electric Co. and USNC will conduct a pre-feasibility study on micro-modular reactors to explore clean and sustainable energy options.

The feasibility study for the possible deployment of micro modular reactors will be conducted in Meralco sites as part of ongoing efforts to ensure dependable and affordable access to power.

According to the PCO, Meralco has the option to conduct a more detailed feasibility study with focus on the adoption and deployment of micro modular reactor (MMR) energy systems.

The agency described the MMR as “a fourth-generation nuclear energy system that delivers safe, zero-carbon, cost effective electricity and heat to utilities, industry and remote communities.”

Marcos had described the partnership as a “significant step towards exploring clean and sustainable energy options for the Philippines,” adding that it was in line with the government’s commitment to cut greenhouse gas emissions and boost the country’s climate change resilience.

USNC, a global leader and vertical integrator of nuclear technologies and services, joined the US Presidential Trade and Investment Mission last month.

Among the company’s key initiatives are the MMR, fully ceramic micro-encapsulated nuclear fuel and nuclear power and propulsion technologies for space exploration.

In November, the Philippines and the US signed the 123 Agreement, which allows Washington to export nuclear technology and equipment to Manila for peaceful uses.

The deal was named after Section 123 of the US Atomic Energy Act, which requires the completion of a peaceful nuclear cooperation deal for significant transfers of nuclear material from the US.

## CCC IN THE NEWS:

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### [Reclamation activities in West Philippine Sea causing irreparable damage - CCC](#)

The Philippine Climate Change Commission blames China and Vietnam for causing irreparable damage to the marine biodiversity of the West Philippine Sea. It said this has endangered food security and the livelihood of Filipino fishermen.



## DAILY TRIBUNE

### [A hot mess: Climate change and human health](#)

By: Secretary Robert EA Borje

The current El Niño phenomenon has triggered heat waves, leading many local governments to suspend face-to-face classes, reverting to the pandemic-era blended learning modality. With temperatures showing no signs of immediate decrease, more suspensions are anticipated as the month progresses.

According to the latest data from the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, most parts of the country will continue to experience heightened temperatures resulting in “human discomfort index” with heat indexes between 37 and 43 degrees Celsius. The agency has issued “Extreme Caution” and “Danger” warnings to the public as prolonged exposure to heat can cause several life-threatening health issues, including heat exhaustion and heat stroke, and exacerbate pre-existing cardiovascular and respiratory conditions.

Beyond these immediate concerns, climate change also stimulates the proliferation of disease-carrying insects such as mosquitoes and ticks, heightening the risk of vector-borne illnesses like dengue and malaria infections. The United Nations (UN) warns that high temperatures and humidity, worsened by climate change and complicated by El Niño, can create stagnant bodies of water. These are ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Likewise, during humid conditions, adult mosquitoes seek cooler, shaded areas often found in human residences, increasing the risk of disease transmission.

In 2023, global dengue cases reached a whopping 5 million, with 5,000 deaths. The Philippines recorded over 167,355 dengue cases and 575 deaths in the same year. The UN attributes these cases to various factors, including changes in global distributions and behavior of mosquitoes, amplified ambient temperatures from El Niño, fragile health care systems, and political and financial instability in affected countries.

Similarly, the World Health Organization links approximately 1 billion malaria cases across 109 countries to climatic variations, specifically rising temperatures, humidity, and shifts in rainfall patterns.

Elevated temperatures also affect water and food security. Warmer water temperatures, coupled with increased flooding and droughts, raise the risk of water pollution from sediment, pathogens, and pesticides, allowing the spread of waterborne diseases like cholera.

In response to the ongoing El Niño in the Philippines, the Department of Health has cautioned against waterborne diseases such as cholera, typhoid fever, and leptospirosis, and vector-borne diseases such as chikungunya and dengue. These diseases can cause severe complications and even death.

Drought-induced water scarcity exacerbates pressure on food production. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the 2024 droughts in the Philippines have resulted in 44.8 thousand metric tons of crop production loss, equating to over US\$31.2 million or approximately P1.76 billion in economic losses, affecting over 29.4 thousand Filipino farmers and their families.

The ongoing heatwave that is cooking the entire country provides hard lessons learned, underscoring the need to grasp the deep interconnection between climate change and human health. Extreme weather events like this jeopardize lives and livelihoods, cause immense stress and anxiety, halt economic activities, and hinder national development.

Certain vulnerable social groups, including children, the elderly, low-income communities, and individuals with pre-existing health conditions, bear the brunt of these impacts due to factors such as limited healthcare, inadequate housing, and socio-economic disparities prevalent in the country.

Given its implications for health and livelihoods, addressing the root causes of climate change and implementing adaptation measures are imperative. The draft National Adaptation Plan (NAP) of the Philippines identifies agriculture, fisheries, and food security, water resources, and health among the eight priority sectors for adaptation and resilience. The NAP outlines indicative strategies to integrate climate resilience into these sectors.

The NAP encapsulates the governments' plans to greatly reduce the impacts of climate-related disasters and protect the livelihoods and well-being of Filipinos. By investing in sustainable agriculture, enhancing our healthcare systems, promoting sustainable land and water management practices, and improving our early warning systems for extreme weather events, the NAP aims to minimize the health risks posed by climate change.

Together with the government initiatives and projects, the protection of the welfare of our families and communities from the health risks of climate change is a collective responsibility. Raising awareness, staying updated on advisories, and concrete preparations about the link between climate change and health empower individuals and communities to take action, fight for their right to health security, and contribute to building a more resilient and sustainable future for all Filipinos.

Earlier this month, we celebrated World Health Day which is an annual commemoration aimed at raising awareness about global health issues. This year's theme, "My Health, My Right," emphasizes the fundamental right of individuals worldwide to access quality healthcare, education, safe drinking water, clean air, nutritious food, adequate housing, decent working conditions and discrimination-free environments.

## WPS climate forum

By: John Louie Abrina

Climate impact at the West Philippine Sea is at the forefront at a forum in Manila Hotel on 12 April 2024. Climate Change Commissioner Albert P. Dela Cruz Sr., PCG Special Staff for WPS, and PCG's Spokesperson for WPS, CG Commo Jay T. Tarriela of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), talked about the significance of regional maritime security and geopolitics.



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