



NEWS ROUNDUP

01 August 2022 (Monday) [as of 9:25am]

- Awash in plastic, calls for action spring in Philippines to tackle growing crisis
- Climate migration growing but not fully recognized by world
- US State Secretary Blinken to meet Marcos on August 6
- Filipino among confirmed monkeypox cases in Singapore
- PH mourns death of former President Fidel V. Ramos
- Ingrid Power plans to build 270-MW battery energy storage system in Rizal
- Mountain melt shuts classic Alpine routes
- [OPINION] San Carlos bishop: There is still time to change course and push for more renewable energy
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- DoF studies Indonesia's carbon tax system
- Rich countries fall short of climate change pledge
- [OPINION] SONA: For most Filipinos, it's the economy, stupid
- [OPINION] Water is life
- PXP Energy cuts loss to P6 million in H1

CCC IN THE NEWS

- Regional student filmmakers stand out in climate advocacy film fest

ARAB NEWS

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By Ellie Aben

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BUSINESS MIRROR

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By: Julie Watson

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US State Secretary Blinken to meet Marcos on August 6

By: Malou Talisog-Bartolome

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A Filipino is among Singapore’s confirmed cases of monkeypox, its Ministry of Health (MOH) reported.

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Among those who expressed their sadness and sent condolences to the bereaved family were President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr., government agencies, lawmakers, and even other nations.

MANILA STANDARD

Ingrid Power plans to build 270-MW battery energy storage system in Rizal

By: Alena Mae Flores

Ingrid Power Holdings Inc., a joint venture of ACEN Corp. and Axia Power Holdings Philippines Corp., plans to put up a 270-megawatt battery energy storage system in Barangay Malaya, Pililla, Rizal that will cost nearly P7 billion.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Mountain melt shuts classic Alpine routes

By Agence France-Presse

Geneva — Little snow cover and glaciers melting at an alarming rate amid Europe’s sweltering heatwaves have put some of the most classic Alpine hiking routes off-limits.

[OPINION] San Carlos bishop: There is still time to change course and push for more renewable energy

In the explainer by the United States Energy Information Administration, natural gas is defined as “a fossil energy source that formed deep beneath the earth’s surface.” It is made up of “the remains of plants and animals (such as diatoms) built up in thick layers on the earth’s surface and ocean floors, sometimes mixed with sand, silt, and calcium carbonate.” It is found by drilling it from the earth and from the seafloor. And the burning of “natural” gas emits “nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO), and

carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrous oxide (N₂O), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), trace amounts of sulfur dioxide (SO₂), and particulate matter (PM).” Like oil and coal.

THE MANILA TIMES

DoF studies Indonesia's carbon tax system

By Mayvelin U. Caraballo

As part of its efforts to improve the country's tax system, the Department of Finance (DoF) is studying Indonesia's experience with the implementation of carbon pricing.

Rich countries fall short of climate change pledge

By PNA

Ankara, Turkey: Rich countries are still failing to fulfill their pledge to provide \$100 billion for climate action in poorer nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) said.

[Opinion] SONA: For most Filipinos, it's the economy, stupid

By: Ricardo Saludo

BEFORE the headline topic, a rejoinder on the change in policy direction by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. The day after he declared the need for a Department of Disaster Resilience after the Abra earthquake, he reversed course.

[OPINION] Water is life

By Marit Stinus-Cabugon

The sitio where I live had just celebrated the second night of the annual fiesta with a "Hot Mama" pageant. A few hours later we woke up to voices yelling, "Sunog!" (Fire!) The sight of the orange flames dancing in the dark night and the frantic activity outside was surreal. Fortunately, a few minutes later fire trucks arrived and the fire was put under control.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

PXP Energy cuts loss to P6 million in H1

By: Richmond Mercurio

Manila, Philippines — Listed upstream oil and gas company PXP Energy Corp. has significantly slashed its net loss in the first half to P6.4 million on the back of higher profit from the Galoc operations.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

ARAB NEWS

Awash in plastic, calls for action spring in Philippines to tackle growing crisis

By Ellie Aben

When President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. delivered his first speech as the newly elected leader of the Philippines at the end of June, he touched on the country's massive plastic problem.

The Southeast Asian nation was ranked third in the world for failing to deal with its plastic, according to a widely cited 2015 study by the University of Georgia. The Philippines generates about 2.7 million metric tons of plastic garbage annually, 20 percent of which ends up in the ocean.

"We too have our part to play; we are the third biggest plastics polluter in the world," Marcos had said.

"But we won't shirk from that responsibility; we will clean up."

The plastic problem has only grown more recently, with a 2021 study published in the Science Advances journal identifying the Philippines as the largest contributor of plastic waste that ends up in the world's oceans, emitting more than 356,000 metric tons each year.

Every day, almost 48 million shopping bags are used throughout the Philippines, adding up to about 17.5 billion pieces a year, according to a report by the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives.

In a world grappling with the increasingly devastating impacts of climate change, there has been a renewed urgency to address the plastic crisis in the Philippines.

"The Philippines has a massive plastic pollution problem at the moment, and it's been a long while coming," Marian Ledesma, Greenpeace Philippines' zero waste campaigner, told Arab News.

"It is essential that we act on the plastic crisis right away," she said. "We need government action as well as the action of large corporations to really shift the tide."

The Philippines could start by implementing existing laws, Ledesma said, such as the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, which critics say has been poorly enforced over the last two decades.

It is also important to reduce the production of single-use plastic and for the government to adopt complementary policies that would help businesses transition to reuse and refill systems, Ledesma added.

Under a new law known as the Extended Producer Responsibility Act, large companies are required to adopt and implement policies for the proper management of plastic packaging wastes, paving a regulatory pathway for the Philippines to combat its plastic pollution problem seriously.

Many environmental groups in the Philippines campaigned to raise more awareness across the country during Plastic Free July, a global movement aimed at real actions to end plastic waste.

Thony Dizon, a chemical safety campaigner with BAN Toxics, told Arab News that finding a solution to the crisis is crucial.

“We really need to address this, we have to find a solution,” Dizon said. “We need action.”

At the individual level, Filipinos should reduce the usage of single-use plastic and switch to alternative materials, such as canvas bags, and bring reusable containers when buying fillable products.

“These are some of the ways to reduce the volume or use of single-use plastic,” Dizon said. “It reaches the main goal, which is to lessen the production and lessen the consumption and throwing away of plastic.”

Plastic waste also contributes to flooding in the Philippines as it clogs drains, he said. Not only does such waste end up in our oceans, but it could also affect our food sources.

Some local governments have moved faster to combat plastic pollution. Quezon City, for example, has banned plastic bags and single-use plastic.

“That’s because they have seen the effects of the problem,” Dizon said. “They have experienced the problem — flooding because of plastic.”

The plastic problem spiraled further during the COVID-19 pandemic as people’s consumption patterns shifted to adapt to life under lockdown and reliance on online deliveries for food and groceries turned into a new normal.

“The pandemic has reshaped people’s shopping behavior,” Dizon said.

“We thought that during the pandemic there would be less volume of plastic waste, but that’s not what happened. Plastic wrappers and packaging from online deliveries added to the problem.”

Filipino lawmakers like Senator Loren Legarda are among those renewing calls to tackle the growing crisis. In July, she pushed for a bill to regulate single-use plastic.

“The plastic crisis we face right now calls for a rethinking of our approaches to our governance and market systems and operations,” Legarda said in a statement.

Though adopting more sustainable practices is important, Legarda said Filipinos also “need to continue demanding more effective policies and solutions” to help address plastic pollution.

Despite calls from environmental groups to highlight the plastic crisis, the issue did not make it to President Marcos' first state of the nation address in July, which lays out the government's agenda for the next year.

But in a comprehensive policy speech that outlines plans for growth and development, the 64-year-old leader spoke of the Philippines' vulnerability to climate change.

"If we cannot mitigate climate change, all our plans for the economy, all our plans for our future, will be for naught," he said.

BUSINESS MIRROR

Climate migration growing but not fully recognized by world

By: Julie Watson

Tijuana, Mexico—Worsening climate from the burning of coal and gas is intensifying a range of disasters and uprooting millions of people, with wildfires overrunning towns in California, rising seas overtaking island nations and drought exacerbating conflicts in various parts of the world.

Each year, natural disasters force an average of 21.5 million people from their homes around the world, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

And scientists predict migration will grow as the planet gets hotter. Over the next 30 years, 143 million people are likely to be uprooted by rising seas, drought, searing temperatures and other climate catastrophes, according to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report published this year.

Still, the world has yet to officially recognize climate migrants or come up with formalized ways to assess their needs and help them. Here's a look at climate migration today.

WHO ARE CLIMATE MIGRANTS?

Most climate migrants move within the borders of their homelands, usually from rural areas to cities after losing their home or livelihood because of drought, rising seas or another weather calamity.

Because cities also are facing their own climate-related problems, including soaring temperatures and water scarcity, people are increasingly being forced to flee across international borders to seek refuge.

Yet climate migrants are not afforded refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention, which provides legal protection only to people fleeing persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or particular social group.

DEFINING CLIMATE MIGRATION

Identifying climate migrants is not easy, especially in regions rife with poverty, violence and conflicts.

While worsening weather conditions are exacerbating poverty, crime and political instability, and fueling tensions over dwindling resources from Africa to Latin America, often climate change is overlooked as a contributing factor to people fleeing their homelands.

According to the UNHCR, 90 percent of refugees under its mandate are from countries "on the front lines of the climate emergency."

In El Salvador, for example, scores each year leave villages because of crop failure from drought or flooding, and end up in cities where they become victims of gang violence and ultimately flee their countries because of those attacks.

“It’s hard to say that someone moves just because of climate change. Is everyone who leaves Honduras after a hurricane a climate migrant?”

Elizabeth Ferris, a research professor at the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University, wrote in an email to The Associated Press. “And then there are non-climate related environmental hazards—people flee earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis—should they be treated differently than those displaced by weather-related phenomena?”

Despite the challenges, it’s vital that governments identify climate-displaced people, Ferris added.

“The whole definitional issue isn’t a trivial question—how can you develop a policy for people if you aren’t clear on who it applies to?” she wrote.

INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS

While no nation offers asylum to climate migrants, UNHCR published legal guidance in October 2020 that opens the door for offering protection to people displaced by the effects of global warming.

It said that climate change should be taken into consideration in certain scenarios when it intersects with violence, though it stopped short of redefining the 1951 Refugee Convention.

The commission acknowledged that temporary protection may be insufficient if a country cannot remedy the situation from natural disasters, such as rising seas, suggesting that certain climate displaced people could be eligible for resettlement if their place of origin is considered uninhabitable.

An increasing number of countries are laying the groundwork to become safe havens for climate migrants.

In May, Argentina created a special humanitarian visa for people from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean displaced by natural disasters to let them stay for three years.

Shortly after taking office, President Joe Biden ordered his national security adviser to conduct a months-long study that included looking at the “options for protection and resettlement of individuals displaced directly or indirectly from climate change.” A task force was set up, but so far the administration has not adopted such a program.

Low-lying Bangladesh, which is extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, has been among the first to try to adapt to the new reality of migration. Efforts are underway to identify climate-resilient towns where people displaced by sea level rise,

river erosion, cyclonic storms and intrusion of saline water can move to work, and in return help their new locations economically.

TRANSFORMING DEBATES ON MIGRATION

Policy debates on migration have long centered on locking down borders. Climate change is changing that.

With hundreds of millions of people expected to be uprooted by natural disasters, there is growing discussion about how to manage migration flows rather than stop them, as for many people migration will become a survival tool, according to advocates.

“One problem is just the complete lack of understanding as to how climate is forcing people to move,” said Amali Tower, founder and executive director of Climate Refugees, an advocacy group focused on raising awareness about people displaced because of climate change.

“There is still this idea in the Global North [industrialized nations] that people come here because they are fleeing poverty and seeking a better life, the American Dream. In Europe, it’s the same spin of the same story. But no one wants to leave their home. We’ve got to approach climate displacement as a human security issue and not a border security issue.”

US State Secretary Blinken to meet Marcos on August 6

BY: Malou Talosig-Bartolome

US State Secretary Antony Blinken is flying next week to two capitals in Asia — Phnom Penh and Manila — to show US President Joe Biden’s commitment to the Indo-Pacific region already largely influenced by rival China, and to “strengthen” bilateral ties with the Philippines that were earlier strained during the first four years of President Duterte’s administration.

In a statement, US State Department spokesman Ned Price said Blinken will first travel to Cambodia on August 3-5 to participate in the three foreign ministerial meetings with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) — US-Asean Ministerial Meeting, East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, and the Asean Regional Forum.

Aside from Blinken, other foreign ministers of the regional partners of Asean like China, Russia, Japan, India, Pakistan, the European Union, South Korea, North Korea and Australia will also attend the post-Asean ministerial meetings in Phnom Penh.

In May, Biden initiated an expanded free trade zone in the Indo-Pacific region called Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), with seven Asean members Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam in the fold. The IPEF was nowhere mentioned in the statement, and instead, Blinken will focus on giving importance to “Asean centrality.”

Other members of IPEF are Australia, India, Japan, South Korea, and lately, Fiji.

“At each (Asean) ministerial, the Secretary will emphasize the United States’ commitment to ASEAN centrality and successful implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

“He will also address the Covid-19 pandemic, economic cooperation, the fight against climate change, the crisis in Burma, and Russia’s war in Ukraine,” Price said.

Immediately after the ministerial meetings in Cambodia, Blinken will travel straight to Manila to meet President Marcos and Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo.

This is the first time Blinken will visit the Philippines since he assumed office in January 2021.

During his meetings in Manila on August 6, Blinken will “discuss bilateral efforts to strengthen the US-Philippines alliance, including through increased cooperation on energy, trade, and investment, advancing our shared democratic values, and pandemic recovery.”

In a separate statement announcing Blinken's visit, the Philippine DFA said the Blinken-Manalo meeting will tackle a wide range of issues "focusing on sustaining the positive trajectory of relations between the Philippines and the US."

Relations between Manila and Washington started on "a very strong trajectory" in the latter period of the Duterte administration, after then President Duterte revived the Philippine-US Visiting Forces Agreement and the US leading the Covid-19 vaccine campaign for the Philippines.

After his brief stint in Manila, Secretary Blinken will travel to South Africa on August 7-9.

In Pretoria, Blinken will launch the U.S. Strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa, "which reinforces the U.S. view that African countries are geo-strategic players and critical partners on the most pressing issues of our day, from promoting an open and stable international system, to tackling the effects of climate change, food insecurity and global pandemics, to shaping our technological and economic futures. He will also visit Johannesburg, where he will join in the South African celebration of National Women's Day.

Then on August 9-10, the Secretary will meet with senior government officials and members of civil society in Democratic Republic of the Congo "to discuss mutual interest in ensuring free, inclusive, and fair elections in 2023, promoting respect for human rights and protecting fundamental freedoms. "

He will also focus on combating corruption, supporting trade and investment, addressing the climate crisis, building agricultural resilience, and support regional African efforts to advance peace in eastern DRC and the broader Great Lakes region.

Lastly, Blinken will visit Rwanda on August 10-12, to discuss peacekeeping, especially on the role of the Rwandan government in reducing tensions and violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"He will also raise democracy and human rights concerns, including transnational repression, limiting space for dissent and political opposition, and the wrongful detention of US Lawful Permanent Resident Paul Rusesabagina," Price said.

CNN

Filipino among confirmed monkeypox cases in Singapore

A Filipino is among Singapore's confirmed cases of monkeypox, its Ministry of Health (MOH) reported.

In a local case update on July 25, the MOH said that the patient who tested positive for the virus is a 31-year-old male.

"He developed fever on July 21, and subsequently rashes on his face and at his perianal region with further spread to other parts of his body," the ministry said.

It added that the patient sought medical care at the Singapore General Hospital on July 24 and was admitted on the same day. He is also currently in stable condition.

The same local case report stated that contact tracing is ongoing.

Just a few days after, the Philippines detected its first confirmed case of monkeypox - a 31-year-old returning overseas Filipino who had traveled to countries with documented infections.

Apart from this, the Health department did not disclose further details of the patient but it assured the public that it is in talks with the government of the United States to obtain vaccines against the virus.

The World Health Organization declared monkeypox a public health emergency of international concern on July 23. It vowed to "continue to work closely" with the country's Department of Health as the disease reaches the Philippines.

PH mourns death of former President Fidel V. Ramos

Among those who expressed their sadness and sent condolences to the bereaved family were President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr., government agencies, lawmakers, and even other nations.

“I extend my deepest condolences to the family of former President Fidel Valdez Ramos who passed away today having lived a full life as a military officer and public servant,” Marcos said in a Facebook post. “Our family shares the Filipino people’s grief on this sad day. We did not only lose a good leader but also a member of the family.”

Apart from highlighting the late president’s socio-economic agenda, Vice President Sara Duterte emphasized Ramos’ role in achieving peace in Mindanao.

“I am one with the whole nation in grieving over the loss of a leader who, during his presidency, made peace possible in Mindanao. In 1996, he signed the peace agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which ended the 24-year Moro armed revolution headed by Nur Misuari,” she said.

Her father, former President

Her father, former President Rodrigo Duterte, expressed “deep sadness” over the death of FVR, which he was popularly known for.

“As we grieve for his loss, let us honor his legacy of service and his significant contributions to the country. May God grant eternal repose on his soul and give strength and solace to all of his bereaved,” he said.

Meanwhile, former President Joseph Estrada, who also served as FVR’s vice president during his term, highlighted the late president’s accomplishments in his condolence message.

“A military man by training and an engineer and a builder by background, he brought to the presidency a different view of how problems should be dealt with, overcoming them in the most pragmatic, cost-effective, and fastest way. I mourn the loss of our former president whose many accomplishments will continue to inspire us,” he said.

Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri echoed Estrada’s statement, noting that FVR “was probably one of our brightest leaders.”

“Maybe it was his military background, but as a politician he was always able to quickly assess the landscape, and formulate the best way forward through consultation and consensus,” he said.

House Speaker Martin Romualdez also released a statement on behalf of his party Lakas-Christian-Muslim-Democrats.

“President Ramos will be remembered as one of the great Filipino leaders that took good governance to heart. His experience as a military general and his innate charm

set the blueprint for what Philippine leaders should be: tough when necessary, but with a caring heart for the common Filipino,” he said.

Senators Bong Revilla and Loren Legarda and Albay Rep. Joey Salceda also thanked FVR whom they considered as their mentor in public service.

Other lawmakers likewise sent their condolences to his family, including Senators Grace Poe, Ralph Recto, Joel Villanueva, Lito Lapid, Sonny Angara, Bong Go, Nancy Binay, Jinggoy Estrada, Francis Tolentino, Robin Padilla, Koko Pimentel and Rep. Elpidio F. Barzaga Jr.

The Philippine National Police and the Office of the Press Secretary, as well as heads of the Department of Budget and Management and Department of National Defense, also condoled with FVR’s family and loved ones.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) also honored its former Commander-in-Chief.

“The AFP is prepared to render traditional military funeral services as our final salute to the departed former Commander-in-Chief. Flags in all military installations shall be raised at half-mast in solidarity with the grieving nation,” it said in a statement.

The European Union and the United States Embassy in the Philippines also extended their condolences, underscoring his contributions to the advancement of the country’s relationship with their nations.

MANILA STANDARD

Ingrid Power plans to build 270-MW battery energy storage system in Rizal

By: Alena Mae Flores

Ingrid Power Holdings Inc., a joint venture of ACEN Corp. and Axia Power Holdings Philippines Corp., plans to put up a 270-megawatt battery energy storage system in Barangay Malaya, Pililla, Rizal that will cost nearly P7 billion.

IPHI said in a report to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources the project would address the need for energy storage systems to handle the ancillary or reserve requirement of the power grid.

It said the Pililla BESS would be operated with energy time-shifting or energy arbitrage as its primary function. The plant will charge from the grid when there is excess energy and electricity marginal prices are low.

The stored energy will then be discharged and sold to the grid during high-power demand and high electricity market prices.

The charging and discharging from the grid will be via the 230-kilovolt Malaya Substation of the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines through a direct connection to the Ingrid Substation.

It will serve as a source of ancillary service for the Luzon grid and improve power quality to help ease the frequency and voltage problems. The project will also provide ancillary service in the form of regulating and contingency reserve to maintain the consistent grid frequency.

IPHI said the project would use lithium-ion battery energy storage systems, which have better ageing and cycle life characteristics and are used mainly for energy time-shifting.

These batteries allow convenient installation and are easily scalable for future expansions. They also have relatively high specific energy, energy density and specific power.

IPHI said this technology is safe to operate and has a minimal environmental impact during construction and operation.

The project will rise on 63,151-square-meters property and will have a service lifetime of 15 years. The proposed project site is owned by Tabangao Realty Inc. and leased by Buendia Christiana Holdings Corp.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Mountain melt shuts classic Alpine routes

By Agence France-Presse

Geneva — Little snow cover and glaciers melting at an alarming rate amid Europe's sweltering heatwaves have put some of the most classic Alpine hiking routes off-limits.

Usually at the height of summer, tourists flock to the Alps and seek out well-trodden paths up to some of Europe's most iconic peaks.

But with warmer temperatures speeding up glacier melt and thawing permafrost — which scientists say are driven by climate change — routes that are usually safe this time of year now face hazards like falling rocks released from the ice.

“Currently in the Alps, there are warnings for around a dozen peaks, including emblematic ones like Matterhorn and Mount Blanc,” Pierre Mathey, head of the Swiss mountain guide association, told AFP.

This is happening far earlier in the season than normal, he said.

“Usually we see such closures in August, but now they have started at the end of June and are continuing in July.”

‘Postpone’

Alpine guides who usually lead thousands of hikers up towards Europe's highest peak announced earlier this week that they would suspend ascents on the most classic routes up Mont Blanc, which straddles France, Italy and Switzerland.

The Guide Alpine Italiane said on its Facebook page that the “particularly delicate conditions” caused by the temperature spike made it necessary to “postpone the climbs”.

Mountain guides have also refrained — reportedly for the first time in a century — from offering tours up the classic route to the Jungfrau peak in Switzerland.

And they have advised against tours along routes on both the Italian and Swiss sides of the towering pyramid-shaped Matterhorn peak.

Ezio Marlier, president of the Valle D'Aosta guides association, said having to steer clear of routes most coveted by tourists was a blow after the Covid slowdowns.

“It is not easy... after two almost empty seasons to decide to halt work,” he told AFP.

He stressed that the Italian Alpine region had shut only two and that there were many other breathtaking and safe routes to take.

But he lamented that many people simply cancelled their trip when they heard their preferred route was off-limits.

“There are plenty of other things to do, but usually when people want Mont Blanc, they want Mont Blanc.”

Dangerous glaciers

Climbing on some of the thousands of glaciers dotting Europe’s largest mountain range is also proving trickier.

“The glaciers are in a state that they are usually in at the end of the summer or even later,” said Andreas Linsbauer, a glaciologist at Zurich University.

“It is sure that we will break the record for negative melts,” he told AFP.

He said a combination of factors were contributing to a “really extreme” summer, starting with exceptionally little snowfall last winter, meaning there was less to protect the glaciers.

Sand also blew up from the Sahara early in the year, darkening the snow, which makes it melt faster.

And then the first heatwave hit Europe in May, with subsequent ones following in June and July, pushing up temperatures even at high altitudes.

The rapid melting can make glaciers more dangerous, as seen with the sudden collapse of Italy’s until then seemingly harmless Marmolada glacier earlier this month, which saw 11 people killed as ice and rock hurtled down the mountain.

While scientists have yet to draw clear conclusions on what caused the disaster, one theory is that meltwater may have reached the point where the glacier was frozen to the rock, loosening its grip.

‘Invisible threat’

Mylene Jacquemart, a glacier and mountain hazard researcher at Zurich’s ETH university, told AFP there were many unknowns about the catastrophe.

“But the general theme is definitely that more meltwater... makes things complicated and potentially more dangerous.”

Mathey, who said warmer temperatures had put mountain guides on high alert, also voiced concern that meltwater filtering under a glacier posed an “additional and invisible threat”.

But despite the challenges, he voiced confidence that guides would find solutions, seeking out alternative routes to keep showing off Alpine splendours.

“Resilience is really in the mountain guides’ DNA,” as is adaptability, he said.

“Humans have to adapt to nature and to the mountains, not the other way around.”

[OPINION] San Carlos bishop: There is still time to change course and push for more renewable energy

In the explainer by the United States Energy Information Administration, natural gas is defined as “a fossil energy source that formed deep beneath the earth’s surface.” It is made up of “the remains of plants and animals (such as diatoms) built up in thick layers on the earth’s surface and ocean floors, sometimes mixed with sand, silt, and calcium carbonate.” It is found by drilling it from the earth and from the seafloor. And the burning of “natural” gas emits “nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO), and carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrous oxide (N₂O), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), trace amounts of sulfur dioxide (SO₂), and particulate matter (PM).” Like oil and coal.

Considering that “natural” gas is made, found, and used in the same way as oil and coal, it really is just as natural as any other form of fossil fuel. But proponents of “natural” gas call it that because they want it to sound cleaner than other fossil fuels. After all, “fossil gas,” though more accurate, sounds as dirty and deadly as it actually is.

This is why it is quite alarming how some of our local officials are welcoming the construction of a 300-megawatt liquefied natural gas (LNG) combined cycle power plant in barangays Punao and Palampas, here in San Carlos. The LNG plant is being proposed by Reliance Energy Development Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of SMC Global Power Holdings Corp., the same corporation that wants to build a coal-fired power plant in our city.

Our opposition to the project has been deemed selfish.

It makes one wonder what is so selfish about stopping an energy project, which would destroy our environment and pollute our atmosphere. Is it selfish to not only think about short-term profits, and consider the cost of drilling and burning fossil fuels to our air, land, and water supply, as well as its effects on the livelihood of our fisher folks? Or is it selfish to oppose the LNG plant, if by doing so, we safeguard the environment and climate for future generations? The people want more choices. We want better choices.

At present, RE technology and RE investments are on the rise, including in Southeast Asia. RE technology and infrastructure, which have a relatively lower impact on the environment, do not require the use of dirty, imported, or mined fossil fuels, and are quicker and easier to build while also producing green and sustainable jobs. But while we all want the choice to abandon dirty, costly energy, RE projects and investments will not come here if they see that local governments are more inclined to greenlight fossil gas projects. For us to have more renewable energy and the choice to disconnect from dirty energy, it would take the commitment and initiative of our elected officials.

Can we believe that our so-called public servants can do nothing to stop the plant? They said the same thing about the coal-fired power plant years ago. But like coal and LNG, renewable energy is also being allowed—even promoted more intensively—by the national government. This means that local policymakers still have a choice on the kind of energy they will support. So the real question is: Why LNG and not more RE?

Promoters of LNG say that because LNG is more efficient than coal, it is the ideal “transition fuel” to more renewable energy in the future. However, this has been doubted by scientists and energy experts from academia and the industry. According to environmental economists from the University of Texas at Austin, market projections show that LNG will not serve as a bridge to more RE, but will be contractually locked for a long period of time. According to climate scientists at Cornell, the amount of leakage in the production of methane leads to equal, if not more, emissions than in coal or oil. And according to Austria’s International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, the burning of the greenhouse gas methane in LNG will make it impossible to reach climate goals.

The science is clear: if the LNG plant pushes through, we will continue to have no choice but to destroy the environment for the sake of energy. Fossil gas will not lead us to more renewable energy. Those who tell us are either sincerely misinformed or deliberately lying. And to insist that something is true for the sake of pride and profit, despite evidence and facts: that is selfishness.

Fortunately, there is still time to act. There is still time to change course. When your house is burning, you try to put it out; you don’t turn on the gas. The only real bridge to more RE is more RE. If our leaders so choose, we can cross that bridge now. But we cannot do that if we continue to take fake paths from the same intentions, with the same excuses, as before.

THE MANILA TIMES

DoF studies Indonesia's carbon tax system

By Mayvelin U. Caraballo

As part of its efforts to improve the country's tax system, the Department of Finance (DoF) is studying Indonesia's experience with the implementation of carbon pricing.

Finance Undersecretary Zeno Ronald Abenoja said last week during an online business forum run by The Manila Times that the DoF is doing an engagement research into carbon tax or carbon pricing instruments.

"We are engaging possible partners to look at the options for the Philippines. What this study will entail really is to have a baseline understanding of where we are right now and given this understanding of the situation in the Philippines, we will look at other countries' experiences," he added.

He said the agency is considering several options as the country would benefit from other countries' experiences and draw on the knowledge of multilaterals to offer some direction on what the options might be for the country.

"They've been one of the first countries economies in the region to take a complete step in this direction. This has been available to them, I think, a couple of years ago, but the implementation as I understand has been stretched out," the official said of Indonesia.

The Finance department can identify the difficulties and factors that Indonesia is now taking into account given the first steps that it had taken, Abenoja said.

"And that will provide us [with] more ideas of the range of options that are available to us. It may be something similar to Indonesia, a slight modification or some other type of instrument," he emphasized.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said in his first State of the Nation Address that the government will execute sound fiscal management under his watch.

"Tax administration reforms will be in place to increase revenue collection," he said.

The Development Budget Coordination Committee said the government's revenue program for this year, which is P3.30 trillion, or 15.2 percent of the country's gross domestic product, will be met through the continuous application of the tax law and administrative reforms, supported by strong economic growth.

Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno previously said the Marcos administration is pursuing the imposition of taxes on single-use plastics and studying carbon taxation as potential sources of revenue.

It is one of the measures proposed under the new administration's Medium-Term Fiscal Framework, which aims to improve tax administration, enhance the fairness and

efficiency of the country's tax system, and promote environmental sustainability to address climate change.

In a discussion paper released in December 2018 by the Philippines Institute for Development Studies, authors said carbon taxation "is a bold step for a developing country like the Philippines as such types of regulatory taxes can counter growth policies due to the obvious increase in production costs of fossil fuel-heavy industries.

Rich countries fall short of climate change pledge

By PNA

Ankara, Turkey: Rich countries are still failing to fulfill their pledge to provide \$100 billion for climate action in poorer nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) said.

In 2020, \$83.3 billion were given to developing countries, \$16.7 billion short of the target set at the 2009 Copenhagen climate conference.

The figure, however, marked a 4 percent increase from 2019, primarily driven by a rise in public flows, according to the OECD.

Receiving 42 percent of the total on average, developing countries in Asia have been the main beneficiaries of climate finance between 2016 and 2020, followed by Africa (26 percent) and the Americas (17 percent).

"We know that more needs to be done. Climate finance grew between 2019 and 2020, but as we had expected, remained short of the increase needed to reach the \$100 billion goal by 2020," OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said in a statement.

He warned that climate change continues to cause "widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people."

"Developed countries need to continue to ramp up their efforts in line with their stated commitments in the lead-up to COP26, which would mean the \$100 billion goal would be reached from next year," he said. "This is critical to building trust as we continue to deepen our multilateral response to climate change."

Previous projections by the OECD showed that "if all commitments put forward by bilateral and multilateral providers up to that point are delivered, the \$100 billion level would be met in 2023 and be exceeded in the period to 2025," the statement said.

[Opinion] SONA: For most Filipinos, it's the economy, stupid

By: Ricardo Saludo

BEFORE the headline topic, a rejoinder on the change in policy direction by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. The day after he declared the need for a Department of Disaster Resilience after the Abra earthquake, he reversed course.

Echoing his elder sister, Sen. Imee Marcos, the President argued that a new Cabinet department would consume too much resources. A disaster body under the Office of the President should suffice, in the siblings' view.

In fact, one can go either way, as long as the new entity addresses three key problems with the current National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), created by Republic Act 10121 in 2010.

First, there is no specific official tasked and responsible for DRRM. Not its chairman, the secretary of national defense, or any other Cabinet members and top officials on the council. All those officials have primary functions not directly related to disaster rescue, relief and rehabilitation. Indeed, no one has ever been fired for failing in DRRM.

Take then-Interior and Local Government Secretary Manuel "Mar" Roxas 3rd, designated by law as NDRRMC vice chairman for disaster preparedness. His department was cited by the Commission on Audit for failing to implement any DRRM capacity-building among local governments, as mandated by law, in the years before the 2013 Super Typhoon "Yolanda" calamity. Zero accomplishment was a major failing, but disaster readiness was not Roxas' main mandate.

Second, no one in the NDRRMC has to have solid DRRM expertise and track record. Of course, the council can engage calamity experts. But why not specifically mandate a DRRM head with disaster knowledge and capabilities?

Third, the NDRRMC or its chairman cannot order agencies to undertake calamity operations the way the Commission on Elections (Comelec) can order government bodies and personnel for election activities.

By law, the NDRRMC head can "call on" state bodies, including the military and the police, for disaster operations. And agencies usually follow such instructions. Still, the ideal arrangement is to give a DRRM chief the power of control over government entities during calamities, as the Comelec wields for elections.

Bottom line: President Marcos and Senator Marcos have helpfully inputted into deliberations on the DRRM body. Congress should now prioritize legislation to establish it in a form both lawmakers and Malacañang will support.

The article quoted Singson that "Marcos' SONA was 'quite surprising and very extensive ... he covered practically all the topics, beyond the topics that we had wanted in MAP, and as much as 19 proposed bills already laid out to Congress,' he (Singson) said. This can boost the confidence of the private sector in the country since Marcos was able to lay down what he wants to happen during his term. 'This already gives a

clear direction to the Cabinet members. Of course, this will require a lot of details but at least, clearly, the directions have been given' ..."

Yet the story headline was "Marcos' SONA lacked anti-corruption stand: business leader." Singson did say: "I was just hoping that he would have made a stronger statement on anti-corruption. Zero tolerance for corruption would have been a good statement this early." But surely for a business leader, the more pertinent SONA assessment was Singson's comment on business concerns.

In fact, the address was highly strategic in focusing on the most important concerns for Filipinos as surveyed by Pulse Asia just a month before the SONA. Its poll on June 24 to 27 found that the top four public concerns were economic: controlling inflation (chosen by 57 percent of respondents), raising workers' pay (45 percent), reducing poverty (33 percent) and creating jobs (29 percent).

No wonder the first, second and fourth sections of the SONA addressed inflation and jobs — the economy, agriculture and tourism — while the third and the fifth targeted rural and urban poverty: agrarian reform and the Department of Social Welfare and Development. Moreover, the sixth segment on health, and the seventh on education address both economic and poverty concerns; so does the migrant workers portion.

Subsequent sections on digitalization, infrastructure, energy and climate change lay the foundation for sustainable growth and lift investor confidence. So does the opening presentation of economic data as well as 10 proposed pieces of legislation covering economic and business issues, out of the 19 presented. It shows business that President Marcos heeds his topnotch economic team.

On foreign affairs, the President reiterated the crucial policy amid escalating superpower rivalry: "With respect to our place in the community of nations, the Philippines shall continue to be a friend to all. And an enemy to none." This is key to avoiding Ukraine's fate in seeking to join the Western alliance.

What about corruption, fifth among Filipinos' issues with 1 in 5 Pulse Asia respondents citing it?

No doubt it must be addressed. But whenever the Marcoses talk of fighting graft, opponents use the occasion to raise Marcos-era sleaze, as they do when human rights is mentioned.

Plainly, SONA coverage would have been skewed toward graft and abuses if those issues were raised, to the diminution of the nation's far greater concerns regarding economic needs.

Hence, understandably, the President saved rights, corruption and several other issues for another time, giving strategic focus on what worries the great majority of Filipinos: prices, wages, jobs and poverty.

[OPINION] Water is life

By Marit Stinus-Cabugon

The sitio where I live had just celebrated the second night of the annual fiesta with a "Hot Mama" pageant. A few hours later we woke up to voices yelling, "Sunog!" (Fire!) The sight of the orange flames dancing in the dark night and the frantic activity outside was surreal. Fortunately, a few minutes later fire trucks arrived and the fire was put under control.

Two months ago, 3,000 individuals were displaced when a fire destroyed 600 homes in Punta Princesa, also in Cebu City. The Cebu City Fire Office has reported that properties worth about P500 million have been lost to fires, this year alone. This represents a big loss not only for the affected individuals, families and business establishments, but for the city as well.

I wonder to what extent small fires become big because households don't have running or stored water. The Metropolitan Cebu Water District (MCWD) serves a franchise area with a total population of about 2.5 million and thousands of establishments, yet the number of connections is only about 200,000. Households — including some in my neighborhood — are denied connections because MCWD is already having a problem servicing existing ones.

Many customers only have water a few hours in a day. Low pressure, we are told, which means there simply isn't enough water to meet demand.

The MCWD recently announced that rates will be increased effective July 2023. The last increase was in 2015. The cost of producing and delivering water has gone up, thus the need to adjust the tariff. The rate hikes of the water fees — a flat rate covering connection and up to 10 cubic meters water consumption per month and which varies according to meter size and the different consumption brackets — reach about 60 percent. The power cost adjustment (PCA) which constitutes the biggest of three charges aside from the water fee — purchased water adjustment (PWA) and franchise tax being the two others — has reportedly been incorporated in the new rate.

The proposed water rate hike doesn't sit well with Cebu City Mayor Michael Rama who finds the increase excessive. But MCWD's basic rates are actually low when compared to, for example, the cities of Metro Manila, Bacolod and Cagayan de Oro. Davao City has lower rates but is scheduled to implement 30 percent, 20 percent and 10 percent rate hikes in 2022, 2023 and 2024, respectively.

Mayor Rama is also opposed to the MCWD's plan to source more water from desalination plants, knowing that the desalination process is costly. Instead the mayor is requesting the national government to fund a dam that would capture rainwater.

There is no doubt that better systems to capture and utilize rainwater would contribute significantly to easing Metro Cebu's water shortage problems. However, it is doubtful that it would suffice. During the dry, hot summers existing dams dry up, causing major drops in MCWD's already insufficient water production. We must keep in mind that climate change is causing more frequent, longer and more extreme weather: higher temperatures and drought have caused lakes to dry up around the world. NASA is

warning that Lake Mead, the biggest reservoir in the US, could soon reach dead pool — meaning, the level of the lake, created with the construction of the Hoover Dam on the Colorado River almost 90 years ago, would drop "so low that it can't flow downstream from the dam" (Robert Glennon, University of Arizona in *The Conversation*, May 13, 2022). "[T]ens of thousands of acres [of land] lie idle because farmers can't get enough water to grow crops," BBC reports. Cities like Las Vegas and Los Angeles depend on Lake Mead for water. Water that starts its journey as snow in the Rocky Mountains. But there is less snow and rain now. A dam that will collect Cebu's rainwater is unlikely to suffice in meeting current and future water demand.

Singapore, whose success Mayor Rama aspires for Cebu City, used to depend on imported water. However, while still importing water, Singapore — as of 2019 — got 30 percent of its water requirements from desalinated water. "High-grade reclaimed water" — recycled sewage water — and water from local catchment are the other two important sources of water (www.wateroam.com).

Nobody likes water rates to increase, but the fact is that buying water by the gallon from private water vendors is a lot more expensive, not to mention time-consuming and inconvenient. Water is a basic necessity and every consumer ought to be serviced by the local water district. The importance of clean water in safeguarding public health cannot be overemphasized — the recent increase in typhoid fever cases in Central Visayas is a case in point. Our already inadequate water supply is further challenged by climate change-induced extreme heat and prolonged periods of drought, increasing the risk of fires and disease outbreaks. We must prepare. No stone can be left unturned.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

PXP Energy cuts loss to P6 million in H1

By: Richmond Mercurio

Manila, Philippines — Listed upstream oil and gas company PXP Energy Corp. has significantly slashed its net loss in the first half to P6.4 million on the back of higher profit from the Galoc operations.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange, PXP Energy core net loss declined to P2.1 million from P22.2 million in the same period last year.

These improvements were a result of higher profit from Service Contract (SC) 14C-1 Galoc operations and reduction in general and administrative expenses.

Consolidated petroleum revenues during the six-month period surged by 130 percent to P45.1 million from last year's P19.6 million.

Costs and expenses, meanwhile, dropped by 13.2 percent to P47.3 million.

Lower general and administrative expenses of P23.7 million offset the P23.6 million worth of petroleum production costs in SC 14C-1 Galoc.

PXP Energy said it would continue to coordinate with the government on the resumption of activities in both SC 75 and SC 72.

SC 72 is operated by Forum GSEC 101 Ltd., a 79.13-percent subsidiary of PXP Energy's unit Forum Energy Ltd.

PXP has a total economic interest of 54.36 percent in SC 72.

SC 75 in northwest Palawan, on the other hand, is directly operated by PXP Energy with a 50 percent participating interest.

Last April, the Department of Energy (DOE) suspended activities in prospects in the West Philippine Sea pending clearance from the Security, Justice and Peace Coordinating Cluster.

In compliance with the directive, PXP Energy and Forum suspended all activities in both SCs.

Meanwhile, PXP Energy said the group would continue to pursue exploration work with respect to its other projects in the Philippines, including SC 40 and SC 74.

PXP Energy is looking to do a seismic reprocessing following the recommendation from a quantitative interpretation study for SC 74, or the Linapacan block in northwest Palawan.

SC 40, or the North Cebu Block, on the other hand, is located in the Visayan Basin, which the DOE considers as among the most prospective in the country next to the Northwest Palawan Basin.

Forum Exploration Inc., a 66.67 percent subsidiary of Forum, is doing a study which involves depth modeling and identification of gravity prospects and leads.

CCC IN THE NEWS

BUSINESS MIRROR

Regional student filmmakers stand out in climate advocacy film fest

By Seymour B. Sanchez

Students from Visayas State University in Leyte and Philippine National University South Luzon in Quezon province led the winners of the Klima Film Festival, a competition that aims to spotlight the effects of climate change using short films written and produced by young Filipinos nationwide.

KFF, a joint initiative of the Climate Change Commission and the Oscar M. Lopez Center, with support from its official media partner iWantTFC and GIZ Philippines, aims “to mobilize the youth in amplifying the importance of local climate solutions to further increase their influence on local climate policy-making and generate local climate adaptation stories as viewed by young Filipino filmmakers by providing a venue for the production and promotion of climate science-based short films.”

The second edition of the KFF with the theme, “Adapting for a Sustainable Future: Stepping Up Local Climate Action in a Post-Pandemic World,” emphasizes “the importance of local climate action that will optimize our nation’s future—to plan, build, and support sustainable communities.”

The KFF 2021 short films were judged by science, gender, and film experts Dr. Doracie Zoleta-Nantes, Dr. Rodel Lasco, Dr. Rolando Tolentino, Liza Diño, Honey Castro, and Sari Dalena for their cinematic attributes and technical execution, story, and content, impact, as well as gender considerations.

Sci-fi films from climate advocate

Science fiction film “Viridescent” by Mikone Joshua Calungsod bagged four trophies for Best Film, which comes with a cash prize of P70,000, and an additional P15,000 for each major prize—Best in Climate Advocacy, Best Production Design (Camille Flores), and Best Cinematography (Darwin Palermo).

The sci-fi drama focuses on scientist Dr. Leila Montesclaros (Leila Amore Galvez) and software engineer Noah Bolfango (Calungsod). They must work together to retrieve crucial biological data to save humankind from the verge of extinction. As they experience a breakdown of communication. Dr. Montesclaros must draw upon her ingenuity to fulfill a dream of securing planet Earth for humanity.

Calungsod, Palermo, and Galvez are also behind “Verdant” of Ang Maharlika Productions (now known as MCDP Films), which won first runner-up in the first KFF two years ago. Flores, who served as a production designer in “Viridiscent,” completes the grand prize-winning team this year.

“We have successfully made two short films that enabled us to send a message to the world about our environment. This win is not just for the production team but for

everyone,” Calungsod, a second-year BS Environmental Science major at VSU, shared.

Against all odds for a clean environment

“Sigalot: Sa Pagitan ng Tao at Kalikasan” by Quezon-based filmmaker Erwin Adupe received three trophies and P80,000 for winning first runner-up, Best Direction (Adupe), and Best Musical Scoring.

In the film, three siblings, Luntian (Michael Japone), Benilda (Vhenalyn Balanon), and Bagwis (John Jenard Magaoay), make a difference in their community near the sea by doing good things for the environment. As they clean their community together in preparation for a coming typhoon, they unexpectedly earn criticism and opposition from their neighbors and colleagues for their actions.

Adupe also worked with assistant director Abegail Carullo, scriptwriters Dane Khryssel Severa, Khaysel Oliveros, and Ma. Alea Cabiles, production designer Veranice Julia Valenciana, makeup artist Rea Lyn Barrameda Forbes, lights and sound director Angelo Gulifardo, videographers and editors Vince Cloude Reyes, Miguel Balanon, and Daniel Deocales, production manager Lhea Mae Capistrano, talent manager Eishah Kaye Oliva Limbo, location manager Lovely Marie Leogo, researcher John Carlo Flores, and background talents or extras Aderyne Diaz, Cyrene Lachica, Trixie Manalac, and Angelie San Juan.

More student filmmakers for climate justice

Student filmmakers from De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde secured a total of five awards from KFF.

“Tanaw” directed by Kaila Ysavl Bergonio of Playback Multimedia brought home four trophies along with P30,000 for winning second runner-up, P15,000 for Best Screenplay, P15,000 for Best Performance (Andrea Marie Bool), and P5,000 for bagging the Gender-Responsive Award.

On the other hand, “Modern Stray” by Rayshelle Lozada of Trianggulo Productions won the Audience Choice trophy and P5,000 plus an additional P15,000 for being one of the four KFF finalists.

In “Tanaw,” Aira Mendoza (Bool) is a teenage student raised by her mother, a retired barangay captain, and an environmental activist. A school requirement brings her onsite in a quarry for a research project.

Content creator with concern for nature

Meanwhile, in “Modern Stray,” Sunny De Vera (Fern Santos) has been called ill-mannered and materialistic. She devises a plan to showcase her roots in Batangas as she creates new content for her YouTube channel. In her province, she retraces her past with childhood friend Nanoy (Justine Jay Daanoy). Sunny’s realizations and reflections push her on a new path as an environmental advocate.

Lozada remembers how often she obsessed with how time works, recalling how her mother also used to say that her type of story is about time travel. “What inspires me to conceptualize the film ‘Modern Stray’ is about the idea of your past selves merging into this future self you wanted to portray. Like we’re basically our real selves as a child but as time progresses, we learn to fabricate our own truths.”

Making a difference as young filmmakers

Bergonio revealed that she and her co-writer, Fred Autor, “aim to tell through our film that a simple task can lead to a piece of greater knowledge and understanding that could cause a spark in future generations to stand up for themselves and their future.”

She and her team intended “Tanaw” to show that they can still make a difference for the environment and society, no matter how little or small their efforts are. “To break the stigma of pointing fingers at those suffering and who cannot choose, we must remember to act and never remain silent, particularly when we have the power and access to education and information. It is easy for our generation to look past important issues as such or to be easily swayed in our opinions,” the young filmmaker emphasized.

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