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20 AUGUST 2024 [08:00 am]

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By: Steven A. Cook

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SENATE

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Information and Knowledge Management Division

ABS CBN

Metro Manila flood control project delayed by 2 years

By: Victoria Tulad

The Metro Manila flood control project will be delayed by two years, according to the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA).

“I understand that this particular program is currently being restructured so magkakaroon ng (there will be) a two year extension,” MMDA acting Chairman Romando Artes said during the budget hearing in the Senate on Monday.

Senator Joel Villanueva expressed disappointment over the delay and asked the reason for this, but Artes could not explain since the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) is the one in charge of flood control.

“Sila gagawa then kapag tapos na, turnover sa MMDA for operation,” Artes said. “Nagco-coordinate lang po samin ang DPWH, nagpaparticipate kami sap pagpa-plano from time to time pero implementation po is DPWH.”

(They will construct and then turnover to the MMDA for operation. DPWH just coordinates with us, we participate in the planning from time to time but the implementation is with DPWH.)

Villanueva told Artes, however, “That is also your turf. Project ‘yan sa jurisdiction ninyo. Siguro it is right to get an answer with DPWH. We will ask that but I think you should also know what’s going on dahil inyo po yan and kayo yung pagtu-turnoveran niyan. I am just disappointed that restructured uli.”

(That is a project under your jurisdiction. It is right to get an answer with DPWH. We will ask but I think you should also know what’s going on because you’re the one whom the project will be turned over to. I am just disappointed that it is restructured again.)

Senate OKs Blue Economy, Loss and Damage Fund Board Acts

The Senate has approved the proposed Blue Economy Act for the sustainable and safe use and development of marine wealth as a pillar of the national economy and patrimony.

Blue economy refers to the practical ocean-based economic model using green infrastructure and technologies, innovative financing mechanisms, and proactive institutional arrangements. It has the twin goals of protecting the country's oceans and coasts, and enhancing its potential contribution to sustainable development, including improving human well-being, and reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.

It forms the Blue Economy Council to formulate an integrated strategy to strengthen, grow, and sustain the Philippines' blue economy, integrated marine and coastal area management, and ecosystem-based management of coastal and marine resources.

The Senate also approved the Loss and Damage Fund Board Act which aims to accelerate access to critical climate finance and investments for future-proofing the economy and ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth for all Filipinos.

The measure supports the hosting of the governing board of the Fund in the Philippines. It states that the state recognizes the need to grant juridical personality and legal capacity to the Board to enable it to discharge its roles and functions.

FOREIGN POLICY

[Climate Change Is Making the Middle East Uninhabitable](#)

By: Steven A. Cook

Over the last 10 months, the world's attention has been focused on Israel and the Gaza Strip. The war that began on Oct. 7, 2023, with Hamas's attack on Israel has been cataclysmic. But the conflict has overshadowed another crisis enveloping the region: intense heat and water scarcity.

In mid-July, the heat index in Dubai was 144 degrees Fahrenheit. In late June, the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, registered a temperature of 125 degrees. This heat coincided with Hajj season. When it was over, more than 1,300 people had lost their lives. And in Egypt, temperatures have rarely fallen below 100 degrees since May.

It was actually hotter in the Gulf region last summer, topping out at an eye-popping real feel of 158 degrees in the coastal areas of Iran and the United Arab Emirates. That reading and the unrelenting heat this season exceeded the "wet-bulb temperature" at which humans, if exposed for six hours, can no longer cool themselves off, leading to heat-related illnesses and death.

The World Bank estimates that by 2050, water scarcity will result in GDP reductions of up to 14 percent in the region. In 2021, a UNICEF report stated that Egypt could run out of water by 2025, with the Nile River coming under particular stress. Water stress in countries such as Egypt is exacerbated by the upriver flow of the Nile being restricted because of the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Syria and Turkey have been at odds over many years because the Turks have built dams along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, cutting the flow south. And among the many issue that divide Israelis and Palestinians is water and who has the right to tap into the Mountain Aquifer of the West Bank.

In addition to the extreme heat's significant threat to life and livelihood in the Middle East and North Africa, a hotter region has the potential to destabilize politics well beyond its borders.

Before going further, it is important to underscore that this is not a column about "climate conflict." About a decade ago, there was a spate of articles on this issue, highlighting the Syrian Civil War as an example of what the future would look like as the globe warmed. Even though this idea captured the imagination of a variety of notables including then-Prince Charles, U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, and others, the claim about Syria in particular was based on incomplete data, faulty interpretation of that data, over-generalization, and, as a result, erroneous conclusions.

As the October 2021 National Intelligence Estimate on climate change dryly noted, the U.S. intelligence community had "low to moderate confidence in how physical climate impacts will affect US national security interests and the nature of geopolitical conflict, given the complex dimensions of human and state decisionmaking." Basically, the spies

are saying it is hard to make a causal connection between climate and conflict because there are so many variables that contribute to conflict.

A clearer and more pressing problem is how people adapt to rising temperatures and water scarcity. They migrate to places with lower temperatures and more water. According to the World Bank, as many as 19 million people—approximately 9 percent of the local population—will become displaced in North Africa by 2050 because of the climate crisis. And for people in the region, the destination of choice is Europe.

A number of caveats are in order: First, the bank is extrapolating. It is possible that there may be political, economic, or technological changes that limit the number of migrants. Second, not every person on the move will be migrating because of the changing climate. And finally, some of those displaced people will remain somewhere in the region given the resources necessary to make it across the Mediterranean. (That presents its own set of problems, however. Internally displaced people, who generally settle in urban areas, will put pressure on the budgets and infrastructure of places whose resources and capacity to absorb migrants are limited.)

All this said, in the abstract migration is positive for countries in the European Union, which have aging populations and need workers to pay into generous social safety nets. Yet the claim that migration provides benefits to society remains unconvincing to a significant number of Europeans who oppose large (or perceptively large) numbers of newcomers into their countries.

France's National Front party, which long flirted with fascism and a coy version of Holocaust denial and rebranded itself as the National Rally in 2018 in an effort to shed this ugly legacy, has become a major force in French politics in large part due to its opposition to immigration, especially from Islamic countries. Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, the avatar of European illiberalism, built his authoritarian system on fears of the threat that migrants pose to Hungarian society.

Brexit, which British voters approved in 2016, was about a lot of things, but immigration propelled the United Kingdom's imprudent decision to leave the European Union. More recently, the proximate cause of the recent riots in England was the allegation that an immigrant was responsible for the murder of three young girls at a dance class in the seaside town of Southport. Despite the allegation being demonstrably false, the ensuing street violence suggests that simmering resentment toward migrants within a segment of the marginalized English working class stoked by, and combined with, right-wing populism is dangerous and potentially destabilizing.

Then there is Germany, where in 2015 hundreds of thousands of Syrians sought refuge from the violence enveloping their country. Then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel made the decision to grant Syrians entry. It was a decision that many Germans embraced, but it also produced a backlash that has helped drive the emergence of the Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) party. The AfD is different from other right-wing populist parties in Europe given its provenance. Although it began as a party based on

Euro-skepticism, it has moved steadily toward embracing fascism, downplaying the atrocities of the Third Reich, spreading Islamophobia, and inveighing against foreigners in general. Of course, there is a whole host of reasons for the rise of the AfD and other fascist, illiberal, right-wing populist parties in Europe. But scholars agree that migration is the through line in this phenomenon.

The United States has a compelling interest in a Europe that is stable, whole, free, and prosperous. The emergence and success of xenophobic, fascist, or fascist-adjacent parties that make common cause with the enemies of Western liberalism are a threat to that core U.S. interest. That's why Washington needs to help head off mass migration to Europe. There is not a lot that the United States can do about conflicts—such as the one in Sudan—that drive migration, but U.S. policymakers can help when it comes to the climate crisis, which will contribute to the increasing numbers of people seeking refuge in Europe.

This requires not increasing financial assistance or green infrastructure projects but something both more cost-effective and influential: creative diplomacy. High heat makes the problem of water scarcity worse, which is why people migrate. Using its own experience and technical expertise from managing resources in the increasingly hot western United States, the U.S. government can play a useful role in helping countries in the Middle East do a better job managing what water they have.

The conflicts that span the region make assistance harder, given the fact that water sources often cross boundaries. But that is a challenge that can be overcome. Not only are there technical solutions to the problem of water scarcity, but there are also political incentives to come to agreement even across conflict zones.

Leaders across the region may disdain their citizens, but they have a political interest in satisfying at least their people's minimum demands, including access to water. Even with all the nationalist huffing and puffing of their governments, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed have a strong interest in sharing the waters of the Nile. Without such an agreement, the political and economic problems of both countries will deepen, threatening both leaders.

Of all things, the maritime border agreement between Israel and Lebanon can be a template of sorts for the way U.S. officials approach the problem of water sharing in the region. There was a range of critics of the agreement in the United States, Israel, and Lebanon, but the actual substance is less important than the way U.S. diplomats brought it about. They separated Israeli concerns about Lebanon and Lebanese concerns about Israel and focused instead on the upside for each country. Once that became clear—the exploitation of gas deposits off the Israeli and Lebanese coasts—it was hard for the two countries that nonetheless remain in a state of war to not agree to a boundary. Despite 10 months of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, the agreement has not been breached. That is important and suggests a way forward for negotiations over water.

It is tempting to want to place efforts to deal with water scarcity in some broader climate agenda for the Middle East. That is exactly what U.S. officials should not do. Washington should focus on issues where it has a realistic chance of making a difference. There is little the United States can do about the intense heat, and mitigation of greenhouse gases is not a pressing problem in the region because it does not actually emit that much greenhouse gas. Water, however, is critically important, and it is an area where the United States has expertise to bring to bear.

Indeed, helping strike agreements to manage water scarcity in the Middle East is a low-cost way the United States can mitigate the perversions of European politics and help shape the global order to come.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Heavy rains cause floods in Metro Manila, nearby areas on Monday

By: John Eric Mendoza

Metro Manila and adjacent areas saw intense and torrential rains on Monday afternoon, according to the state weather bureau.

In its advisory at 3:57 p.m., the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said that “intense to torrential rain showers with lightning and strong winds” are being experienced in the National Capital Region (NCR), along with adjacent areas Bulacan, Cavite, Zambales, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija, Quezon, and Batangas.

Pagasa said the rains “may persist within 2 hours and may affect nearby areas.”

“All are advised to take precautionary measures against the impacts associated with these hazards which include flash floods and landslides,” Pagasa said.

Several areas in the NCR were flooded due to the rains, according to the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA).

As of 4:48 p.m., “below gutter deep floods” were seen in E Rodriguez-Araneta, Araneta del Monte, and C3 NLEX/ Connector in Quezon City; McArthur Hi-Way Calle Uno in Caloocan City; as well as in Andrew Tramo and Edsa Roxas intersection in Pasay City.

Also, “above gutter deep” floods were seen in EDSA Orense St. Guadalupe in Makati City, and C5 Kalayaan in Taguig City.

Meanwhile, some flights were temporarily suspended at Ninoy Aquino International Airport due to the flooding, according to the Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA).

A “lightning red alert” was issued by the MIAA at 4:07 p.m., but it was shortly lifted at 4:37 p.m.

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[Air pollution in NCR due to vehicular emissions: DENR](#)

By: Marita Moaje

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources-Environmental Management Bureau (DENR-EMB) said the foggy atmosphere in the National Capital Region (NCR) on Monday was mainly due to air pollution from vehicular emissions and not vog coming from Taal Volcano.

“The current air pollution levels may be primarily attributed to emissions from heavy vehicular traffic, especially during rush hour, and the effect of thermal inversion which traps air pollutants in the surface level,” the DENR's Haze Watch Air Quality Technical Bulletin read.

The surface wind direction is blowing from the southeast at about 8 a.m., as observed from the nearest station of PAGASA (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration) located approximately 33.3 kilometers from Taal Volcano.

This means that the wind direction is away from the NCR, it added.

Meanwhile, air quality in some areas in Metro Manila was recorded at unhealthy levels.

The DENR-EMB air monitoring station in Makati City recorded an air quality index (AQI) of “very unhealthy” for Particulate Matter (PM) 2.5, while stations in Caloocan, Pateros, and Parañaque City recorded an AQI of “unhealthy for sensitive groups” for PM2.5.

Stations in Pateros and Taguig City recorded AQI of “fair” (55-154) for PM10, while stations in Caloocan, San Juan, Makati, and Parañaque City recorded AQI of “good” for PM10 (range from 0–54).

Meanwhile, an AQI of “very unhealthy” was recorded for ground-level upwind PM2.5 monitoring stations located in SM Sky Ranch, Tagaytay, Cavite; and BSU Mabini Campus Rizal Ave, Extension, Batangas -- all near Taal Volcano.

However, air quality varies in time and place and can change anytime depending on pollution sources and meteorological factors.

Meanwhile, vog was recorded in areas near the Taal Volcano which is under Alert Level 1.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) recorded 3,355 tonnes/day of sulfur dioxide emissions within the area and a plume height of 2,400 meters.

[DOE awards 25-year renewable energy contract to MisOr firm](#)

By: Nef Luczon

The Department of Energy (DOE) has approved a 25-year solar energy operating contract for a firm in Misamis Oriental province, which broke ground on its power facility on Monday.

In a statement, DOE said FDC Green Energy Corporation, a subsidiary of FDC Utilities, Inc., will build the 20.75-megawatt Misamis Solar Power Project.

Juan Eugenio Roxas, president and chief executive officer of FDC Green, said the groundbreaking is a significant milestone in the company's transformative journey toward achieving a balanced energy portfolio.

"We aim to boost our renewable energy capacity in the coming years, underscoring our unwavering commitment to sustainability and innovation," he said.

Under the DOE terms, the project will install over 34,000 monocrystalline solar panels that are expected to generate approximately 30,450 megawatt-hours of clean energy annually, significantly bolstering grid stability in the region.

Strategically located within the Phividec Industrial Estate, one of the Philippines' major economic zones, the project benefits from optimal conditions for solar energy generation.

The solar power project will contribute to meeting the country's renewable portfolio standards, which require electric power industry participants to source 2.52 percent of their annual energy demand from eligible renewable facilities.

RAPPLER

[Tropical Storm Dindo leaves PAR](#)

By: Acor Arceo

Tropical Storm Dindo (Jongdari) left the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) on Monday morning, August 19, just hours after it developed on Sunday evening, August 18.

As of 10 am on Monday, Dindo was already 670 kilometers northeast of Itbayat, Batanes, slowly moving northeast outside PAR.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said Dindo is expected to move over the East China Sea and the Yellow Sea in the next three days, toward the Korean Peninsula.

The tropical storm maintained its strength as it left PAR, with maximum sustained winds of 65 kilometers per hour and gustiness of up to 80 km/h.

Since Dindo formed far from Philippine landmass and immediately exited PAR, it did not bring rain to the country. Tropical cyclone wind signals were not raised as well.

But Dindo and the southwest monsoon or habagat are still causing moderate seas — with waves 1 to 2 meters high — in extreme Northern Luzon. PAGASA advised small vessels to take precautionary measures.

Dindo was the Philippines' fourth tropical cyclone for 2024 and the first for August. PAGASA earlier estimated there may be two or three tropical cyclones during the month.

On Monday, the southwest monsoon is affecting only extreme Northern Luzon, particularly Batanes and Babuyan Islands, which have scattered rain and thunderstorms.

Other areas are seeing generally fair weather, with just isolated rain showers or thunderstorms.

SENATE

[Senate approves Blue Economy Act](#)

The Senate approved on third and final reading the Blue Economy Act, embodying the sustainable utilization of Philippines' oceanic resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and the health of the country's ocean ecosystems.

Sen. Loren Legarda, principal author and sponsor of Senate Bill No. 2450 or the Blue Economy Act, said blue economy transcends borders and touches the very essence of Philippines' sustainable future as the United Nations General Assembly recognized the urgent need to protect and harness the potential of oceans and marine resources to drive sustainable development as encapsulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

According to Legarda, in 2017, the World Bank unveiled a groundbreaking report, "The Potential of the Blue Economy," highlighting the abundant opportunities lying dormant in the coastal and oceanic realms of nations that are yet to harness them fully.

"These untapped resources, such as natural gas and the Philippine Rise, a 13-million-hectare underwater plateau, have the power to transform economies and lives. Consider the staggering biodiversity found within the Philippines nestled in the heart of the Coral Triangle," Legarda said in her sponsorship speech.

The bill will boast marine shore-fish biodiversity that is unrivaled, offering not only tangible stocks of marine resources but also the invaluable regulating services that support coastal states outside or around the Philippines.

A significant portion of the Philippine population, 60 percent, calls the coast home, with fisherfolk representing the second highest poverty-stricken sector. This imbalance cries out for rectification. The Blue Economy, simply put, embodies the sustainable utilization of oceanic resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and the health of our ocean ecosystems.

"It embodies our commitment to conserve, protect, and prosper in harmony with our marine environment. The Blue Economy bill, a priority in the LEDAC agenda, is our solution to this pressing issue. It aims to rewrite the narrative for coastal and marine resources, elevating their status in our development plans, and ensuring that they contribute to our national economy and the realization of SDG," Legarda explained.

Section 4 of the bill specifically provides scope of application: "For purposes of this Act, the Philippines shall exercise sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction, in accordance with international law, as appropriate, in internal waters, archipelagic waters, territorial sea, contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone and continent shelf, herein collectively referred to as coastal and marine zones, including its seabed and

subsoil, and any and all maritime features within the Maritime Zones now known or to be known in the future."

The bill also contained a policy development framework that aims to help the country define a roadmap to a diversified and sustainable ocean economy in a manner that provides long-term economic and social benefits while building resilience to climate change and without compromising the safety of our marine ecosystems.

The Framework objectives are to: (a) Ensure a cross-sectoral and cross-stakeholder approach, creating a value chain, supporting inclusiveness, and ensuring sustainability to make the blue economy a new engine for the country's future economic growth; (b) Develop a common understanding of the blue economy; (c) Provide a foundation for regional actions relevant to the blue economy to maximize the economic potential of the country's ocean and inland water resources.

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Ang ulan na binagsak ni Carina, mas marami kaysa sa binuhos ng Bagyong Ondoy noong Setyembre 2009. Sinasabi ng mga eksperto na epekto umano ito ng climate change.

Kaya naman ang administrasyon ni Pangulong Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. pinaghahandaan ang brutal na epekto ng climate change at extreme weather events sa mga susunod na buwan.

Isiniwalat ni Makati City Rep. Luis Campos Jr., vice chairperson ng House committee on appropriations, na sa panukalang 2025 national budget, naglaan ang Malacañang ng P31 bilyon para sa Calamity Fund. Mas malaki ito ng 51 porsiyento kumpara sa alokasyon ngayong taon na P20.5 bilyon.

Sinabi ni Campos na pinalaki ang Calamity Fund “to enable agencies to deliver highly improved emergency aid, relief and rehabilitation services to disaster victims.”

Sa P31 bilyong Calamity Fund, isiniwalat ni Campos na tinatayang P14.7 bilyon ang gagamitin sa capital outlays, partikular sa reconstruction ng mga nasirang permanent structures tulad ng kalsada, tulay at mga school buildings.

Tinatayang P7.7 bilyon naman ang ipinasok sa Quick Respond Fund (QRF) para sa walong frontline departments, sabi ng mister ni Makati Mayor Abby Binay.

Kinatigan din ni Campos ang paglalagay ng P1 bilyon para sa People’s Survival Fund (PSF). Ang PSF, aniya, ay magsisilbing special fund upang makapagpalabas ng subsidy sa climate change adaptation at natural disaster resilience strategies, kabilang halimbawa ang paglalagay ng practical rainwater collectors.

Hinikayat ni Campos ang mga barangay at nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) na mag-avail sa PSF upang makapagtayo sila ng mga rainwater harvesting systems sa kanilang komunidad.

Ang tubig na maiipon sa panahon ng tag-ulan ang magsisilbing extra freshwater supplies sa mga panahon naman ng matinding tagtuyot.

Ang PSF ay hahawakan ng People's Survival Fund Board na binubuo ng mga pinuno ng Department of Finance, Department of Budget and Management, Department of the Interior and Local Government, National Economic and Development Authority, at Philippine Commission on Women, kasama ang vice chairperson ng Climate Change Commission, at tig-isang kinatawan mula sa scientific community, business sector, at NGOs.

Dati, marami sa atin ang minamaliit lamang ang isyu ng climate change. Pero sa mga naranasang pagbaha sa maraming lugar sa bansa, nauunawaan na nila marahil ang usaping ito at ang pangangailangan na mapaghandaan ang bangis ng Inang Kalikasan.

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