



## NEWS ROUNDUP

14 SEPTEMBER 2023 [ 09:00 am]

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- EU, World Bank, Napocor inaugurate solar-generation plants development in VisMin
- WTO warns against global trade split-up
- More than 5,000 presumed dead in Libya after ‘catastrophic’ flooding breaks dams and sweeps away homes
- ADB OKs \$303-M loan for flood control infra
- ADB approves \$303-million loan to prevent flooding in the Philippines
- Gov’t should promote cultivation of bamboo to help protect crops, combat climate change
- Solon bats for age-old earth balling upgrade
- ADB approves \$303-M flood, climate risk loan
- El Niño and La Niña mess up agriculture
- For 10th straight year, Philippines remains Asia’s deadliest place to defend the environment

## BUSINESS MIRROR

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## BUSINESS WORLD

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By: Norman P. Aquino

Geopolitical tensions and recent crises have spurred protectionist policies that are slowly eroding the world’s trading system and could ultimately fragment the global economy, the World Trade Organization (WTO) said, as it called for a renewed drive toward a broader and more inclusive integration.

## **CNN**

### **[More than 5,000 presumed dead in Libya after 'catastrophic' flooding breaks dams and sweeps away homes](#)**

By: Hamdi Alkhshali, Mostafa Salem and Kareem El Damanhoury

More than 5,000 people are presumed dead and 10,000 missing after heavy rains in northeastern Libya caused two dams to collapse, surging more water into already inundated areas.

## **GMA NEWS**

### **[ADB OKs \\$303-M loan for flood control infra](#)**

By: Red Crodero

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said on Wednesday it had approved a loan for the Philippines aimed at reducing flood and climate risks in three major river basins in the country.

## **MANILA STANDARD**

### **[ADB approves \\$303-million loan to prevent flooding in the Philippines](#)**

By: Julito G. Rada

The Asian Development Bank said Wednesday it approved a \$303-million (roughly P17 billion) loan to reduce flood and climate risks and protect people and livelihoods in three major river basins in the Philippines.

## **PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER**

### **[PH faces AI threat](#)**

The Philippine government will need to swiftly address the rising threat of artificial intelligence (AI), especially on key sectors such as outsourcing, which is one of pillars of the economy.

## [Gov't should promote cultivation of bamboo to help protect crops, combat climate change](#)

Environment Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga called for the planting of more trees to help beat the heat all over. We hasten to add that bamboo would more effectively address the current problem of global warming and climate change, but it is not a tree, as it belongs to the subfamily Bambusoideae of the grass family Poaceae.

### **PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY**

#### [Solon bats for age-old earth balling upgrade](#)

By: Zaldy De Layola

Leyte Rep. Richard Gomez on Wednesday urged his colleagues to pass his bill seeking an upgrade on the age-old earth balling system as the country moves forward towards economic development amid the growing risks of climate change.

### **THE MANILA TIMES**

#### [ADB approves \\$303-M flood, climate risk loan](#)

By: Niña Myka Pauline Arceo

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$303-million loan to reduce flood and climate risks in the disaster-prone Philippines.

#### [El Niño and La Niña mess up agriculture](#)

By: Ernie Cecilia, DPM

Officer in charge Esperanza Cayanan of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) earlier announced that the "El Niño is showing signs of strengthening in the coming months. The climate outlook further suggests that the aggregate impacts of El Niño are expected toward the last quarter of the year and first half of 2024 to bring dry spells in most areas of the country."

## THE PHILIPPINE STAR

### [For 10th straight year, Philippines remains Asia's deadliest place to defend the environment](#)

By: Gaea Katreena Cabico

For the 10th consecutive year, the Philippines remains the deadliest country in Asia for individuals defending their land and the environment, according to new research, raising concerns among advocates who fear that the current administration's promotion of mining and infrastructure projects will exacerbate the threats to their lives.

**Information and Knowledge Management Division**

## **BUSINESS MIRROR**

### **[EU, World Bank, Napocor inaugurate solar-generation plants development in VisMin](#)**

The European Union (EU), the World Bank (WB), and the National Power Corporation (Napocor) have activated solar power plants of electric cooperatives (ECs) in the Visayas and Mindanao.

Said facilities were completed late in August in Samar, as well as South Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat in Mindanao.

Napocor is currently performing the solar-power plants' set up and linking to the ECs' distribution networks under the "Access to Sustainable Energy" project administered by the WB, and funded by an EU grant. The project, which is part of the EU's €66 million (P3.8-billion equivalent) "Access to Sustainable Energy Programme," financed four 1-megawatt power greenfield solar photovoltaic power plants at a total cost of €4.6 million (P280-million equivalent).

The two plants connected to the distribution networks of South Cotabato II Electric Cooperative or SOCOTECO II, and Sultan Kudarat Electric Cooperative or SUKELCO, were switched on at the ceremony. The other two plants, which will be connected to the networks of Samar I & II Electric Cooperatives or SAMELCO I and SAMELCO II, are for activation by the end of this month.

According to the Embassy of the EU Delegation to the Philippines, these investments in solar energy will help make energy consumption in the target locations more environmentally sustainable, contribute to diversifying energy supply, and ultimately help mitigate climate change.

At the inauguration ceremony, Ambassador Luc Véron stated that "we are very proud to have financed this action that provides sustainable and clean energy solutions to remote communities in Mindanao and [the] Visayas. Working on the transition to a greener society and climate-change mitigation is a global priority for the EU, and it will also remain at the center of our cooperation efforts with the Philippines."

Véron added that the said efforts were confirmed a few weeks ago in the dialogue between President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. and European Commission president Ursula van der Leyen during her visit to the country.

"This project exemplifies the World Bank's commitment to promoting sustainable energy solutions for inclusive growth in the Philippines," said Ndiame Diop, WB country director

for Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. He also noted the importance of these solar power plants by setting practical examples and benchmarks for scaling up renewable-energy supplies among ECs.

“[We are proud to partner with] the EU and the WB in bringing renewable energy [RE] to far flung areas of the Philippines, supporting the government’s endeavors in full electrification and scale-up,” noted Napocor president and CEO Fernando Martin Y. Roxas. “Under this partnership, [we also completed the installation of 30,500 solar-home system units for five ECs] in Mindanao in 2022.”

Roxas thanked the EU and WB, as well as the Department of Energy, for entrusting Napocor with the implementation of the project.

“This has been a fruitful collaboration. We are grateful to extend our technical expertise and at the same time, obtain inspiration in our own pursuit of [RE] technologies,” remarked Roxas. “We look forward to future engagements with our development partners.”

## **BUSINESS WORLD**

### **[WTO warns against global trade split-up](#)**

By: Norman P. Aquino

Geopolitical tensions and recent crises have spurred protectionist policies that are slowly eroding the world's trading system and could ultimately fragment the global economy, the World Trade Organization (WTO) said, as it called for a renewed drive toward a broader and more inclusive integration.

In its annual Global Trade Report released on Tuesday, the world's biggest economic organization said the tariff escalation between the US and China has slowed trade growth between them, while there have been signs of trade reorientation along geopolitical lines since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

Despite these challenges, international trade continues to thrive, and talk of de-globalization is on balance still far from supported by the data, Ralph Ossa, the WTO chief economist, told reporters at a news briefing in Geneva.

"We need to embrace trade instead of rejecting it if we want to overcome the most pressing challenges of our times," he said. "The report makes the case for extending trade integration to more economies, to more people and to more issues — a process we call re-globalization."

A strong multilateral trading system is the "best guarantor of economic security" because it provides the options needed when faced with supply shortages, Mr. Ossa said, citing the global coronavirus pandemic as an example.

In the report, the WTO said globalization must evolve in response to new challenges and needs to be accompanied by appropriate domestic policies.

"Re-globalization offers a better path forward," WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said in the foreword of the 134-page report. "Bringing more countries and communities from the margins of the global economy to the mainstream would make for deeper, more diversified markets that are more resilient to shocks."

Globalization — and WTO — critics have said the WTO's consensus system needs to be replaced by a new negotiating model that meets 21st century problems including climate change, environmental destruction, low labor standards, human rights and corruption. They are also calling for bilateral and plurilateral deals to level the playing field.

“The WTO is concerned because the issue of trade and commerce has been politically tainted,” Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry President George T. Barcelon said by telephone before the WTO event. “Once it’s tainted, it will hold back actions that should come into play in the free market. The Philippines is having difficulty already in the supply chain especially during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. After that, some countries added another layer by weaponizing trade.”

This has especially affected the agriculture sector, which is heavily dependent on imported inputs such as fertilizer that comes from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, where there is a war, he added.

“I am all for re-globalization, as long as the WTO can get people to follow the rules.”

In the report, the WTO noted that with security considerations becoming an increasingly influential factor in trade policy, some countries might reshuffle trade relationships due to tensions, but taking this too far would be counterproductive.

“The long-term evidence suggests that trade has contributed positively to peace among nations,” according to the report. “With regard to economic security, recent experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic, extreme weather events and the war in Ukraine have demonstrated how deep and diversified international markets help countries cope with unanticipated shortages by securing supplies from alternative sources,” it added.

Global trade flows have been resilient throughout past shocks, the WTO said, adding that trade costs keep falling as digital technologies facilitate international transactions and economies continue to sign integration deals.

The 164-member trade group admitted that there have been longstanding issues on its agenda, particularly agriculture, which accounts for a big employment pie in many member countries.

For one, trade costs in agriculture exceed those in manufacturing by 50%, penalizing poorer segments in society that rely on this sector.

## WARNING SIGNS

Still, the WTO said it is already making a difference here — recent research found that its Trade Facilitation Agreement has had disproportionately positive effects on agricultural trade since it took effect in 2017, with least developed countries posting a 17% increase in agricultural exports as a result.



“Trade can be a powerful magnifying force of domestic competitiveness reforms, but in the absence of such domestic reforms, its role is limited,” Mr. Ossa separately told BusinessWorld in an e-mailed reply to questions. “That said, much remains to be done in the area of agricultural trade policy reforms.”

Trade costs in agriculture are 46% higher than in manufacturing, holding back agricultural exports around the globe, he said, citing the 2023 Global Trade Report. “While not all of this reflects policy barriers, it points to substantial unfinished business in multilateral trade negotiations.”

Mr. Ossa said de-globalization has not happened yet, noting that China remains the biggest trading partner for many economies including the Philippines.

He does not expect this to change soon. He noted that bilateral trade between China and the US reached a record \$690.6 billion (P39 trillion) in 2022.

Mr. Ossa said trade was remarkably resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic, bouncing back to pre-pandemic levels less than a year after the first wave of lockdowns.

Trade in digitally delivered services remained strong all along, growing at an average annual rate of 8.1% between 2005 and 2022, outpacing goods (5.6%) and other services (4.2 %).

“But the warning signs must be taken seriously,” he said. “In the report, we looked at trade within and between hypothetical geopolitical ‘blocs’ constructed based on voting patterns in the United Nations General Assembly,” he said.

Goods trade flows between these “blocs” have grown by as much as 6% more slowly than within these ‘blocs’ since the onset of the war in Ukraine, indicating a shift toward friend-shoring, Mr. Ossa said.

“We also report an increasing level of trade concerns being raised about unilateral policies of trading partners at the WTO and the International Monetary Fund has reported a fragmentation of investment flows,” he said.

“All of this will eventually be reflected in reduced trade growth unless countries re-embrace multilateralism or re-globalization,” he added.

The WTO’s next trade forecast will come out in early October, “and it will be interesting to see what direction trade has taken since the spring.”

“Globalization never really went away, but in recent years it has been under serious scrutiny — partly due to international overdependence on China’s manufacturing prowess and the disruption in oil and gas trade due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine,” said Arthur E. Appleton, a partner at Appleton Luff — International Lawyers and adjunct professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.

Because of China’s actions in the South China Sea and its aggressive rhetoric toward Taiwan, Western countries are making efforts to onshore manufacturing and shorten supply chains, he said in an e-mailed reply to questions.

“Hopefully this is a temporary phenomenon. Despite globalization’s retreat, it remains important, particularly for the Philippines which is beginning to benefit from its various comparative advantages and continued integration into global supply chains,” Mr. Appleton said.

“The Philippines needs globalization to continue the development of its goods sector, and its increasingly important service sector. The rule-based trading system which is the backbone of globalization provides security to the Philippine business community and for Philippine economic development,” he added.

Mr. Appleton said it is in the Philippines’ economic interest to continue its integration into global supply chains despite challenges particularly in agriculture.

On the other hand, he said the WTO is stymied by its reliance on the consensus system.

“Getting 164 members to agree on anything is very difficult,” he said. “The WTO is also hampered by the US decision to block appellate body appointments. Without an effective dispute settlement system, it is more difficult to apply the rule of law when international trade disputes arise.”

Mr. Appleton said WTO members are likely to consider additional plurilateral alternatives to avoid blockages caused by the consensus system, and they need to resolve the dispute settlement impasse.

‘NOT PERFECT’

“The WTO is not perfect — far from it,” Ms. Okonjo-Iweala said in the report. “But the case for strengthening the trading system is far stronger than the case for walking away from it.”

She also said WTO members are acting to reinvigorate the organization, adding that today’s complex challenges require more, not less, international cooperation.

WTO members are actively looking at how to update and upgrade the group's rulebook so that trade can contribute fully to effective responses.

The alternative to rules-based integration is power-based fragmentation and a world of greater uncertainty, increased socioeconomic exclusion and heightened environmental decline, Ms. Okonjo-Iweala said.

This year's World Trade Report makes the case that "re-globalization" is a far more attractive alternative, she said, adding that policy makers should find it useful in shaping the future of trade "for peace, people and the planet."

## CNN

### [More than 5,000 presumed dead in Libya after 'catastrophic' flooding breaks dams and sweeps away homes](#)

By: Hamdi Alkhshali, Mostafa Salem and Kareem El Damanhoury

More than 5,000 people are presumed dead and 10,000 missing after heavy rains in northeastern Libya caused two dams to collapse, surging more water into already inundated areas.

Tamer Ramadan, head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies delegation in Libya, gave the numbers of missing people during a briefing to reporters in Geneva, Switzerland, on Tuesday. "The death toll is huge," she said.

At least 5,300 people are thought dead, said the interior ministry of Libya's eastern government on Tuesday, state media LANA reported. CNN has not been able to independently verify the number of deaths or those missing.

Of those who were killed, at least 145 were Egyptian, officials in the northeastern city of Tobruk, in Libya, said on Tuesday.

In the eastern city of Derna, which has seen the worst of the devastation, as many as 6,000 people remain missing, Othman Abduljalil, health minister in Libya's eastern administration, told Libya's Almasar TV. He called the situation "catastrophic," when he toured the city on Monday.

Whole neighborhoods are believed to have been washed away in the city, according to authorities.

Hospitals in Derna are no longer operable and the morgues are full, said Osama Aly, an Emergency and Ambulance service spokesperson.

Dead bodies have been left outside the morgues on the sidewalks, he told CNN.

"There are no first-hand emergency services. People are working at the moment to collect the rotting bodies," said Anas Barghathy, a doctor currently volunteering in Derna.

'We are all terrified'

Relatives of people who lived in the destroyed city of Derna told CNN they were terrified after seeing videos of the flooding, with no word from their family members.

Ayah, a Palestinian woman with cousins in Derna, said she has been unable to reach them since the floods.

“I’m really worried about them. I have two cousins who live in Derna. It seems all communications are down and I don’t know if they are alive at this point. It is very terrifying watching the videos coming out of Derna. We are all terrified,” she said.

Emad Milad, a resident of Tobrok, said eight of his relatives died in the flooding in Derna.

“My wife Areej’s sister and her husband both passed away. His whole family is also dead. A total of eight people are all gone. It’s a disaster. It’s a disaster. We are praying for better things,” he said on Tuesday.

‘Ferocious’ weather conditions

The rain, which has swept across several cities in Libya’s north-east, is the result of a very strong low-pressure system that brought catastrophic flooding to Greece last week and moved into the Mediterranean before developing into a tropical-like cyclone known as a medicane.

The deadly storm comes in an unprecedented year of climate disasters and record-breaking weather extremes, from devastating wildfires to oppressive heat.

Just as ocean temperatures around the world soar off the charts due to planet-warming pollution, the temperature of the Mediterranean is well-above average, which scientists say fueled the storm’s heavy rainfall.

“The warmer water does not only fuel those storms in terms of rainfall intensity, it also makes them more ferocious,” Karsten Haustein, climate scientist and meteorologist at Leipzig University in Germany, told the Science Media Center.

Libya’s vulnerability to extreme weather is increased by its long-running political conflict, which has seen a decade-long power struggle between two rival administrations.

The UN-backed Government of National Unity (GNU), led by Abdulhamid Dbeibeh, sits in Tripoli in northwest Libya, while its eastern rival is controlled by commander Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA), who support the eastern-based parliament led by Osama Hamad.

Derna, which lies some 300 kilometers (190 miles) east of Benghazi, falls under the control of Haftar and his eastern administration.

The country's complex politics "pose challenges for developing risk communication and hazard assessment strategies, coordinating rescue operations, and also potentially for maintenance of critical infrastructure such as dams," Leslie Mabon, lecturer in Environmental Systems at The Open University, told the Science Media Center.

#### Dams collapse

The collapse of two dams, which sent water rushing towards Derna, has caused catastrophic damage, authorities said Tuesday.

"Three bridges were destroyed. The flowing water carried away entire neighborhoods, eventually depositing them into the sea," said Ahmed Mismari, spokesperson for the LNA.

Homes in valleys were washed away by strong muddy currents carrying vehicles and debris, said Aly, the Emergency and Ambulance authority spokesperson.

Phone lines in the city are down, complicating rescue efforts, with workers unable to enter Derna due to the heavy destruction, Aly told CNN.

Aly said authorities didn't anticipate the scale of the disaster.

"The weather conditions were not studied well, the seawater levels and rainfall [were not studied], the wind speeds, there was no evacuation of families that could be in the path of the storm and in valleys," he said.

"Libya was not prepared for a catastrophe like that. It has not witnessed that level of catastrophe before. We are admitting there were shortcomings even though this is the first time we face that level of catastrophe," Aly told Al Hurra channel.

#### 'Unprecedented flooding'

The storm looks certain to be one of the deadliest on record in North Africa.

Libya is facing an "unprecedented" situation, said Hamad, the head of the eastern administration, according to a report from state news organization Libyan News Agency (LANA).

Mismari, the LNA spokesperson, said the floods have affected several cities, including Al-Bayda, Al-Marj, Tobruk, Takenis, Al-Bayada, and Battah, as well as the eastern coast all the way to Benghazi. At least 37 residential buildings were swept away into the seas.

"We are not prepared for such a scale of devastation," Mismari said.

Libyan authorities need three types of specialized search groups including teams to recover bodies from rugged valleys after torrents dispersed them, teams to recover bodies from under the rubble, and teams to recover bodies from the sea, he added.

Tens of thousands of military personnel have been deployed, but many of the flood-stricken regions are still inaccessible to emergency workers, according to Mismari.

Several countries and human rights groups have offered aid as rescue teams scramble to find survivors under the debris and rubble.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) said the country faces “an unprecedented humanitarian crisis,” in the wake of the disaster.

Ciaran Donnelly, IRC’s senior vice president for crisis response, said the challenges in Libya “are immense, with phone lines down and heavy destruction hampering rescue efforts.” He added that climate change has compounded the “steadily deteriorating” situation in the country after years of conflict and instability.

Turkish aircraft delivering humanitarian aid have arrived in Libya, according to Turkey’s Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) on Tuesday.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the country would send 168 search and rescue teams and humanitarian aid to Benghazi, according to state run news agency Anadolu Agency on Tuesday.

Italy is sending a civil defense team to assist with rescue operations, the country’s Civil Protection Department said Tuesday.

The US Embassy in Tripoli, Libya, announced that its special envoy, ambassador Richard Norland, had made an official declaration of humanitarian need.

This “will authorize initial funding that the United States will provide in support of relief efforts in Libya. We are coordinating with UN partners and Libyan authorities to assess how best to target official US assistance,” it posted on X (formally known as Twitter).

United Arab Emirates President, Zayed Al Nahyan, has directed to send aid and search and rescue teams while offering his condolences to those affected by the catastrophe, state news agency reported.

Egypt’s President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi also extended his condolences to Libya. “I wish a speedy recovery for the injured, and I hope that the crisis will pass quickly with Libyans standing together in unity,” El-Sisi said in a statement on social media.

The storm reached a peak in northeastern Libya on Monday, according to a statement from the World Meteorological Organization, citing Libya's National Meteorological Centre.

Libya's storm follows deadly flooding in many other parts of the globe including southern Europe and Hong Kong.



## **GMA NEWS**

### **[ADB OKs \\$303-M loan for flood control infra](#)**

By: Red Crodero

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) said on Wednesday it had approved a loan for the Philippines aimed at reducing flood and climate risks in three major river basins in the country.

In a statement, the ADB said \$303 million was allotted for the Integrated Flood Resilience and Adaptation Project-Phase 1.

The project will upgrade and construct flood protection infrastructure in the Abra river basin in northern Luzon and the Ranao-Agus and Tagum-Libuganon river basins in southern Mindanao.

The ADB said the flood infrastructure project was initiated to protect people and livelihoods in the three major river basins.

The Manila-based multilateral lender said the infrastructure project takes into account future climate change impacts and incorporates nature-based solutions such as restoring and reconnecting old river channels for natural drainage and reinforcing riverbanks with mangroves and vegetation planting.

"Climate change is expected to raise risks from extreme weather events. These river basin communities are highly vulnerable to climate-related hazards, as we have seen in recent years when typhoons destroyed infrastructure, displaced families, and damaged crops," said ADB senior water resources specialist Junko Sagara.

"The project will help lessen these risks and improve income and livelihood opportunities, especially for the poor and vulnerable," she said.

The ADB said the project would also help strengthen the Philippines' capacity to perform flood risk management planning by providing training for government officials, installing equipment for weather and river flow monitoring and early flood warning, and introducing an asset management information system.

The lender added that the flood infrastructure project aims to boost community-based flood risk management by supporting 22 local government units and about 150 barangays in updating their climate and disaster risk assessments and integrating flood risk management into local development plans.

Training activities will be conducted to build the capacity of communities to adapt to climate change and manage flood risks.

The project will include civil society organizations and beneficiary groups in its planning and implementation.

The feasibility study and design for the project, meanwhile, were supported by the ADB's Infrastructure Preparation and Innovation Facility, which has been helping Philippine government agencies access information on up-to-date technology and innovative designs for building major infrastructure projects since 2017.

The project is aligned with the Philippine government's climate priorities under its National Climate Change Action Plan 2011–2028 and the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028, according to the lender.

## MANILA STANDARD

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By: Julito G. Rada

The Asian Development Bank said Wednesday it approved a \$303-million (roughly P17 billion) loan to reduce flood and climate risks and protect people and livelihoods in three major river basins in the Philippines.

The country is one of the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change and disasters caused by natural hazards.

The Integrated Flood Resilience and Adaptation Project – Phase 1 will upgrade and construct flood protection infrastructure in the Abra River Basin in the northern Luzon region and the Ranao/Agus and Tagum–Libuganon River basins in the southern Mindanao region.

The infrastructure takes into account future climate change impacts and incorporates nature-based solutions such as restoring and reconnecting old river channels for natural drainage and reinforcing riverbanks with mangroves and vegetation planting.

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The project is aligned with the Philippine government's climate priorities under its National Climate Change Action Plan, 2011–2028, and the Philippine Development Plan, 2023–2028.

It is complemented by policy reforms being pursued under ADB's Climate Change Action Program, which is the bank's first climate action policy-based loan, and the Competitive and Inclusive Agriculture Development Program, which aims to lift agriculture resilience and productivity and enhance food security.

## PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

### PH faces AI threat

The Philippine government will need to swiftly address the rising threat of artificial intelligence (AI), especially on key sectors such as outsourcing, which is one of pillars of the economy.

This warning was raised by Dr. Sanjay Sarma, the Dean of the Asia School of Business (ASB) and a professor of mechanical engineering and the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, during a recent visit to the Philippines.

“In the Philippines, it has to be a national effort [so] the government needs to be really cognizant,” said Sarma, who likened climate change to the threat AI poses to the unprepared.

“It’s like climate change is going to damage the environment. [AI] is going to hurt a lot of people. This is technology change,” he said.

Sarma, who was in the country to also promote the ASB in Kuala Lumpur, said businesses need to level up their skills and technology to combat the threat. This also applies to the Philippine government, which can push new skills training so parts of the workforce can remain relevant.

“The Philippines should become the country that leads the world in how to use AI. It will put some people out of work, but at least you define the rules of how it works,” he said.

Up for modernization

As part of the ongoing urban renewal of Makati City—which is to say the improvement of old structures with more modern, more efficient and more environmentally friendly ones—another iconic building will be modernized soon.

Biz Buzz hears that the China Banking Corp. building along Paseo de Roxas will soon be augmented by a newer edifice that will rise right beside it, on a property that currently hosts a multilevel parking building (which has also become insufficient for the needs of the growing financial institution).

There’s no word yet on whether China Bank’s headquarters, which is also showing its age, will be torn down soon, but that is a reasonable assumption to make given the aggressive redevelopment being made by the Sy family (which also controls China Bank, in addition to BDO Unibank) of the entire block that starts near the corner of Sen. Gil Puyat Ave. and Makati Ave.

## BCDA chief gets public service citation

Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) president and CEO Joshua Bingcang last Monday received a citation for his dedication and leadership in public service from his hometown, a recognition that came after being with the government agency for close to three decades.

The BCDA chief received the commendation from the local government unit of Mexico, Pampanga, which expressed their “pride and honor” for his recent appointment to the top management position of the investment promotion agency.

“Engineer Bingcang has performed vital tasks that prove his commitment and love for Pampanga and the Metro Clark areas through his roles in the planning and implementation of key projects,” read a part of the Municipal Resolution No. 138-2023 issued by the Sangguniang Bayan of Mexico.

Climbing the career ladder in the public sector, Bingcang started working at the BCDA as a rank III project development officer in 1996.

He then held different positions on development and project management through the years until his promotion as senior vice president for the Conversion and Development Group in 2019.

In March 2023, he was appointed as president and CEO of Clark International Airport Corporation, a BCDA subsidiary, before taking the oath of office as the parent government agency head last June 6.

## Gov't should promote cultivation of bamboo to help protect crops, combat climate change

Environment Secretary Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga called for the planting of more trees to help beat the heat all over. We hasten to add that bamboo would more effectively address the current problem of global warming and climate change, but it is not a tree, as it belongs to the subfamily Bambusoideae of the grass family Poaceae.

Numerous references, actual proofs, and experiences—including ours as an active advocate of bamboo—attest to the wonder of this grass which can be summed up in one sentence: Bamboo can save the world!

Bamboo is the world's fastest-growing plant, with certain species attaining full growth in about just a year, compared to trees that take up to several years to mature; gives off 30-35 percent more oxygen and sequesters 10 times or more tons of carbon dioxide than trees. Bamboo can store large amounts of water in its roots and stems, as a reservoir during droughts. The roots protect the soil from landslides and erosion. Bamboo provides food, medicine, paper, clothing, kitchen utensils, furniture, musical instruments, materials for transportation, houses, and buildings, and can replace wood and cement. Iron bamboo, for example, is stronger than steel. Check out more than 1,000 more uses. Unlike trees, bamboo would not be decimated. With judicious harvesting, it keeps growing.

Bamboo would help bring about a sound environment and economy.

However, a big challenge is posed by illegal claimants of watersheds—which are owned by the state, off-limits to human settlements, beyond the commerce of man.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has yet to confront this problem which we have actually encountered in our efforts to plant bamboo. The stems and shoots from the seedlings we had earlier planted had been uprooted or hacked, and armed men threatened us from proceeding further.

Add to that illegal logging, wanton quarrying, and destructive mining—negating the benefits that bamboo could bring.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) under Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. should also help address this problem which seriously deters the establishment and protection of bamboo plantations. Likewise, the Department of Agriculture (DA) should make good Undersecretary Deogracias Victor Savellano's announcement that government would help mitigate climate change with the nationwide cultivation of bamboo—a welcome remark as the House of Representatives, where he

came from as congressman of the first district of Ilocos Sur, reportedly has not acted for the longest time on the bills promoting the planting and propagation of bamboo.

As for the Department of Agrarian Reform's (DAR) recent move under Secretary Conrado Estrella III to condone all unpaid amortizations of agrarian reform beneficiaries, bamboo planting and cultivation could greatly help protect the crops of the farmers, add to their income from bamboo, and rehabilitate or enhance their farmlands.

Much more needs to be done for DENR, DILG, DA, and DAR to stand up strong for the state and the people, confront those defying laws and that of nature; and work together—without delay—in all good efforts to pursue this greening mission nationwide.



## PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

### Solon bats for age-old earth balling upgrade

By: Zaldy De Layola

Leyte Rep. Richard Gomez on Wednesday urged his colleagues to pass his bill seeking an upgrade on the age-old earth balling system as the country moves forward towards economic development amid the growing risks of climate change.

“The earth balling method guarantees the survival and continued growth of the transplanted tree, thereby maintaining the environmental balance and ecological integrity of the area. This process is essential as it allows for the coexistence of infrastructure development and environmental sustainability,” Gomez said in his privilege speech.

Under House Bill 9124, an annual appropriation of funds is proposed to the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) for the procurement, maintenance, and use of at least one set of machinery known as “earth balling equipment” per region to be used in road improvement and other developmental projects.

An earth balling machine is a mechanized apparatus specifically designed to relocate trees that obstruct road-widening efforts.

On the other hand, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) defines earth balling as “the process of moving trees by digging out the earth and the roots in a circular shape, leaving most of the root system undisturbed and intact.”

Gomez said a DENR memorandum issued in November 2009 stated that the cutting of trees that obstruct road-widening projects is only allowed when earth balling is already impractical.

The former mayor of Ormoc City, however, noted that the DPWH is still undertaking “manual” or “traditional” earth balling because “there was no budget for (the purchase of) earth balling machines.”

“This is a laborious and expensive process. I believe that it is because of this complication that tree-cutting permits are methodically granted to DPWH for road-widening projects,” Gomez said as he urged his colleagues to bring down the number of trees cut “to the barest minimum.”

## THE MANILA TIMES

### [ADB approves \\$303-M flood, climate risk loan](#)

By: Niña Myka Pauline Arceo

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$303-million loan to reduce flood and climate risks in the disaster-prone Philippines.

The Manila-based lending institution on Wednesday said that the Integrated Flood Resilience and Adaptation Project-Phase 1 would be used to improve and build flood protection structures in the Abra River basin in Northern Luzon and the Ranao/Agus and Tagum-Libuganon river areas in Southern Mindanao.

"Climate change is expected to raise risks from extreme weather events," Junko Sagara, ADB senior water resources specialist, said in a statement.

"These river basin communities are highly vulnerable to climate-related hazards, as we have seen in recent years when typhoons destroyed infrastructure, displaced families and damaged crops," Sagara added.

"The project will help lessen these risks and improve income and livelihood opportunities, especially for the poor and vulnerable."

The ADB said that the proposed infrastructure would take into account future climate change effects and include eco-friendly methods such as revitalizing and linking old river pathways for natural drainage and fortifying riverbanks with mangroves and vegetation.

The project is expected to enhance the Philippines' ability to conduct flood risk management planning, which will be achieved through the training of government officials, setting up weather and river flow monitoring, and early flood warning equipment, and introducing an asset management information system.

Assistance will be provided to 22 local government units and approximately 150 barangay (villages) with regard to updating their climate and disaster risk assessments while integrating flood risk management into local development plans.

The initiative includes training activities to empower communities in handling climate change adaptation and flood risk management. Civil society organizations and beneficiary groups will also be involved in the project's planning and execution.

The project's feasibility study and design received support from ADB's Infrastructure Preparation and Innovation Facility, said to have been aiding Philippine government agencies in accessing information about modern technology and creative designs for infrastructure projects since 2017.

The flood resilience project also aligns with climate goals outlined in the country's National Climate Change Action Plan for 2011-2028 and the Philippine Development Plan for 2023-2028.

It also complements policy reforms carried out under ADB's Climate Change Action Program, the bank's initial climate action policy-based loan, and the Competitive and Inclusive Agriculture Development Program, which aims to strengthen agricultural resilience, productivity and food security.

## El Niño and La Niña mess up agriculture

By: Ernie Cecilia, DPM

Officer in charge Esperanza Cayanan of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) earlier announced that the "El Niño is showing signs of strengthening in the coming months. The climate outlook further suggests that the aggregate impacts of El Niño are expected toward the last quarter of the year and first half of 2024 to bring dry spells in most areas of the country."

Then why do we still experience typhoons and heavy rains?

Cayanan added: "However, an enhanced southwest monsoon season (habagat) is still expected, which may result in above-normal rainfall conditions over the western section of the country."

### El Niño and La Niña

In Spanish, El Niño means "Little Boy" and La Niña means "Little Girl." Scientists use the terms to refer to two extreme climate or weather conditions. The El Niño phenomenon usually brings dry spells after the Christmas season, during which Christians all over the world celebrate the birth of the El Niño Jesus. The opposite of El Niño is La Niña. The latter alternately brings excessive rainfall every five years, though most Philippine typhoons are not caused by La Niña. (Imagine two little kids messing up the whole world's weather and food security!)

With the high temperatures of the surrounding waters and the atmosphere, the relative humidity in the Philippines is elevated to 71 percent in March and 85 percent in September. El Niño is associated with less rainfall, resulting in a dry spell or drought for usually more than three consecutive months.

La Niña does the reverse. It cools the Central and Eastern Pacific Oceans, strengthens trade winds and pushes more cool water to the surface, and increases rainfall and cool temperatures for months in the Western Pacific and Southeast Asia, including the Philippines.

These phenomena are extreme climate conditions. Long dry spells wreak havoc and cause damage worth billions of pesos to Philippine agriculture, livestock and aquatic resources, year in and year out. Too much rainfall over prolonged periods destroys most food crops and livestock, too. The Philippines experiences an average of 20 typhoons every year.

The Department of Agriculture announced that Typhoon "Goring" ("Saola") left the Philippines on September 2 with P900 million worth of damage to agriculture. Goring affected 25,000 farmers, 35,000 hectares of agricultural land, and almost 40,000 metric tons of production loss.

## Climate change

For more than 30 years, climate researchers have tried to establish the link between human-caused climate change El Niño and La Niña. Then, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), an Australian government agency responsible for scientific research, took the last five years to examine their research to "understand how El Niño and La Niña will change as the world warms in the future."

On May 19, 2023, Wenju Cai and Agus Santoso reported on the CSIRO website, "Our deep analysis found a relationship between human-caused greenhouse gas activity and changes to El Niño and La Niña."

They added: "Human-caused greenhouse gas emissions mean strong El Niño and La Niña events are occurring more often, according to our new research, which provides important new evidence of the human fingerprint on Earth's climate."

The CSIRO analyzed 43 climate models or computer simulations of the Earth's climate system and found that:

- Global warming has caused the sea surface to warm faster than the water below.
- There was more variability in the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) since 1960 compared with data from 1901 to 1960.
- El Niño and La Niña events have occurred more frequently since the 1960s than hundreds of years before humans started ramping up greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
- The strong variability of ENSO after the 1960s point to GHG emissions as the culprit.

ENSO "refers to the periodic fluctuation in sea surface temperature (El Niño) and the air pressure of the overlying atmosphere (Southern Oscillation) across the equatorial Pacific Ocean." Sir Gilbert Walker, a British climatologist, discovered the phenomenon where the atmospheric pressure "seesaws" between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans and called it "Southern Oscillation."

Given these CSIRO findings, we can expect more El Niño and La Niña phenomena in the next century — even if GHG emissions are slashed dramatically and global warming is kept to 1.5 degrees Celsius as agreed in the Paris Agreement. Experts believe that these phenomena will never go away soon, "as the Pacific Ocean holds a lot of heat that could take several decades to dissipate."

### Adapting to climate change

The country's climate is a major challenge to food security and agriculture. Philippine farmlands are not contiguous, unlike other countries with agricultural land areas larger than our 30 million hectares. But we have more arable land than such food-secure countries as Singapore or Israel.

"More than half of Israel's land area is desert. In 1948, Israel had 165,000 hectares of arable land. With vision, hard work and technology, it now has 433,000 hectares — 29.87 percent of total land area. Israel became a "major exporter of fresh produce and a world leader in agricultural technologies, despite the fact that its geography is not naturally conducive to agriculture." (Wikipedia, Knoema)

Here's what Israel did to improve its agriculture:

- Effective government. Since the 1950s, Israel has had visionary leadership. Government allots 30 percent of the total annual budget for agriculture and water. It invested in "institutional architecture and pursued an agro-industrial policy."
- Farmers' organization. From the start, farmers were organized into professionally managed cooperatives. This led to better "bargaining power and access to finance, research, training, farm inputs, and markets."
- Market-orientation. The market guides planning and coordination for government and farmers. Developing the domestic market for food self-sufficiency in parallel with export market development was guided by marketing and agricultural research.
- Farmer-centric approach. Israel was always farmer-centric in solving agriculture-related problems. There is a "close relationship between researchers, agricultural extension workers and farmers."
- International support. Support from other governments allowed Israel to "spend resources according to its own development plan." In the 1950s, Israel built a 250-kilometer water pipeline from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Negev Desert in the south. (Wikipedia)

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization earlier submitted the "Adapting Philippine Agriculture to Climate Change (APA)" project for approval. On March 16, 2023, the Green Climate Fund approved a \$26.3 million grant to foster climate-resilient agriculture in nine provinces and in Regions 2, 5, 10, 12 and the Cordillera. Funding of \$12.98 million from the Philippines will increase the fund to \$39.3 million and help ensure climate-resilient Philippine agriculture.

Climate resilience is a good first step toward food security.

Norman Ernest Borlaug, the American founder of the Green Revolution, once said, "Food is the moral right of all who are born into this world."

## THE PHILIPPINE STAR

### [For 10th straight year, Philippines remains Asia's deadliest place to defend the environment](#)

By: Gaea Katreena Cabico

For the 10th consecutive year, the Philippines remains the deadliest country in Asia for individuals defending their land and the environment, according to new research, raising concerns among advocates who fear that the current administration's promotion of mining and infrastructure projects will exacerbate the threats to their lives.

The Philippines has been identified as the worst place in Asia since watchdog Global Witness started reporting on the killings of land and environmental activists in 2012.

Eleven of the 16 lethal attacks in Asia last year took place in the Philippines.

Globally, the Philippines was the fifth most dangerous country for environmentalists in 2022. Colombia topped Global Witness' ranking with 60 killings, followed by Brazil with 34, Mexico with 31 and Honduras with 14.

The latest report of the London-based watchdog, which was released Wednesday, found that at least 177 defenders lost their lives last year, or an average of one activist murdered every other day.

Indigenous peoples, who rely on their lands and natural resources for a living, accounted for more than a third of lethal attacks, with 64 killings last year.

Since 2012, 1,910 people have been killed for protecting the planet.

"All of them shared a commitment to defend their rights and keep the planet healthy. All of them paid for their courage and commitment with their lives," Global Witness said.

It warned that the worsening climate crisis and the increasing demand for agricultural commodities, fuel and minerals "will only intensify the pressure on the environment—and those who risk their lives to defend it."

Defending amid scramble for minerals

Around 281 land and environmental defenders have been killed in the Philippines since 2012. According to Global Witness, a third of the killings were associated with defenders who opposed mining operations.



Revitalizing the mining sector is a priority of the administration of President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. following the lifting of a ban on new mining operations by his predecessor Rodrigo Duterte.

In May, Marcos called on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to enhance regional cooperation toward boosting the region’s mineral value chain, which is essential to the transition to renewable energy.

The Philippines is the fifth most mineral-rich country in the world, producing minerals used in clean energy technologies such as copper and nickel.

The report highlighted the decades-long fight of Sibuyan Island residents against nickel exploration, which they fear will destroy the intact ecosystem of their home—known as the “Galápagos of Asia.”

The residents successfully thwarted the operations of Altai Philippines Mining Company after setting up a barricade earlier this year.

In June, the Supreme Court issued a writ of *kalikasan*—a legal remedy for the protection of the right to a healthy environment—against the mining firm and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

“The bullish promotion of extractive industries and environmentally unsustainable infrastructure calls for stronger action of environmental defenders and communities affected,” Sibuyanon environmentalist Rodne Galicha said.

He added that the involvement of politicians and their families with business interests “creates a more dangerous environment for environmental defenders.”

## Vilification

In the Philippines, people and communities who protect the environment and resist destructive projects are vilified and falsely tagged as members or supporters of communist insurgency.

Environmentalists also experience harassment and some have even been abducted.

Earlier this month, Jonila Castro and Jhed Tamano, who have been active in organizing communities affected by reclamation projects in Manila Bay, were reportedly abducted. They have yet to be surfaced.

Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment national coordinator Jon Bonifacio criticized the Marcos administration—who often talks about climate action and justice—for its silence on the “human rights crisis” that Filipino environmental defenders go through.

“There has not been any systemic reversal of Duterte-era policies that have helped make the Philippines such a dangerous place for advocates, and attacks have continued and have escalated in recent months,” Bonifacio told Philstar.com.

Bonifacio said the government agencies that engage in red-tagging sprees such as the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict should be held accountable. He also called for the review or repeal of the Anti-Terrorism Act, which has been used and abused to criminalize environmental and land activists.

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