

27 November 2022, Sunday



**DENR**

# **NEWS ALERTS**

# **NEWS CLIPPINGS**

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



## DENR chief: Communities, ecosystems should be priority in climate actions

By RIZAL RAOUL REYES

**T**HE Philippines should act against the threats of climate crisis through comprehensive risk management that emphasizes on evidence-informed prevention and disaster risk-recovery planning over emergency response.

This was the message made by Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga at the recent Pilipinas 2022 conference in Makati City organized by the Stratbase ADR Institute and Democracy Watch Philippines.

"Moreover, lessons unlearned from past disasters need to be made part of our survival DNA," said Loyzaga, also a trustee and program convener of Stratbase ADR Institute and convener of Philippine Business for Environmental Stewardship.

She said the communities and the country's ecosystems that support them need to be the priority in terms of investment, in terms of risk communications and impact-based early warning.

Living in a multi-hazard environment in an interconnected world, Loyzaga explained that the risks Filipinos face are complex, dynamic and systemic.

"These compound and cascade across sectors and skills. The interventions we designed to confront this complexity must,



A FLOOD rescue operation in Zamboanga City during Typhoon Paeng (international code name Nalgae) on October 28. BRO. JEFFREY PIOQUINTO SJ/WIKIMEDIA CC BY 2.0

therefore, be transdisciplinary, time-sensitive and spatially targeted in order for them to be transformational. In our view, this will involve the following, first, the establishing of a national risk registry," she added.

Loyzaga urged a multistakeholder formation horizon, scanning exercise to ensure the country must have a shared understanding of risks to climate-related and other hazards. Afterwards, the country must frame and prioritize its investments.

She said the next move by the country is to form a national natural resource geospatial base. She said it will need baseline inventories and valuations of the country that will function as both stock and flow.

"We have started this process internally but we will need your support to populate and validate data," she said.

Loyzaga said these must be "intersected as the basis for identifying scenario-based challenges to the goals of inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development and

prioritizing strategies, laws, policies, and actions to respond to these."

She said the private sector has played a crucial role in bridging the cost of both energy transition and the just transition of labor toward net zero. Energy transition costs are estimated to be in trillions for some countries and sectors.

Loyzaga said this would mean the private sector adopting climate and disaster resilience into core business value cycles through investment strategies, enterprise risk management, and integrated environmental, social, and governance programs.

"Here, we will support area-based approaches to risk prevention, preparedness, response and recovery that goes beyond company fence lines," she said.

Loyzaga said the country must accelerate the adoption of nature-based solutions with co-benefits in terms of climate action.

She said the country must also invest in education training and capacity building to create decision support systems for risk governance based on the best available science.

"We need to build geo-strategic awareness of regional and global factors that will reduce our range of adaptation, mitigation, and disaster risk reduction functions," she explained.



Senator Loren Legarda  
(SenatePH)

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# DENR TANIM-PUNO BINUHUDAN ₱50B, WA EPEK



## DENR TANIM-PUNO BINUHUDAN ₱50B, WA EPEK

Hindi kumbinsido si Senador Loren Legarda sa pagpapatupad ng Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) ng National Greening Program (NGP) dahil hindi naman umano naramdaman ang epekto nito sa bansa.

Sa panayam kay Legarda ng DWIZ kahapon, sinabi ng senador na higit P50 bilyon na rin ang naibigay na pondo para sa naturang programa sa nakalipas na 10 taon subalit tila wala aniyang nangyayari.

"Tama po kayo alam n'yo higit P50 bilyon na ang naibigay sa past

10 years pero 'di maramdaman ang epekto," wika ni Legarda.

Ito ang dahilan aniya kung bakit tinapyasan ang pondo ng programa sa ilalim ng 2023 national budget.

"Gusto natin makita kung saan napupunta (ang budget) at pinalagay yata sa protected areas... Siguro 'di sapat kasi 'di natin masyadong makita ang positibong epekto nito sa nakaraang 10 taon," ayon kay Legarda.

Binigyang-diin pa ng senador na hindi dapat nagtatapos sa pagtatanim ang naturang programa ng DENR.

"It should be a growing activity at dapat akma ang itatanim sa lupa," dagdag pa ni Legarda.

Batay sa DENR website, ang NGP diumano ang pinakaambisyosong reforestation program ng gobyerno at target nito na makapagtanim ng 1.5 bilyong puno sa 1.5 milyong hektarya ng lupain sa loob ng anim na taon, mula 2011 hanggang 2016.

Pinalawak pa ang programa sa pamamagitan ng Executive Order No. 26 na nilagdaan noong Pebrero 24, 2011 kung saan ay ginawa ang coverage nito na mula 2016 hanggang 2028.



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# INQUIRER



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## EDITORIAL

# To a bike-friendly future

**T**oday is National Bicycle Day. Then President Rodrigo Duterte signed Proclamation No. 1052 in November 2020 declaring the fourth Sunday of November as National Bicycle Day to highlight the importance of nonmotorized transportation “as a means of fostering sustainable development and promoting environmental health that is conducive to the physical health and well-being of Filipinos.” The proclamation cited Republic Act No. 8749, or the Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999, which mandates the state to provide a comprehensive management program for air pollution, including promoting nonmotorized transport.

That the proclamation was signed in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic is a reminder of how bicycles provided a reliable transport alternative at a time when public transportation was limited and private vehicles were banned from the roads. In fact, a biking culture flourished over the pandemic, local governments started providing bike lanes to ensure the safety of bikers, and there was so much promise that bicycles—a cleaner, healthier mode of transport—will be preferred even when routines, including traffic, return to normal.

But whatever gains may have been achieved at the height of the pandemic needs to be sustained. From how things appear, however, returning to normal may also mean bike lanes are no longer for the sole use of bicycles but can also be used for motor vehicles especially when there are traffic jams.

It is hardly surprising that motor vehicles are given priority by policymakers but it should never be normalized, especially considering the data: based on nine national surveys conducted by the Social Weather Stations from May 2020 to April 2022, there are more bicycle owners than car owners. The pollster said that for every car owner, there were four bicycle owners; in the National Capital Region, more households owned bicycles than cars and motorcycles, and the same was true even in rural areas, where motorcycles are more commonly owned. Why then do cyclists need to beg for bike lanes and for their safety and security on the roads?

The rising popularity of bicycles is bolstered by data from the Bureau of Customs, which reported that bicycle imports jumped by 112 percent in 2020 to 2.1 million units from 1 million units in 2019. Back then, the government pushed for promoting cycling as a mode of transport to address the public transport shortage, and pushed for building protected bike lanes.

Within nine months, the World Bank noted in a report, the government achieved building 500 kilometers of bike lanes along national roads. “This multi-sectoral effort went a long way in raising the profile of cycling as a reliable and sustainable form of transport. Importantly, it also empowered and inspired local governments and communities to add on to the new network by building their own bike lanes,” it said. This 500-kilometer network is broken down as follows: Metro Manila, 313.12 km; Metro Cebu, 129.47 km; and Metro Davao, 54.74 km. In November last year, the Department of Transportation has already requested Google to include bike lane routes in the dashboard of Google Maps to help cyclists on their daily commutes.

This only shows that things can be done when there is political will. Perhaps a model for local government units is Iloilo City, whose I-Bike Program promoting bike culture won this year’s Galing Pook Award. The city, which dubs itself the “bike capital of the Philippines,” has built an 11-km bike network that has improved connectivity with establishments and made it easier for locals to bike and walk safely. The city has won the gold award at the Bike Lane Awards 2021, which recognizes “exemplary efforts” of local governments “that have pushed for active transportation through the establishment of new infrastructure and the implementation of various support programs in the last two years,” and the country’s most bicycle-friendly city at the Mobility Awards 2021.

All these are good developments in a country that has traditionally prioritized moving cars instead of people, and where bicycles are considered a “poor man’s ride.” But the government must improve the infrastructure to ensure safety for bikers, since most bike lanes were merely carved out of existing lanes used by vehicles. Facilities such as parking for bikes and connectivity to offices and commercial establishments must also be put in place. More importantly, there must be proper law enforcement: Bikers must wear the necessary protective equipment such as helmets, and motor vehicles should not be allowed to enter bike lanes.

There is still a long way to go before the Philippines can consider itself bike-friendly—this would need a major shift in mindset that has been biased toward car ownership as well as education for all road users to learn to share space and respect each other’s rights. The infrastructure has already taken shape, the government must continue to work on policies to complement it.



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SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION CITED

PROTECTION OF RICH NATURAL RESOURCES IN DISPUTED WATERS PUSHED

By Julie M. Aurelio  
@JMAurelioINQ

A lawmaker has sought to declare the Kalayaan Island Group and Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal, and the three nautical miles around it as a protected area.

House Bill No. 6373 was filed on Thursday by Palawan Rep. Edward Hagedorn, who stressed that the government should prioritize the protection

of natural resources in the West Philippine Sea.

The bill's explanatory note cited the significant environmental degradation in the disputed waters that affected the Mischief Reef, Cuarteron Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, Gaven Reef, Johnson Reef, Hughes Reef and Subi Reef.

"The protection of the rich marine resources and environment of the West Philippine Sea

is a shared interest and responsibility of all adjoining states around the South China Sea, which should be a guiding policy for all of us in the region," Hagedorn said in a statement.

He added: "We all stand to gain or to lose depending on the outcome of our collective actions while we settle our territorial disputes. Through this bill, we hope for the Philippines to help initiate and spark this

regional cooperation."

Other coauthors of HB 6373 were Palawan Reps. Edgardo Salvame and Jose Chavez Alvarez.

The measure proposes that the environment secretary also designate strict protection zones in areas with significant biodiversity values or habitats of threatened species.

It also prohibits the following acts in the marine protected area: fishing practices that de-

stroy coral reefs, seagrass beds and marine life; dumping and using toxic chemicals, nonbiodegradable materials and untreated wastes; littering or depositing refuse; using blasting caps or explosives;

Undertaking mineral exploration or extraction; introducing exotic species and genetically modified or alien species; constructing and maintaining fences, structures

and enclosures; etc.

A Protected Area Management Board and Protected Area Management Office for the Kalayaan Island Group and Scarborough Shoal will be created to lead the protection and preservation of the area.

The measure also proposes a P10 million yearly budget to implement measures to protect the marine protected area in the West Philippine Sea. INQ



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## MOUNT APO WILDLIFE RESCUE, CONSERVATION CENTER MULLED

By MANUEL T. CAYON

**D**AVAO CITY—An ambitious wildlife rescue and rehabilitation center is being hatched up for Mount Apo wildlife that may involve as large as 100 hectares for the facility.

At least two municipal governments in the Davao Region and Region 12 have volunteered spaces in their localities to host the facility but these proposed areas would still be subject to ongoing discussions among local government units straddled by the mountain, and private companies which also indicated their support to the proposal.

Joey E. Recimilla, director of the Policy Formulation, Planning and Project Development Office of the Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA), said Mayor José Paolo Evangelista of Kidapawan City, North Cotabato, and Acting Mayor Michel Louise Gutierrez of Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur, volunteered their towns to host the facility.

“These areas have 50 hectares, but the DENR [Department of Environment and Natural Resources] told us it has 100 hectares,” he told a news briefing on Wednesday, after the chief executives and representatives of the Aboitiz Group and the Energy Development Corp. gathered for a commitment signing for the project.

They attended the workshop later in the afternoon to iron out more details, such as

the scope and size of the facility, where, from whom they would source the funds, and how much, said Secretary Maria Belen S. Acosta, the chairman of the MinDA.

Acosta disclosed that the move to establish the rescue center was partly prompted by the continued encroachment of Mount Apo and the sporadic incidents of Philippine eagles and other raptors, warty pigs and other wildlife animals being targets of game hunters and local tribal villagers.

MinDA has initiated the project and has engaged the local government units around the foothills of Mount Apo to contribute to the crafting of the rescue center.

Shirley Uy, the Mount Apo Natural Park (MANP) Protected Area superintendent (PASU), said hunting was among the threats to wildlife conservation in Mount Apo, although government has allowed the indigenous villagers to engage in hunting “because these are not for commercial purpose but for their sustenance.”

“However, we still have to regulate this hunting by the tribes and we ask and encourage them to list down the animals they usually target for hunting and the season for their hunting so that we can regulate their activities,” she added.

Uy said the project came at a period that the MANP PASU office was “preparing the protected area management plan for the next ten years.”



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**SIGN OF RICH BIODIVERSITY, HEALTHY AQUATIC LIFE**

# QUEZON FOLK WELCOME 'BUTANDING' RETURN TO TAYABAS BAY

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.  
@dtmallarijrINQ

LUCENA CITY—Whale sharks, locally known as “butanding,” have been spotted once again at Tayabas Bay about a month after the most recent storm to hit the country, according to residents of the coastal town of Sariaya and an environmental group based in Quezon province.

Jay Lim, project manager of Tanggol Kalikasan, said more than 20 butanding were seen at the bay just last week. By his estimate, the species, which goes by the scientific name *Rhincodon typus*, were 4.5 meters to 12 meters (15 feet to 40 feet) in length.

Before the onslaught of Severe Tropical Storm “Paeng” (international name: Nalgae) late in October, there were few butanding at the bay, Lim said.

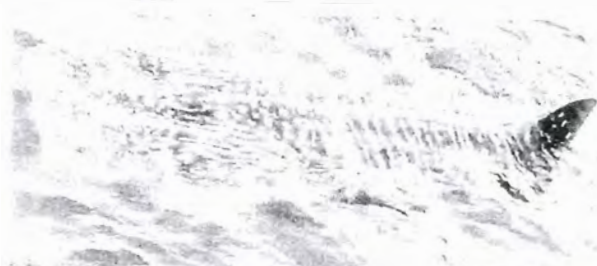
Paeng took almost a week in its slow path across the archipelago since entering the Philippine area of responsibility on Oct. 26. Another storm followed on its heels but it weakened into a tropical depression.

Since then, the butanding have returned. Lim and Edwin Frias—a fish warden, or marine version of a wildlife officer, at Sariaya—have been taking videos of the sea creatures after they have become an almost a regular sight.

### ‘More fish in our waters’

Sherwin Rosales, a fisheries technician at Sariaya’s agriculture office, said the whale sharks are “usually spotted in the vicinity of fish sanctuaries fronting the coastal villages of San Roque and Bignay 2.”

According to Rosales, whale sharks were already migrating



**GENTLE GIANT** This whale shark, or “butanding,” was sighted on Thursday at Tayabas Bay, an indication that more of the endangered animals will return to those waters after illegal fishing was banned in that area. —EDWIN FRIAS/CONTRIBUTOR

to Tayabas Bay sometime between March and May.

The bay, located northwest of the island province of Marinduque, stretches from San Juan town in Batangas province to the towns of Sariaya, Pagbilao, Padre Burgos, Agdangan, Unisan, Pitogo, Macalelon, General Luna, Cat-

anauan, Mulanay and San Francisco and Lucena City in Quezon.

“With the return of more butanding... it indicates the presence of more fish in our waters,” Rosales said.

Even the Department of Environment and Natural Resources noted the presence of

the whale sharks there, saying this was a sign of the bay’s “rich marine biodiversity.”

### Sea patrol

Precisely for that reason, Sariaya’s fishers also welcomed the return of the butanding as they anticipated a bigger catch.

Yet not long ago, blast fishing and other irresponsible fishing methods drove the butanding out of Quezon’s waters.

In 2012, a whale shark was found dead at the coast of Adimonan town, which faces Lamon Bay on the eastern side of the province.

Fishermen said this butanding, which measured 8 meters long and 2 meters wide (27 feet long and 7 feet wide) and weighed 11 tons, was hit by a commercial fishing boat.

Three years later, a sperm whale weighing around 50 tons

and measuring 17 meters long (55.7 feet) was found dead also at Lamon Bay, at the coast of Calauag town. Residents there said the animal died from blast fishing.

Lim remembered Frias telling him that blast fishermen would always hold a merry-making after every illegal catch.

“But they can’t do it anymore” after blast fishing has been banned in Sariaya, he said, adding that Mayor Marcelo Gayeta has also reinforced the local “bantay dagat” (sea patrol) with the provisions they need.

Tanggol Kalikasan continues to raise awareness about environmental laws as these concern the municipality.

“The return of butanding is a welcome sight in Tayabas Bay. It shows that the protection of our natural environment always produces a good result,” Lim said. INQ





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# Philippine Daily Tribune

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## WPS as marine haven vs strife

**We must learn to cooperate as one region in the protection of our natural resources while we settle the territorial disputes in the West Philippine Sea.**

BY EDJEN OLIQUINO  
@tribunephil\_eao

To ward off future conflicts, Palawan legislators have proposed to turn most of the West Philippine Sea, which is in one of the richest marine areas in the world, into "marine protected areas."

Palawan Representatives Edward Hagedorn, Edgardo Salvame and Jose Chavez Alvarez are proposing a measure that would declare features of Kalayaan Island Group and Scarborough Shoal as off-limits to vessels and human activity.

House Bill 6373 rallies for curbs to preserve the atolls, coral reefs, and other vital marine resources around these parts.

It will take, however, an agreement in the entire region to turn the area into a neutral zone.

"We must learn to cooperate as one region in the protection of our natural resources while we settle the territorial disputes in the West Philippine Sea," Hagedorn said Friday.

He added: "(It) is a shared interest and responsibility of all adjoining states around the South China Sea. We all stand to gain or to lose depending on the outcome of our collective actions while we settle our territorial disputes."

### Spark for cooperation

Hagedorn hopes the bill will help initiate regional cooperation. The bill argues that a hectare of the reef is pegged to produce \$350,000 in marine products a year.

Through this bill, Hagedorn hopes for the Philippines to help initiate and spark regional cooperation.

**It will take, however, an agreement in the entire region to turn the area into a neutral zone.**

"The coral reefs in the Spratlys comprise 34 percent of the world's total coral reefs, despite the West Philippine Sea occupying only 2.5 percent of the world's total ocean and sea surface," he said.

The House members said South China Sea is one of the richest marine areas in the world with 3,000 species of fish and 600 species of coral reef.

Activities by surrounding states locked in territorial disputes — like overfishing, poaching, and large-scale ocean filling or reclamation-led to significant environmental degradation in the area.

Citing Republic Act 11038, or the Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 2018, as well as the 2016 Arbitral Ruling, the lawmakers reiterated that the proposed measure has strong backing in declaring the target regions as protected areas.



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# Financing biodiversity via ecotourism, partnership

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

**A**T the foot of Mount Makiling, a mystical mountain shared by the provinces of Laguna and Batangas, lies the Makiling Botanical Garden (MBG), a popular ecotourism destination some 65 kilometers from Metro Manila.

The MBG is part of the Mount Makiling Forest Reserve (MMFR), an area set aside for conservation, which embodies a variety of ecosystems and species that makes a popular ecotourism destination among dwellers of the so-called concrete jungle that is Metro Manila.

## Leisure and learning park

A 300-hectare garden, MBG is both a learning and leisure park. It envisions into becoming a world-class education facility and regional biodiversity conservation area.

The management of the botanical garden aims to promote the appreciation and increase knowledge and understanding about plants, their diversity, importance and conservation, and serve as a living collection, a repository and sanctuary of endemic and endangered plant species in the country.

MBG is being developed to support professional instruction, research, and extension services related to forestry, plant sciences, biodiversity and awareness about the environment and serve the needs of ecotourism.

Recently, the MBG played host to an ecotourism tour and workshop participated in by some 70 environmental experts from various countries from Europe Asia and the Pacific who attended the three-day Regional Dialogue of the United Nations Development Programme-Biodiversity Finance Initiative (UNDP-Biofin) for Europe, Asia, and the Pacific.

## Learning tour

FORESTER ANGELA A. LIMPIADA, University Extension Associate II of the Makiling Center for Mountain Ecosystems of MBG, said students of University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) are among the frequent visitors of MBG.

Being the closest to Metro Manila, the MBG is a natural tourist magnet.

Limpiada said other students and teachers from different schools, and even scientists from other state colleges and universities, as well as private learning institutions, are common visitors to the botanical garden.

"Here, we have assorted indigenous flora to showcase," Limpiada said in



**DWARFED** by the trees. This best describes the touring participants of the UNDP-Biofin Europe, Asia and the Pacific Regional Dialogue at the Makiling Botanical Gardens in UPLB as they stand beside gigantic trees. GREGG YAN

Filipino. "We also showcase some of the species planted over the years in this area. Sometimes foreign dignitaries visit and plant their native species here," she told the BUSINESSMIRROR in an interview on November 9.

## Living collections

THE MBG showcases living collections of native plants in the Philippines Plants Row, which provides a glimpse of the indigenous plants of the Philippine archipelago.

It has a *Dipterocarp Arboretum*, including the oldest arboretum, which harbors about seven genera and seven species of *dipterocarps*, the best-known family of tropical plants.

Dipterocarps grow up to 20 meters or more and reach more than 2 meters in diameter at the base.

As part of its conservation strategy, the MBG management has been implementing the Adopt-a-Forest Project in collaboration with the Isuzu Philippines Corp.

The botanical garden also showcases *Bambusetum*, where the species

of the so-called giant grass or bamboo thrive through natural regeneration.

## Mount Makiling's rich biodiversity

WITHIN this 4,244-hectare forest reserve lies a rich biological diversity with both endemic, indigenous and introduced non-native species.

A large number of endemic plant species as well as those introduced from other parts of the world can be found on Mount Makiling, which is not a mountain, but a dormant volcano.

Species, such as *Rafflesia manillana*, *Medinilla magnifica* and *Nepthes alata* are found in this forest reserve.

Rare animal species are also found in the area. These include the Philippine eagle-owl (*Bubo philippensis*) and the Philippine pygmy fruit bat (*Haplonycteris fischeri*), which are both endemic in the country and are highly restricted to their original rainforest habitats.

The Philippine calotes (*Calotes marmoratus*) and common tree frog (*Philautus surdus*) were also recorded in the Makiling forest. Both are included in



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A TOUCAN, one of the many types of South and Central American wildlife that Biofin looks out for. In Costa Rica, Biofin and its allies are buying privately owned land to conserve wildlife habitats. GREGG YAN



PARTICIPANTS of the eighth UNDP-Biofin Europe, Asia and the Pacific Regional Dialogue pose for a photo after planting tulibas, banana, talo-talo and other native tree species at the Makiling Botanical Gardens on November 9. UNDP-BIOFIN/GREGG YAN

International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List as threatened species.

### Asean Heritage Park

MMFR, an Asean Heritage Park (AHP), has a unique management regime. It is the first national park of the Philippines established on February 23, 1933, by Proclamation 552.

However, it was decommissioned as a national park on June 2, 1963, with the enactment of Republic Act 3523, transferring it to the care of UPLB for its use in forestry education and information.

AHPs are selected protected areas in the Asean region that are known for their unique biodiversity and ecosystems, wilderness, and outstanding values in scenic, cultural, educational, research, recreational, and tourism.

### Tourism income

LIMPIADA said that while the UPLB is allocating funds for the maintenance of the entire MMFR, including the MBG, its operation is getting a much-needed boost from tourism income.

However, she said the income from

tourism remains wanting, even after the quarantine restriction imposed by the government for three years due to the Covid-2019 pandemic.

"Right now, we are not self-sufficient," she said, a reason why the UPLB is exploring for financial support for the protection and conservation of Mount Makiling's rich biodiversity, through its various institutional partners, including the UNDP through Biofin Philippines.

### Partnership for biodiversity

WITH the help of Biofin, Limpiada said they have several projects in mind to help narrow the budget gap, adding that protecting 4,244 Mount Makiling Forest Reserve, let alone the 300-hectare botanical garden, is a big challenge.

It requires forest guards or protectors to prevent, among others, hunting and rampant harvesting of plant species by "plantitos and plantitas [male and female plant enthusiasts]," who found the mountain a treasure trove of ornamental plants that easily sell.

"There are several ways to finance biodiversity," Anabelle Plantilla, project manager of Biofin Philippines, said during the same interview.

She said it is best to have plenty of options, rather than simply "putting all the eggs in one basket" in biodiversity finance initiatives.

She said partnering with various institutions is one way of narrowing the biodiversity gap in protected area management, which can help the protectors of areas set aside for conservation, like the UPLB in the case of MMFR and MBG, to sustain its operation without having to depend much from the equally limited budget of the state university.

"Crowdsourcing is also one way of funding biodiversity conservation programs," Plantilla added, pointing out that partnership is the key to sustainability in biodiversity conservation.

### Capacity building

EXECUTIVE Director Theresa Mundita S. Lim of the Asean Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) said that while she has not heard of the financial difficulties of Mount Makiling, she admitted that sustainability of financing is common in protected areas, not only in the Philippines but also in the Asean.

The ACB, which implements the Asean Heritage Park Programme, implements various programs and activities to help protected area managers across Southeast Asia, to sustain biodiversity conservation efforts.

"That is why we have been conducting workshops, capacity building activities and sharing of best practices in sustainable financing for PAs [protected areas in Asean]," Lim told the BUSINESSMIRROR via Messenger on November 21.

"Our recent support to Mount Makiling has been focused on the inventory and understanding of the species found in the protected area, in particular, the plants," she said.

According to Lim, such inventory and understanding of species would better provide the management and enforcers better capacity to track and trace specimens that may be illegally extracted, and possibly used for commercial gain.

"The projects related to this were implemented in partnership with UP Los Baños, and with UP Institute of Biology in Diliman, among others. We also provide networking opportunities with other AHPs and Botanical Collections around the country, and eventually, outside and within the Asean region," she added.



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# Multisectoral commitment: Just transition to climate-resilient Phl by 2050

'In the spirit of 'No One Should Be Left Behind' in the Sustainable Development Goals, this statement of commitment is not just for us, but for our children and the children of our children.'

Government leaders, the business and financial sector, and civil society organizations signed a Statement of Commitment recently aimed at ensuring the availability and accessibility of financing mechanisms for climate and sustainability projects. It also supports the acceleration of the Philippines' low-carbon development and just transition from coal to renewable energy.

Recognizing the imperative for an effective, collective response to the urgent threats of climate change, the commitment also includes the stakeholders' deployment of innovative interventions designed to have sustainable, positive impacts on supply chains and value chains.

New Zealand Ambassador to the Philippines Peter Kell, Securities and Exchange Commissioner McJill Bryant Fernandez, Philippine Stock Exchange Inc. Chief Operating Officer Atty. Roel Refran, and Climate Change Commissioner Albert P. de la Cruz led the ceremonial signing during the Climate Investment Forum 2022 organized by the Climate Change Commission on 21 November in Quezon City.

The event formed part of the commemoration of the 15th Global Warming and Climate Change Consciousness Week.

"In the spirit of 'No One Should Be Left Behind' in the Sustainable Development Goals, this statement of commitment is not just for us, but for our children and the children of our children," CCC Commissioner De la Cruz, said.

"Fighting the impacts of climate change comes at a cost. As a developing country that is at risk, the Philippines needs all the help we can get from both the public and private sectors, and indeed the international community through investments on adaptation and mitigation actions," said

Vice chairperson and executive director Robert E.A. Borje.

Themed "Sama-samang Tumutugon sa Hamon ng Nagbabagong Klima," CCC Week 2022 drew together various climate change and environment stakeholders in the Philippines in a collective push toward transforming climate change commitments to action.

Pursuant to Presidential Proclamation 1667 s. 2008, the CCC spearheads the annual observance of the Global Warming and Climate Change Consciousness Week every 19 to 25 November, aimed at raising consciousness about climate climate.

The SEC's Fernandez led the discussion on Sustainability Reporting Guidelines for Publicly Listed Companies in one of the sessions of the Climate Investment Forum. Sustainability reporting is a mechanism for an organization to disclose and communicate its economic, environmental, and social impacts on society.

"The Sustainability Report measures and monitors PLCs' contributions toward achieving universal targets of sustainability, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, as well as national policies and programs, such as AmBisyon Natin 2040," Fernandez said.

Fernandez was joined by Dr. Allinnettes Adigue, Regional Head of GRI ASEAN; Liza Selerio, Vice-President for Corporate Compliance of SM Prime Holdings Inc.; and Agnes de Jesus, Chief Sustainability Officer of the First Philippine Holdings Corporation.

De Jesus of the FPHC gave a grim picture of the impact

of typhoon "Yolanda" in 2013 on their business. She shared how strategizing the company's mission among business segments contributes to creating value for their stakeholders and business. Maintaining nature's integrity, people's well-being, and a robust economy are the values relevant to their stakeholders, while stable revenues and growth are for the business.

"We are able to contribute to the low carbon economy and reduce our risks. Because we have mainstreamed

sustainability in our mission, we are able to deliver robust data in our sustainability report," De Jesus said.

Selerio of SMPH highlighted the integral role of the private sector to economic development and embracing climate resilience as one of its core business strategies.

"Sustainability and climate programs are centered on environmental, social inclusion, a governance plus disaster resilience," she pointed out.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CLIMATE CHANGE COMMISSION  
 NEW Zealand Ambassador to the Philippines Peter Kell, Securities and Exchange Commissioner McJill Bryant Fernandez, Climate Change Commissioner Albert P. De la Cruz, and Philippine Stock Exchange Inc. Chief Operating Officer Atty. Roel Refran were among those who signed the Statement of Commitment on climate investment in just transition during the Climate Investment Forum 2022 at Novotel Manila on 21 November 2022.



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## Boracay hotels near pre-pandemic revenue

BY RAFFY AYENG  
@tribunephil\_raf

A luxurious hotel on the pristine island of Boracay is reporting higher-than-expected revenue, continuing a pointed growth in the tourism sector since the start of the year.

"Tourists are starting to arrive in this recovery stage. I am glad to inform you that our weekly arrivals are currently at 2,000 or in the pre-pandemic. It's positive since we don't have an international market right now, and it's all local, and records



are now hitting the 2019 figures. We only have a minimal number of foreign guests because the traditional markets here in Boracay are Chinese and Korean. But since Chinese tourists are still barred from traveling due to a surge of cases in their country, we don't have the biggest bulk of foreign arrivals, which is Chinese," said Cecille May Kimpo, the director of Sales and Marketing of Crimson Hotel Boracay and Spa.

The easing of the strict mobility restrictions led to a boom in tourism demand after more than two years of Covid-19 curbs, allowing the hospitality space to increase revenues to pre-pandemic levels.

According to Kimpo, the government's travel restrictions saw Crimson's occupancy rate drop by 50 percent.

"It dropped drastically because aside from foreign tourists, our main market is the National Capital Region because you don't get local business here since Boracay is an island. It had a domino effect on our revenue," Kimpo added.

Also, she said the decision of then President Rodrigo Roa Duterte to shut down the island in 2018 affected their sales as most establishments temporarily closed shop.

"Let's say you have P30 million a month. Then you don't have P30 million (a month) because we are forced to comply with government regulations. Otherwise, you will be called out by the government and face sanctions. So, when that happened and later lifted after six months, then came Covid in March 2020. Our industry was hit for six months in 2018 and 2 years of Covid that started in March 2020. We just started bouncing back in 2021," she said.

The recommendation to temporarily close Boracay from tourists for six months — starting 16 April October 2018 — came from the Department of the Interior and Local Government. The Departments of

Tourism and the Environment and Natural Resources had also called for a "total" closure.

Duterte announced it in a speech in Davao City because the island destination had become a "cesspool."

"That decision is something good for the island. Roads are wider, and the island is now more sustainable because of the eradication of the old tricycle style, as electric bikes are used here. And look at the water now, and it's so clean," Kimpo said.

### Contented with regulations

Although there are still regulations in health protocols being imposed by the Local Government of Malay, Kimpo maintained that they are more than willing to heed them.

"Whatever is happening now in terms of LGU regulations, we are pleased. Before, you could not enter Boracay sans RT-PCR test. We fully understand that for the protection of citizens and our employees because some don't have their vaccines yet from 2020 to 2021. Whatever restrictions they have rolled out for the last two years, it was all good for the island," she emphasized.

Boracay has more than 400 hotels, and Kimpo said all these hotels now followed the installation of sewerage treatment plants, particularly those on the beachfront.

Boracay stakeholders had said that closing the island for a year would take away the jobs of 36,000 people and would mean revenue losses of P56 billion.

However, the National Economic and Development Authority said a 6-month closure of the tourist area would have minimal impact on the economy.

Situated in Station Zero, Crimson Hotel and Spa opened its doors in March 2018.

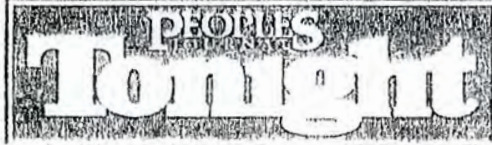
It's just a 15-minute away speedboat ride from the Caticlan Jetty Port. It boasts a private and undisturbed white sand beach and mystic clear waters.

Secluded and pristine, it evokes memories of the enchanting Boracay that guests love and long for.

Currently, Crimson has 192 rooms with a mix of Villas, Suites and Deluxe accommodations.



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## Safe, healthy environment for kids a 'shared responsibility'

By **CORY MARTINEZ**

**PROVIDING children with a safe and healthy environment for their future is their right and "shared responsibility."**

This was stressed by the environment-advocate group BAN Toxics during the recent launching of the "Children's rights for a Safe and Healthy Environment" campaign in Bocaue, Bulacan.

The group partnered with Dr. Yanga Colleges

Inc. (DYCI) and the Diocese of Malolos to launch the advocacy.

Hundreds of students, parents, and teachers of DYCI and other neighboring schools, along with the Diocesan Environmental and Ecological Program (DEEP) of the Diocese, gathered together for their annual drive to promote a safe and healthy environment for the children in time for the celebration of National Children's Month and National Environmental

Week.

Reynaldo San Juan Jr., executive director of BAN Toxics, said that they strongly support the global movement to promote children's rights and environmental awareness in every school, home, and community.

"We need to promote and nurture a safe and healthy environment for every child because it is a basic human right," San Juan stressed.

National Children's Month is celebrated in the

Philippines every year in November under Republic Act (RA) 10661 to commemorate the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on Nov. 20, 1989. UNCRC seeks to promote the protection of children's rights.

This year, the theme for the 30th International Children's Month is "Kalusugan, Kaisipan, at Kapakanan ng Bawat Bata Ating Tutukan!"

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### SAFE

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November is also declared as "Environmental Awareness Month" pursuant to RA 9512, which states that "the policy of the State to protect and advance the right of the people to a bal-

anced and healthful ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature, and in recognition of the vital role of the youth in nation building and the role of education to foster patriotism and nationalism, accelerate social progress, and promote total human libera-

tion and development, the State shall promote national awareness on the role of natural resources in economic growth and the importance of environmental conservation and ecological balance towards sustained national development.



ROAD MAP TO SUSTAINABILITY

# CONVERGE VOWS 'ZERO WASTE' BY 2030

By Tyrone Jasper C. Piad  
@TyronePiad

Technology is enabling companies to forge on with their sustainability initiatives, such as using smart tools to improve energy use efficiency and maximizing digital platforms to reduce the need for printing documents. However, there is a tendency that companies may just trade one thing for another and still end up harming Mother Nature.

The rise of technology has resulted in piling up of electronic waste or e-waste—such as discarded computers and telecommunication equipment and consumer devices—from 33.8 million metric tons (MT) in 2010 to 53.6 million MT in 2019, according to Statista.

Converge ICT Solutions Inc., which has been mindful of its own environmental impact, recognizes this major problem.

"E-waste is one of the fastest-growing waste streams in the world because we are digitizing our economies. Everyone has electronic gadgets now; our TVs are getting bigger, and home appliances are becoming more accessible," Converge chief strategy officer Benjamin Azada points out.

Most recently, the internet service provider pledged to eliminate waste to landfill output by 2030 through the implementation of a circular economy model, or the practice of re-

materials up to the extent possible.

"At Converge, sustainability means walking the talk," Converge president and co-founder Maria Grace Uy quips.

"This year, we are putting more of the guidelines into practice to ensure that our wastes are recycled, reused and treated properly," she explains.

### e-Waste collection

On Nov. 18, the listed company kicked off the collection of discarded electronic devices and equipment from employees, which will be repurposed into something productive.

Converge is doing so through its partnership with John Trix Trading and Green Antz Builders, both experts when it comes to turning solid waste, like e-waste, into useful materials.

John Trix, for example, can convert the waste into plastic pellets, which are raw materials for the manufacturing of furniture. Green Antz, meanwhile, produces eco-friendly bricks used for construction of houses.

Apart from these, Azada shares that they have been refurbishing old Wi-Fi modems as part of their waste reduction initiative.

What Converge does is to recover the modems that are no longer being used by their customers due to upgrade or ending of the contract. Azada says they clean and restore them so the devices can be reused. Over 50,000 of such devices have been refurbished since March.

"What we want to do is maintain or prolong the use of equipment, allow sharing of material equipment, reuse and redistribute. If all else doesn't work, at the very end, we want to recycle,"

says Azada.

Converge also has a partnership with KreAtions, which "upcycles" its discarded tarpaulins into bags, mats and other household items.

"This initiative is particularly important because we know that the improper disposal of waste has a direct impact on climate change. Everyday, we see the impact of climate change on our environment," Uy says.

Prior to the announcement of their waste reduction initiatives, Converge showed its commitment to decreasing its carbon footprint by tapping into renewable energy sources.

Its headquarters in Pasig and data center in Pampanga are running on geothermal energy supplied by First Gen Corp.

Last year, the fiber broadband provider inked a 48-megawatt (MW) clean energy supply agreement for its Pasig office with the power firm. The 14.4-MW supply deal for its Pampanga data center was secured in April.

Data centers have been designed using smart modular data so that airflow and air conditioning are efficient, avoiding waste of electricity, Azada explains.

Converge is currently building another data center in Cebu. Azada says the goal is to make it 'green' as well.

"We went into high gear. First things first, we looked at one of the biggest impact we have and it is energy consumption," Azada says.

About 80 percent to 90 percent of Converge's total energy consumption is so far covered by renewable sources.

The sustainability efforts by the internet service provider are among its overall strategies as it scales up operations. It aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 75 percent by 2030 and achieve 'net zero' by 2050. INQ



DROP BOX This is where your e-waste goes.—CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



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# Regreening Mindanao grid

Solar harvesting shows promise as island's remote areas search for stable, cheaper energy supply

## SPECIAL REPORT

By **Germelina Lacorte**  
@InqNational

(First of two parts)

**D**AVAO CITY—From the roof deck of the Blue Building of Ateneo de Davao University (Addu), Rene Sanchez of Sultan Kudarat's Lebak town gazed down on the roof of the next building where solar photovoltaic (PV) panels had been installed.

Sanchez, the town agriculturist of Lebak, and others from the local government participating in a renewable energy workshop, took advantage of the remaining light from the setting sun to examine the panels and to consider using solar energy back home.

With a population of over 90,000, Lebak, like neighboring Kalamansig and Palimbang, badly needs a dependable supply of electricity as these towns are not yet connected to the Mindanao grid. A diesel-fueled power plant currently supplies the three towns.

Operated by the Small Power Utilities Group of state-owned National Power Corp. (NPC), the plant runs on a 2022 budget of P55 per liter. But the fuel cost skyrocketed to as high as P90 per liter due to the crisis in Ukraine, contributing to the company's financial strain.

NPC required P1.2 billion in additional resources for this year in order to provide an uninterrupted power supply to off-grid areas throughout the country. Before a government subsidy was worked out, a financially bleeding NPC was forced to cut back on power generation in August, leading to 12-hour brownouts in Lebak.

Aside from being expensive, diesel fuel, like coal, heavily emits carbon dioxide and contributes to global warming that, in turn, spawns devastating typhoons.

Addu engineers urged workshop participants to con-

sider renewable energy sources, which are clean, cheaper, and more abundant in the long run.

Shifting to clean energy may be best for Mindanao, which had been recently battered by strong typhoons and extreme weather that brought communities flash floods, landslides and storm surges. Lebak, for one, is still reeling from the destruction wrought by Severe Tropical Storm "Paeng" (international name: Nalgae) in October, with P16 million in damage to agriculture and crops.

The high cost of fossil fuels also provides a robust financial and economic justification for ramping up the share of renewables in the region's energy mix.

### Building a model

The solar panels on the roof of Addu's Finster Hall were among the first that the university installed over a decade ago as it started advocating for renewable energy.

"During that time, the cost was still a problem," recalled Randell Espina, dean of the Addu School of Engineering and Architecture. "But how can we convince people to convert to clean energy if we have nothing to show for it?"

The initiative gained a head start with the support of Fr. Joel Tabora, then university president. Addu mounted its first set of 48 solar panels in 2011. Later, it installed another set on two of its campuses so that today, the university has 842 panels on its three campuses. Together, they have a total capacity of 1 megawatt, supplementing the electricity the university takes from the grid.

Since then, solar makes up part of the energy that lights up the university classrooms and offices, and runs the air conditioners, refrigerators, computers and other electric equipment during daytime. It allows the university to save up to 30 percent on its electricity bills which, according to Espi-

**SOLAR POWER** A parabolic dish at Addu's Bangkal campus in Davao City catches attention. It is used to develop the technology of converting into energy the sun's other power—heat. —BARRY OHAYLAN



na, could amount to P500,000 to P600,000 per month at the current P12 per kilowatt-hour price of electricity.

Addu engineers continue exploring other sources of renewable energy. They literally climb mountains and brave oceans to study the potentials of wind, hydro, tidal, ocean waves and biomass technology to produce energy, according to Nelson Enano, director of the Addu Center for Renewable Energy and Appropriate Technologies.

They did not stop with the solar panels. Addu engineers are also exploring the sun's other power—heat.

Addu hosts within its Bangkal campus its concentrated solar power (CSP) facility, whose parabolic dish is quite a sight to see. Unlike PV cells which convert light to energy in a solar panel, CSP uses mirrors to focus sunlight on a receiver which produces thermal energy to create steam that spins a turbine generator, producing electricity.

The CSP research, along with ocean renewable energies, is being pursued with the Mindanao Renewable R&D Energy Center (MREC), which is funded by the Department of Science and Technology (DOST). MREC is an Addu-led consortium of universities and colleges in Mindanao focused on the research and development of renewable energies.

The desire to understand

renewable energy technologies and make them available and more affordable to local communities prompted the study, Espina said.

### Local expertise

Espina, who has a doctorate in energy systems engineering, said the country could only achieve an energy-secure future by making and using these renewable energy technologies locally.

"When we started with the solar panels, we realized that the technology is already there, we can buy it, but it's not locally available (because we're not producing it) and we're not ready," he said.

"What we really need are experts and technical know-how. Unless we can come up with an army of experts and technical people to focus on this, nothing will happen to us," he added.

Producing these experts was the rationale for the university's doctorate program on Energy Systems Engineering and its Master in Renewable Energy Engineering, which are the first in the country, according to Espina.

One project proposed for funding through MREC was the production of PV cells, he said.

"Our plan was to localize the solar cell technology," he said. "The advantage of localization is we can customize the

size and we can decide for ourselves and tailor it to our needs. We are no longer dependent on what is available in the market."

But the proposal was not approved by the DOST, so Addu focused on CSP and ocean renewable energies.

"What's good about having the CSP laboratory is you will get to know the technology, how it works and what are its limitations, and if it works in our setting and if not, what solutions and adjustments to make," Espina said.

### Reversing trend

The success of these efforts will help wean Mindanao, if not the country, away from dirty energy, the impact of which haunts it back through extreme weather events.

The Philippines' per capita greenhouse gas emission is lower than the global and Southeast Asian averages, but it is one of the most vulnerable to extreme weather conditions and the other effects of climate change.

About a year after Addu installed its first solar panels, Typhoon "Pablo" (international name: Bopha) slammed into Mindanao on Dec. 4, 2012, packing 280 kilometer per hour winds.

It caused widespread devastation and power outages on a large swath of Mindanao, killing 1,900 people and displacing thousands in a part of the country rarely visited by typhoons.

That time, Espina informed Fr. Tabora that solar panels would be handy in lighting up the devastated communities. The priest asked where they could find these panels.

"I told him, we already installed some on the university rooftop, and to our surprise, he ordered 25 of the solar panels to be taken down and temporarily lent to 25 devastated communities and villages, which had no power and water," Espina recalled.

For six months after the typhoon, the panels lit up these

communities, giving hope in the midst of darkness and despair. The panels proved so useful that Addu engineers proposed to the Davao City government to include solar energy in the preparations for calamity response.

Following successive destructive typhoons—Tropical Storm "Sendong" (international name: Washu in 2011, Typhoon Pablo in 2012 and Super typhoon "Yolanda" (international name: Haiyan) in 2013—environmentalists warned against the continued use of coal to generate power as it is contributing to global warming.

Despite this warning, coal-fired power plants mushroomed in Mindanao, as encouraged by the government. Some 2,063 MW of coal-fed capacity was added to the grid, from only 200 MW in 2006.

By 2017, the energy mix in the region had been reversed—from reliance on renewables to dependence on fossil fuels, according to Assistant Secretary Romeo Montenegro, Mindanao Development Authority deputy executive director.

Montenegro said Mindanao's energy mix is accounted for by 50 percent coal and 20 percent diesel and other fossil fuels, leaving only 30 percent from renewable sources.

"Our energy supply in Mindanao comes from fossils. Why should it matter to us?" he asked. "It matters because the transition to dirty fuels resulted in a 20 to 25 percent increase in Mindanao's electricity rates."

"Now after the pandemic affected our local logistics, and the [conflict] in Ukraine, the price of coal spiked four times," he said. "Let us regreen the Mindanao grid because right now, it is black." <sup>PH</sup>

*(Editor's Note: Reporting for this story was supported by the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities under the Jaime Espina Klima Correspondents Fellowship.)*

PHOTO COURTESY OF DOST



## NEDA Board clears 6 new, revised projects

By CHINO S. LEYCO

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board chaired by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., approved one new project funded through official development assistance (ODA), and also changes on five ongoing projects.

According to the agency's report issued on Thursday, Nov. 24, the NEDA Board cleared the ₱11.42-billion Philippine Fisheries and Coastal Resiliency (FishCoRe) project of the Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources. FishCoRe aims to improve the management of fishery resources and enhance the value of production of fisheries in select fisheries management areas, the NEDA said.

Also approved was the request of the Department of Transportation (DOTr) for utilization of savings, change in scope, and loan validity extension for the Maritime Safety Capability Improvement Project Phase I.

The project involves the acquisition of 10 Multi-Role Response Vessels to enhance the Philippine Coast Guard's response capability during coastal maritime incidents which will contribute to maritime safety and security of the country.

Moreover, the NEDA Board approved the request of the DOTr for 19-month loan validity extension for its New Communications, Navigation, Surveillance/Air Traffic Management (CNS/ATM) systems development project.

The project involves the con-

struction of the Manila ATM Automation System and the Manila ATM Center Building in Pasay City, and the installation of communications and surveillance equipment in ten radar sites.

For the Department of Public Works and Highways, the NEDA Board approved the request to extend by 12 months both the implementation period and the validity of the loan for the Samar Pacific Coastal Road Project.

The project involves the construction of 11.30 kilometers of the unpaved section of the Samar Pacific Coastal Road and construction of three bridges with total length of 261 linear meters.

Meanwhile, the request for change in scope of works, increase in cost, and reallocation of contingency cost to civil works category for Integrated Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation Measures in Low-Lying Areas of Pampanga Bay project was also cleared. The project aims to maximize drainage efficiency, minimize flood damages to properties, and improve trading and market activities in Macabebe, Masantol, Minalin, and Sto. Tomas in Pampanga. Specifically, the project aims to implement flood control measures, which will provide long-term solution to the three- to four-month flood duration during the rainy season.

Lastly, the NEDA Board approved the request for change in scope for the Philippine Competition Commission's (PCC) Capacity Building to Foster Competition Project. The project is a long-term capacity building plan to strengthen the institutional and individual capacities of PCC and other agencies with competition-related mandates.



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## Google's efforts to help drive sustainability in Asia-Pacific

### LET'S TALK SOCIAL

NOEMI LARDIZABAL-DADO



**S**USTAINABILITY-RELATED topics are now being searched at all-time highs with people looking for ways to learn and act on climate change through top-searched queries like "how to be more sustainable" and "how to recycle." With such queries, there is a growing need for companies to respond to the demands of stakeholders, including customers, investors, the public, society and the environment, regarding their sustainability efforts.

Google searches on sustainability-related topics show people want to be part of the solution. The future looks uncertain, particularly for our children and the future generations. Experts recognize them as the vulnerable group to the impacts of climate change. To maximize the role of technology in promoting sustainability, Google supports the drive for action in three key areas: addressing its own impact, making sustainable choices easier for everyone, and supporting others to reach their goals.

We decide on sustainable choices. As people look for more ways to practice sustainability, Google continues to build products and features that help people make more sustainable choices in their day-to-day lives. For example, the Air Quality feature in Google Search and Maps uses AI to show the air quality conditions for the day.

Working with credible data provided by the National Environment Agency, the feature is currently available in Singapore. People could decide about staying outdoors or indoors, bringing more attention to the issue.

Using a combination of AI, trusted data from sources like transit authorities and community feedback from Maps users enable Google to offer sustainable transport options to commuters. Commuters could see an area's schedule, crowdedness, and details like accessible entrances and exits.

Cycling directions which have rolled out in Singapore, and in cities in Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan and Japan to date, also help provide even greener options. Though not applicable in the Philippines, it is useful for travelers in the APAC region.

To scale its sustainability efforts, Google makes its technology available to cities, governments, companies, or nonprofits around the world along with funding grants. Nonprofit organizations working to combat climate change or drive sustainability could apply for funding through the AVPN APAC Sustainability Seed Fund, supported by Google.org and the Asian Development Bank.

The fund aims to support nonprofits using emerging technologies to solve local climate challenges across Asia-Pacific. For-profit startups could also access funding through the Google

for Startups Accelerator: Circular Economy, which is open to organizations innovating toward a waste-free world.

It has provided more than \$14 million in funding to nonprofits focused on sustainability and climate-related issues in Asia-Pacific.

In Indonesia, Google.org is supporting Edu Farmers International Foundation, an organization that educates farmers and scales machine learning technology to maximize production yields. A grant by google.org to World Food Program

USA supports the work of the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) in Indonesia, which enables governments and communities to better forecast and respond to extreme weather events — helping achieve better food security.

Nonprofits in the Philippines could take advantage of these grants to bridge the sustainability gap. Our country has committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by 75 percent by 2030. As of 2020, its GHG emissions contributed 0.39 percent to the global total. Compared to other nations, the Philippines is considered a low emitter, but it ranks among the most vulnerable to climate-related disasters.

IBON Foundation, a nonprofit research and policy group, listed economic activities that worsen climate change. Some activities include at least 25 approved and proposed reclamation projects in Manila Bay covering some 30,000 hectares resulting in mangrove deforestation and displacement of fisherfolk. The country's car-centric transport system contributes 65 percent to air pollutants. Hybrid crops are the norm in Philippine agriculture, while the government promotes the cultivation of genetically modified crops.

The United Nations Environment Program reminds us that the needs and priorities of the children and youth couldn't be ignored in an inclusive approach to addressing the climate and environmental crisis.

Principles and Policy Guidance on Children's Rights to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment in the Asean Region sets out fundamental principles for realizing children's rights to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment and for putting the best interests of children at the center of initiatives by all segments of society in Southeast Asia. Let's create a sustainable future for our children and generations to come.



## Asia businesses yet to see value from sustainability strategies

**A** RECENT research study by Oxford Economics and SAP has revealed that for Asia businesses, work remains to be done to drive value from sustainability. While 66 percent of businesses do not think it's difficult to be sustainable and profitable at the same time, just 8 percent said they presently receive significant value from their sustainability initiatives.

This may be because many organizations remain disconnected from sustainability plans and actions. On average, 60 percent of businesses have a clearly communicated sustainability plan, with Japan leading at 68 percent while Indonesia scoring lowest at 46 percent.



**TECH SPACE**  
**TONY MAGHIRANG**

Only 20 percent in the region have incentivized leaders based on its success and less than half (44 percent) said their employees are active participants in their sustainability efforts, with the highest in India at 52 percent, followed by Singapore at 51 percent and the lowest in Malaysia at 33 percent.

### Regulatory compliance

According to the research data, regulatory mandates are one of

the key drivers of sustainability strategies. Compliance is the main benefit companies derive from sustainability (46 percent), ahead of reduced carbon emissions, with Indonesia scoring the highest at 56 percent and the lowest for Malaysia at 39 percent. Too much focus on compliance is the second-biggest sustainability challenge for businesses (26 percent), only behind reinventing business strategy, with the highest score attained by Singapore at 32 percent.

### Data is key

The effective use of organizational data to make more informed decisions would be vital in enhancing

sustainability efforts. According to the survey, accurate data was ranked as among the most significant activities to reach carbon reduction goals amongst businesses in Southeast Asia.

Yet, ineffective data for decision-making is considered a moderate challenge in the region. The research also found that less than one in six (13 percent) businesses in Singapore and less than a quarter (23 percent) in Malaysia and Indonesia have calculated their total organizational carbon output. A majority (60 percent in Singapore, 77 percent in Malaysia) have begun the process in some areas versus only 31 percent in Indonesia.

More needs to be done. Investments in data analysis to measure sustainability in business remain the minority with 47 percent in Singapore, 35 percent in Malaysia, and 31 percent in Indonesia citing their commitment to the investment. Similarly, training of staff on capturing sustainability data saw only 36 percent of Singapore businesses currently doing so, versus 40 percent in Indonesia and 50 percent in Malaysia.

### Sustainability leadership

Urgent action on sustainability is wanting. Beyond the impact on the environment, just 33 percent of Indonesian businesses said their

workforces aren't aware that missing sustainability targets would drive customers to their competition, followed by 21 percent of Malaysian businesses and only 15 percent of Singapore businesses.

Businesses that are achieving value from sustainability are defined by traits such as setting clear expectations at the strategic level, applying the transformative power of technology and data management, and engaging with important audiences such as employees, supply chain partners and policymakers.

SAP has most recently updated its SAP Sustainability Control Tower solution to offer what companies are looking for today to run more sustainably.



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# How a flawed but historic climate deal emerged from COP27 chaos

By JENNIFER A DLOUHY & JOHN AINGER

**H**OURS after the COP27 climate talks reached the deadline, there was still no deal and the European Union's climate chief was threatening to leave Sharm El-Sheikh without one. "We don't want a result at any price," Frans Timmermans told reporters, flanked by ministers from Germany, Austria, Ireland and Spain. "The EU would rather have no decision than a bad decision."



DEMONSTRATORS participate in a sit-in calling for reparations for loss and damage at the COP27 UN Climate Summit on Thursday, November 17, 2022, in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. AP/PETER DEJONG



HOMES are surrounded by floodwaters in Jaffarabad, a district of Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province, on September 1, 2022. AP/ZAHO HUSSAIN



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Friday—which had been the official end date for the conference—as they were unable to bear the expense of rebooking travel or staying for an extended time. A delegation from Botswana, among others, started scrambling to book new arrangements as negotiations headed into overtime. Talks were also complicated by John Kerry's Covid diagnosis on Friday, which forced the seasoned diplomat—known for leveraging handshake diplomacy and personal relationships to forge compromise—into quarantine.

Shortly after midnight Saturday, some delegates were summoned by the Egyptian presidency for a closed-door look at portions of a new drafted text focused on loss and damage and efforts to boost climate mitigation. Country officials were permitted 20 minutes to analyze the unpublished material in a closed room and barred from removing the documents. One official called it highly unusual.

For the EU, the draft decisions were riddled with holes. On loss and damage, the text said that the funds could apply to all developing countries rather than just the most vulnerable. The Europeans found the mitigation language even worse—weaker than Glasgow, according to some—because it explicitly ruled out new climate targets or goals. Timmermans had conditioned a new loss-and-damage fund on stronger emissions cuts. He hadn't gotten it.

Still, the EU gambit had helped shift the debate over loss and damage, successfully boosting pressure on the US to yield on the issue while helping prompt oil-rich Canada to back down from a fight against a fossil-fuel phaseout. The key breakthrough on loss and damage came after texts published early Saturday afternoon. To break the deadlock, the EU took the unusual step of convening the "Friends of the Presidency," a select group of countries and negotiating blocs. The EU, US, the G77 and the Alliance of Small Island States assembled with the Egyptians for the talks.

The G77, which includes many island states threatened by rising seas, had shown a remarkable solidarity in their quest for a loss-and-damage fund that would apply to all developing countries. But in the overtime meeting, the EU pressed the island states: Are you really happy not to be prioritized

for funding? Representatives from the Maldives took a 30-minute timeout, came back into the room and broke with the G77, according to a person familiar with the matter.

As a result, the final version of loss-and-damage text targeted funding to "developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change." The proposal leaves the door open for contributions from developing-but-high-emitting nations, such as China. And, in a win for the US, the language makes clear the new fund isn't meant to duplicate existing efforts, with details developed over the next year. The goal is to operationalize the new funding arrangements at next year's UN climate summit in Dubai.

"Just changing a few paragraphs, we actually got something which respects both sides," said Espen Barth Eide, Norway's climate minister.

Despite the breakthrough on loss and damage, clashes over mitigation intensified at this point. As planes droned overhead, delegates were locked in an intense fight over even maintaining the emissions-cutting ambition adopted at COP26. Officials from Saudi Arabia had pushed for a one-year mitigation work program, an effort that aims to close the gap between 1.5C and the current trajectory headed almost one degree higher. The US, EU and other countries wanted the program to run through 2030.

Ministers from New Zealand, Norway and Canada complained that the latest text was a step backward. "There can't be any backsliding," Canada's Guilbeault told reporters. "We cannot leave Sharm El-Sheikh by having abandoned the possibility of keeping 1.5 Celsius alive, and right now we are very concerned that is what is being proposed."



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The annual United Nations climate summit has only ended once without a major agreement, and in recent years, as the impacts of climate change have become more devastating, the meetings have taken on increased urgency. In the 24 hours after Timmermans and the EU raised the prospect of a no-deal outcome in Egypt, delegates from nearly 200 countries barely managed to avoid a stalemate.

Ultimately the Europeans and their allies accepted the kind of flawed outcome they had vowed to avoid. The COP27 summit adopted an accord that doesn't increase ambitions on lowering emissions or take new steps to preserve the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit for warming temperatures. It also commits to the creation a loss-and-damage fund that, if details can be worked out at future talks, will send aid to vulnerable countries wrecked by the irreversible harms of global warming. That stands as an enormous achievement—a deal three decades in the making that many doubted would come from this year's meeting.

But success was marred by the failure to find agreement on phasing down all fossil fuels or otherwise build on emissions-cutting commitments made at last year's UN summit in Glasgow. "Many parties—too many parties—are not ready to make more progress today in the fight against the climate crisis," Timmermans said after reaching the COP27 agreement. The final deal "is not enough of a step forward for people and the planet."

It's a damning indictment of the UN process from a consummate insider, and it comes against the brutal backdrop of increasingly extreme weather such as the monsoon flooding in Pakistan over this summer that left at least 1,700 dead and some \$30 billion in damage. Pakistan, for its part, celebrated the breakthrough on loss and damage.

After more than two weeks of climate haggling involving nearly 200 nations, all of which had to agree on the final text, COP27 has revealed a marked shift in power within the diplomatic process that produced the 2015 Paris Agreement. Bold new agreements to curtail emissions are now harder, in large part because of the energy crisis that prompted a worldwide scramble for new natural gas supplies. At this moment, cooperation meant to tackle inequities between developed and developing nations is more doable.

The final COP27 document without crucial progress on emissions came about, in part, from a concerted effort by petrostates such as Saudi Arabia and Russia to fend off more carbon-cutting ambition and pledges that would undermine the oil and gas production that fuels their economies. Oil-producing nations were empowered by a hands-off Egyptian presidency that failed to launch early negotiations, foster trust among countries or even circulate draft proposals in time that could form the basis for consensus.

It didn't start out that way. Delegates and observers were jubilant on Nov. 6 after a swift earlier agreement to launch the first-ever formal debate over the issue of loss and damage—COP-speak for how to help developing countries getting battered by intense storms, searing heat waves and other climate-exacerbated weather disasters. The nation: most vulnerable to rising temperatures created little of the planet warming pollution that has intensified these extreme impacts. Yet the moral case for compensation from rich nations hadn't even appeared on a COP agenda until now.

There was major work to do to advance the issue at COP27. The top US climate envoy, John Kerry had insisted before the summit that there was no way countries could agree to establish a new funding facility by the end of the conference. The largest negotiation bloc of vulnerable nations, known as the G77+China, demanded nothing less. At the same time, rich countries wanted to push developing nations harder on pursuing economic growth with green energy and stepping up decarbonization efforts to limit warming to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.

This tension made for halting negotiations at the conference center in a Red Sea resort town where thousands of participants and observers found long lines for food and empty water dispensers. A sense of frustration built among delegates as the days passed under a sweltering sun. By the middle of the second week, there was a hint of breakthroughs on any of the major issues. Even debate over smaller, less controversial carbon markets—remained unresolved. The Egyptian official serving as president of COP27, Sami Shoukry, had to keep a host of topics under negotiation during the conference's final days.

As the second week wore on, a stalemate emerged between developing and developed countries over the new fund for loss and damage. Concessions by the EU and other rich nations that might be compelled to pay into the fund did little to resolve the impasse. As that fight ground on, there was building momentum around India's call for countries to pledge to phase down all fossil fuels—not just unabated coal, as they had promised a year earlier in Glasgow.

Shoukry warned delegates that "time is not on our side," with just days remaining in the talks. "There is still a lot of work ahead of us if we are to achieve meaningful and tangible outcomes of which we can be proud."

Behind the scenes, according to delegates and observers, the Egyptian COP27 presidency was displaying little urgency. Normally in the late stages ministers would be digging into proposed language for a final political decision, or "cover text," that's issued at the end of the summit. These broad consensus statements form the basis for global climate action by laying out temperature goals, carbon-cutting pledges and finance plans. But the Egyptian officials running COP27 weren't initially planning for ambitious cover text at the end, and so they hadn't drafted boilerplate language ahead of time.

By the evening of Wednesday, Nov. 16—after 10 days of talks, and just 48 hours before the conference's official close—nothing formal had been circulated. Shoukry had been notably absent from the process, both publicly in press briefings and behind closed doors in meetings with delegations. This presented a marked contrast to the hands-on style of his predecessor in the COP presidency, Alok Sharma of the UK, who took an active approach to COP26 talks in Glasgow last year.

On Thursday morning, delegates woke to a sprawling, 20-page document that presented an assortment of options for final language. It was full of redundancies and conflicting passages. Egyptian Ambassador Wael Aboulmagd later explained that it had been whittled down from more than 50 pages of competing proposals, after omitting ideas the presidency deemed too controversial.

Among the casualties: any possible pledge to phase down oil and gas as well as coal—a blow to India, the EU and scores of other countries now supporting the effort. The text also left only placeholders for a future compromise on loss and damage, rather than the concrete offer sought by the G77 bloc of developing countries.

Developed nations felt blindsided by proposed language that would compel them to dramatically decarbonize and "attain net-negative carbon emissions by 2030," a feat that would strain both political and technological wherewithal.

Sharma, Timmermans and Steven Guilbeault, Canada's climate minister, spent parts of Thursday pleading with Shoukry in private to ensure the final COP27 outcome would build on the Glasgow declaration, rather than backslide from it. When delegation leaders gathered later that day to assess progress, it was clear little had changed. Timmermans sought to break the logjam by offering a two-part deal: The conference would agree to establish a new loss-and-damage response fund, with details worked out over the next year, and in return countries would vow to peak global emissions by 2025 and phase down all fossil fuels.

That EU proposal was largely passed over by the Egyptian presidency, which on Friday morning released a draft decision text that once again left out any kind of promise to phase down fossil fuels as well as a commitment to peak emissions by 2025. There was little visible progress toward a potential loss-and-damage fund, which developing nations called an unforgivable omission.

"Anything other than the establishment of a loss-and-damage fund at COP27 climate talks is untenable," warned Sherry Rehman, Pakistan's climate minister, speaking on behalf of the G77 bloc.

Tensions had emerged over a push by many developed nations, including Germany and other EU members, to ensure a broad donor base for any new fund for loss and damage. While the onus should be on historically high greenhouse gas emitters, they felt rapidly developing nations behind enormous emissions—namely, China—should also contribute. "We need a financing system that includes the biggest emitters, said Annalena Baerbock, Germany's foreign minister.

As conference staff started pulling down flags, unwiring displays and dismantling pavilions, 10-year-old Nakeeyat Dramani of Ghana beseeched delegates. "Please, do not renege on your responsibility," she implored them inside a packed meeting on Friday. "If all of you were to be young people like me, wouldn't you have already agreed to do what is needed to save our planet?"

But the odds of success appeared to be diminishing. Ministers from island nations were already starting to fly home late



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**Failure on** the mitigation package threatened to tank the deal on loss and damage. New Zealand climate change minister James Shaw said at this point things were

"tantalizingly close" and he felt "it would be an incredible shame for it to fall over right now." Delegates privately worried that if they didn't strike now, future political shifts in the US and other countries would make a new fund impossible.

But Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia and other oil-producing countries were digging in against expanded language on fossil fuels, according to people familiar with the matter. During a two-and-a-half hour meeting of the heads of delegations late Saturday, US negotiator Trigg Talley announced the country was ready to go even further and support a pledge to "phase out" unabated oil, gas and coal.

This took the US a step further than language to merely "phase down" fossil fuels.

But it wouldn't matter. Delegates from oil-rich nations insisted that the energy proposals were unbalanced and unacceptable. Language to phase down oil and gas was a red line they would not cross. When final text was released—after ministers had already filed in to a final meeting around 4 a.m. Sunday—there was no phase-down pledge and new language had been added to further protect petroleum interests. Countries would now be agreeing to an urgent need for rapid emissions reductions, including through an increase in "low-emission" energy, a term Norway's Eide bemoaned and that was left undefined. It could be read as supporting more natural gas.

Shoukry was intent on quickly pushing through the loss-and-damage compromise. Minutes after convening the session just before dawn Sunday—with some staff still sleeping in rolling office chairs in the back—he brought up the text and asked for its adoption. With a gavel bang just a few moments later, it was done. Nearly 200 nations had just agreed to create a loss-and-damage fund for vulnerable countries bearing the brunt of climate change.

The countries that wanted to see stronger climate ambition were still weighing their options, including possibly intervening to demand the insertion of pledges on emissions peaking by 2025 and phasing down fossil fuels. After successfully appealing for a half-hour break to review the newly released text, delegates from the so-called High Ambition Coalition, including Norway, Canada and the UK, huddled to strategize. Sharma spoke with US officials Talley and Sue Biniaz.





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For a moment it looked like developed nations would press the issue on the floor, sparking a fight that would reveal deep divisions over the pace of the world's pivot from fossil fuels. But Shoukry restarted the meeting and began calling up portions of the final documents, one after another, swiftly asking if there was any objection and then gaveling down in assent before any placards were raised. Timmermans sat stony faced, his eyes locked on Shoukry. Moments after applause marked the adoption of the main cover text—dubbed the Sharm El-Sheikh Implementation Plan—delegates from the US fled out the back.

Norway's Eide quickly followed. The mitigation work program could have been worse, he told reporters, and at least the ambition "does not scale down from Glasgow." But his glum face betrayed his disappointment.

Inside, some ministers were still seething. The final calculus, for many, was whether to demand last-minute changes and risk a floor fight that could cause the entire deal to collapse, taking the progress on loss and damage with it. But the disgruntled nations weren't united on their demands, and negotiators were exhausted after a sleepless final night. Shoukry had run out the clock.

"We are all tired—except, of course, for you, Mr. President," Timmermans said in an address a few moments later, an apparent thinly veiled reference to Shoukry's hands-off leadership. "We are faced with a moral dilemma because this deal is not enough on mitigation" but the alternative would be to "walk away and thereby kill a fund that vulnerable countries have fought so hard for for decades."

Sharma fumed that there were fights at every step. "Those of us who came to Egypt to keep 1.5 degrees alive and respect what every single one of us agreed to in Glasgow had to fight relentlessly to hold the line," he said. That target "remains on life support."

Tuvalu's foreign affairs minister, Simon Kofe, summed up the mix of success and failure that characterized the end of the summit in Egypt. Loss and damage counted as a tremendous gain: "It has been a long time coming—three long decades—and we have finally delivered climate justice," Kofe said. However, he added, "we haven't achieved an equal success" on emissions and that "has made Sharm El-Sheikh, regrettably, a missed opportunity for a truly successful COP." *With assistance from Akshat Rathi, Salma El Wardany and Antony Squazzin/Bloomberg.*

Image credits *AP/Peter Dejong AP/Zahid Hussain*



TITLE: *Greta Thunberg, 600 youths sue Sweden for climate inaction*

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# Greta Thunberg, 600 youths sue Sweden for climate inaction

STOCKHOLM (AFP) – More than 600 young people in Sweden, including climate activist Greta Thunberg, on Friday filed a lawsuit against the Swedish state, accusing it of climate inaction, a first in the country.

“There has never been such a large-scale case in the Swedish legal system,” Ida Edling, a member of the organization behind the lawsuit, Aurora, told AFP.

The lawsuit, symbolically submitted to the Stockholm district court during a protest

in the city on Friday, had previously been filed electronically to another Stockholm court, Aurora said.

The legal action, which has been in the works for two years, comes as Sweden’s new right-wing government faces mounting criticism over lackluster climate goals.

Moa Widmark, a 19-year-old student, said she was taking part in Friday’s demonstration because “the climate crisis is worrying and scary – we’re headed for a

catastrophe.”

While the lawsuit is a first in the Swedish courts, six Portuguese youths have taken Sweden and 32 other countries to the European Court of Human Rights accusing them of failing to adequately address the climate crisis.

“If we win, there will be a verdict that says the Swedish state is required to do its share of the global measures needed for the world to meet the 1.5 degree target,” Edling said.



Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg attends a climate demonstration called by youth-led organization Aurora before submitting its lawsuit against the state in Stockholm on Friday. AFP



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## Climate chaos is a crisis of biblical proportions

**COP27 concludes with much homework and little time. We are already halfway between the Paris Climate Agreement and the 2030 deadline.**

COP27 took place not far from Mount Sinai, a site that is central to many faiths and to the story of Moses, or Musa.

It's fitting. Climate chaos is a crisis of biblical proportions.

The signs are everywhere. Instead of a burning bush, we face a burning planet.

From the beginning, this conference has been driven by two overriding themes: justice and ambition.

Justice for those on the frontlines who did so little to cause the crisis – including the victims of the recent floods in Pakistan that inundated one-third of the country.

Ambition to keep the 1.5-degree limit alive and pull humanity back from the climate cliff.

This COP has taken an important step towards justice. I welcome the decision to establish a loss and damage fund and to operationalize it in the coming period.

Clearly this will not be enough, but it is a much-needed political signal to rebuild broken trust.

The voices of those on the frontlines of the climate crisis must be heard.

The UN system will support this effort every step of the way.

Justice should also mean several other things: finally making good on the long-delayed promise of \$100 billion a year in climate finance for developing countries; clarity and a credible roadmap to double adaptation finance; changing the business models of multilateral development banks and international financial institutions.

They must accept more risk and systematically leverage



**SECRETARY GENERAL UNITED NATIONS ANTONIO GUTERRES**

private finance for developing countries at reasonable costs.

But let's be clear. Our planet is still in the emergency room.

We need to drastically reduce emissions now – and this is an issue this COP did not address.

A fund for loss and damage is essential – but it's not an answer if the climate crisis washes a small island state off the map – or turns an entire African country to desert.

The world still needs a giant leap on climate ambition.

The red line we must not cross is the line that takes our planet over the 1.5-degree temperature limit.

To have any hope of keeping to 1.5, we need to massively invest in renewables and end our addiction to fossil fuels.

We must avoid an energy scramble in which developing countries finish last – as they did in the race for Covid-19 vaccines.

Doubling down on fossil fuels is double trouble. The Just Energy Transition Partnerships are important pathways to accelerate the phasing out of coal and scaling up renewables.

But we need much more. That's why I am pushing so hard for a Climate Solidarity Pact.

A Pact in which all countries make an extra effort to reduce emissions this decade in line with the 1.5-degree goal. And a Pact to mobilize – together with International Financial Institutions and the private sector – financial

and technical support for large emerging economies to accelerate their renewable energy transition.

This is essential to keep the 1.5-degree limit within reach – and for everyone to play their part.

COP27 concludes with much homework and little time. We are already halfway between the Paris Climate Agreement and the 2030 deadline.

We need all hands on deck to drive justice and ambition. This also includes ambition to end the suicidal war of nature that is fueling the climate crisis, driving species to extinction and destroying ecosystems.

Finally, justice and ambition require the essential voice of civil society.

The most vital energy source in the world is people power. That is why it is so important to understand the human rights dimension of climate action.

Climate advocates – led by the moral voice of young people – have kept the agenda moving through the darkest of days. They must be protected.

To all of them, I say we share your frustration. But we need you now more than ever.

Unlike the stories from the Sinai peninsula, we cannot wait for a miracle from a mountaintop.

It will take each and every one of us fighting in the trenches each and every day.

Together, let's not relent in the fight for climate justice and climate ambition. We can and must win this battle for our lives.

□□□

Excerpts from the Statement by the Secretary-General at the conclusion of COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.



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# Climate change reshapes life for gannets on Quebec isle

BY CALVIN WOODWARD, LYNN BERRY,  
CAROLYN KASTER & CHRISTINA LARSON  
*The Associated Press*

**P**ERCE, Quebec—On Quebec's Bonaventure Island, the ghosts of human habitation from years past and the birds that breed there now in extraordinary numbers tell the same story: of lives lived hard in a place of fairy-tale beauty.

You see this from the tender ages on the family gravestones of islanders who scratched out a living from the late 1700s to when Bonaventure went entirely to the birds a half century ago.

You see it from the tenacious colony of 100,000-plus northern gannets as they plunge into the sea for prey, soar back to their nests and fight at the least provocation, sometimes to the death, for their territory on a plateau high above the waters or in crannies of the cliffs.

Nothing is easy for the gannets. Not in this age of warming seas, competition with trawlers for fish, pollution, supercharged storms and the onset of avian flu.

That's especially so when those perils are combined with their curious compulsion, shared by many seabirds, to return each spring to the exact spot they left the year before. For these spirited divas, the next nesting spot over just won't do.

Worldwide, it remains difficult or impossible to tie any one massive die-off of seabirds or breeding calamity solely to global warming, for nature has its own jarring rhythms of abundance and deprivation.

But the evidence writ large, over decades, is unassailable: Warming and rising seas and the erratic weather events fueled by a changing climate are taking a heavy toll on seabirds. University of British Columbia researchers say seabird populations have fallen 70 percent since the mid-20th century.

Climate-related losses have, for example, hit albatrosses in the central Pacific, common murrens and Cassin's auklets along the US West Coast, puffins off the Maine coast, penguins in South Africa, endangered roseate terns off New England, and brown pelicans on vanishing islands off southeastern Louisiana.

The struggles of many seabird species occur in marine wilderness far from humans. Those of the Bonaventure gannets, however, play out in plain sight, in a gift to scientists and the public, on the protected grounds of the Quebec government's Parc national de l'Île-Bonaventure-et-du-Rocher-Perce.

The Bonaventure gannets display a "clumsy and funny little side on land which has nothing to do with what it is when it is at sea," said David Pelletier, a leading Quebec researcher of the birds.



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At sea the gannets are magnificent in their grace and power.

Using air currents off the water, they fly effortlessly high over the sea and dive nearly straight down in their hunt for fish, piercing the surface at 100 kilometers (60 miles) an hour like so many white missiles. Their black-tipped wings, which span 2 meters (6 feet), are tightly tucked behind them.

They dive in huge numbers near the island when mackerel—the prey that gives them the most energy—or herring or other smaller fish are abundant there.

It's a sight that amazes even the most seasoned scientists every time. "It's so wow," said Magella Guillemette, a pre-eminent gannet researcher at the University of Quebec in Rimouski, as he described watching the feeding frenzy from his small boat in the thick of it.

With the island less than 3 kilometers (under 2 miles) from the Perce harbor, these Bonaventure birds are remarkably accessible to biologists and visitors who hike on trails thick with wildflowers in summer to see the birds up close. The clamor of the birds greets the hikers even before the full colony comes into view.

The gannets, unlike many other seabirds, seem utterly indifferent to humans. They gaze right through you with their porcelain blue eyes.

"It's rare that we have the possibility to look at wild animals like this," said Marie-Dominique Nadeau-Girard, the park's services manager. "And they stay there, they don't look at you, they live their life, and you're just looking at them and learning."



**A PAIR of northern gannets greet each other by touching beaks on Bonaventure Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence off the coast of Quebec, Canada's Gaspé Peninsula on September 13, 2022. Scientists are tracking the threats to seabirds, like gannets, from climate change, overfishing and other perils wrought by humans. AP/CAROLYN KASTER**



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Guillemette's student researchers are busy each summer studying the birds. Over the years, they have put leg bands and GPS systems on hundreds of them. What's striking about gannets is that the researchers can simply pick them up, without fear of disturbing their nests.

"You just catch that bird," Guillemette said. "You weigh them, you put some devices on them and then you put it back to the nest and it's just staying there."

### The eco-sentinels

ALL of this makes the Bonaventure gannets ideal sentinels for the health of the marine ecosystem in the gulf and clattering storytellers to the planet. They form the world's second largest gannet colony and are easier to reach than the largest, on Scotland's remote Bass Island.

Quebec's on-the-ground experts on the colony, Canadian government biologists, and seabird scientists globally say there is little to no question that global warming is reshaping the lives of the northern gannets. Warmer sea temperatures drive their prey to cooler depths, distant waters or both.

But the full impact of climate change is not yet established and overfishing may be an even greater danger.

In tandem, the threats from fishing and warming are forcing the gannets to go farther from their Bonaventure nests in search of food for their island chicks and themselves. The distance the birds fly on a single fishing trip has more than doubled in recent years to an average of 500 kilometers (300 miles), leaving one mate and the chick waiting several days or longer to be fed by the hunter, Guillemette said.

If the mate on the nest gets too weak from hunger, it may fly off for food, too, leaving the young one to starve or to wander from the nest

and risk being killed by an adult. Like many seabirds, adult gannets are highly territorial and may kill any intruders to their nesting areas; AP journalists witnessed two such deadly attacks on the young on a day shortly before the winter migration.

Researchers have been able to draw a strong correlation between the supply of mackerel in the gulf and the number of chicks produced. In 2012, when there were almost no mackerel, only 4 percent of the nests produced a chick, Guillemette said, a record low attributed to unusually warm waters that year.

Since then, productivity has been highly variable year to year while remaining low on average, said seabird biologist Jean-François Rail of the Canadian Wildlife Service, an agency of Environment and Climate Change Canada.

"Everything points in the direction of reduced availability of mackerel and herring, which results in lower breeding success," he said.

What's clear is that birds now need to work harder to find food. Beginning in 2012, Guillemette's researchers began outfitting gannets with a GPS device, in little boxes taped above their tails, which lets them track how far they fly, how deep they dive, and how many times they dive each day.

In March, just as the spring fishing season was opening, Canada shut commercial fishing for Atlantic mackerel and spring herring in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence, saying stocks had entered a "critical zone." Earlier efforts to restore stocks failed, in part because warmer waters had depleted the microscopic crustaceans that are the main food for the fish.

Mackerel is a star of the gulf ecosystem, not only for gannets. They're prized as a commercial species as well as bait for the

lucrative lobster, crab and tuna fisheries. The gulf's abundant grey seals gobble as many as they can get. With all the competition for food, gannets have found ways to adapt, but at a cost.

This year, the Bonaventure colony also had to contend with the avian flu. The contamination rate was high in the spring, Guillemette said, but faded. Other colonies in Canada had it much worse.

### Colony life

OVER winter, northern gannets are solitary birds that live widely dispersed on the water—along the Atlantic coast from Maine to Florida, some even in the Gulf of Mexico. But mates reunite year after year on their breeding grounds, for 15 years or so, producing one chick each season.

They have a monogamous nature and an elaborate means of communicating mate to mate. In gannet-speak, a beak turned skyward signals it's time to go forage; mates clacking their bills together as if in a swordfight signal a welcome home after the hunt.

You might think they are lovebirds; alas, these sentinels are not sentimental.

"People are more romantic and think they are faithful to their partner, but it's not the case," Nadeau-Girard says with a laugh. "The gannet is faithful to his territory, his nest."

"And if the baby goes out of the nest, the parents won't recognize him because ... they recognize the nest, not the individual. Each time they see each other it's like they meet for the first time."

The nests are only 80 centimeters (30 inches) apart, center-to-center, and these are sizable birds. At certain vantage points, the colony appears as a carpet of white as far as the eye can see, dotted with the dark-feathered young ones, and all of it against the backdrop of sea and sky.

The birds arrive in April, lay their eggs in May and tend them until they hatch more than 40 days later. Then it's three months of raising the chicks. By the time of the southern migration in late September or early October, the young are plenty plump, weighing 1 kilogram (over 2 pounds) more than their parents. The extra fat will sustain them at sea as they learn to fly and dive for fish.

There are no training wheels for the portly juveniles. Instead, lots of practice beating their wings on the ground, followed by a departure from the cliffs that is part flight, part plop.

If they survive that, the journey south will teach them their grace and power on the wing and into the deep.

### A mystical landscape

FROM the town of Perce, the mainland cliffs with the red-roofed houses, the commanding Perce Rock and Bonaventure Island make for an iconic panorama, and a mystical one for the people of the Gaspé Peninsula and travelers from around the world.

When boats bring visitors to the island, park employees corral them to explain the trails and what they can and cannot do. Services are primarily in French. On a September day, the multilingual Rudiger Spraul pulled aside the English-speaking visitors to give them the drill.

He came from Germany, fell in love with the place and spent the summer and early fall working for the park until it closed last month after the gannets left for the winter. He looked out on the colony every day from a small food operation where visitors can picnic and hope they aren't leeward of the day's winds, for the colony can stink.

"It gave me so much peace that I decided I'm going to stay here," he said. "I'm actually an engineer. Now I'm selling sandwiches on this lonesome spot."

"The island is such a beautiful small little paradise. It's like time stands still there. You go there, you see that old houses, no people living for so many years, but still you can get the impression how it was there, how hard it was."

The island was settled in the late 18th century by cod fishermen, reaching its population peak of 172 in 1831. The last remaining families left in 1971 when it was taken over by the government to become part of the park.

Altogether, some 250,000 birds inhabit the teardrop-shaped island, about 3 kilometers (under 2 miles) at its longest. Seals frequent the rocks and shore and whales are a common sight. Foxes poke from island bushes and snag an occasional gannet on the colony's periphery.

They're all out making a living in a changing ecosystem that tests the ability of creatures great and small to adapt.

"The northern gannet is, for me, a resilient species, strong, capable of 'turning on a dime' ... as we say in Quebec, 'se tourner sur un 10 cents,'" said Pelletier, a teacher-researcher at Cegep de Rimouski, a public college.

How much and how fast must they pivot as their habitat and our planet continue to warm? What fish will be there for them in the spring, and how far and how deep will they be? Bonaventure's sentinels will be back next year to tell more of that tale.

Larson reported from Washington.



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**Global wildlife summit  
OKs shark protections**

A historic decision reached in Panama City on Friday could drastically reduce the lucrative and cruel shark fin trade. Approved was a plan to protect 54 more shark species.

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**HISTORIC MOVE AIMED AT CURBING LUCRATIVE FIN TRADE**

# GLOBAL WILDLIFE SUMMIT APPROVES SHARK PROTECTIONS

PANAMA CITY—Delegates at a global summit on trade in endangered species on Friday approved a plan to protect 54 more shark species, a move that could drastically reduce the lucrative and cruel shark fin trade.

Members of the requiem shark and the hammerhead shark families will now have their trade tightly controlled under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The binding resolutions were adopted by consensus on the final day of the two-week meeting by delegates from 183 countries and the European Union, which takes

place every two or three years.

“Proposal 37 approved,” said Panamanian delegate and head of the plenary Shirley Binder of the requiem shark proposal, after Japan failed in getting the blue shark removed from the measure.

The proposal regarding the hammerhead shark passed without debate.

Binder earlier told Agence France-Presse (AFP) the “historic decision” would mean up to 90 percent of sharks in the market would now be protected.

Insatiable appetite in Asia for shark fins, which make their way onto dinner tables in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan, has

spurred their trade.

Despite being described as almost tasteless and gelatinous, shark fin soup is viewed as a delicacy and is enjoyed by the very wealthy, often at weddings and expensive banquets.

Shark fins, representing a market of about \$500 million per year, can sell for about \$1,000 a kilogram (2.2 pounds).

### From villain to darling

“This will be remembered as the day we turned the tide to prevent the extinction of the world’s sharks and rays,” said Luke Warwick, director of shark protection for the NGO Wildlife

Conservation Society (WCS).

The shark species will now be listed on what is known as CITES Appendix II, which is for species that may not yet be threatened with extinction but may become so unless trade in them is closely controlled.

Sharks have long been seen as the villain of the seas they have occupied for more than 400 million years, drawing horror with their depiction in films, such as “Jaws” and occasional attacks on humans.

However, these ancient predators have undergone an image makeover in recent years as conservationists have highlighted the crucial role they play in reg-

ulating the ocean ecosystem.

Joaquin de la Torre of the International Fund for Animal Welfare, told AFP that more than 100 million sharks are killed every year. “Sharks and rays are the most threatened species, more even than elephants and big cats.”

With many shark species taking more than 10 years to reach sexual maturity, and having a low fertility rate, the constant hunting of the species has decimated their numbers. In many parts of the world, fishermen lop the shark’s fins off at sea, tossing the shark back into the ocean for a cruel death by suffocation or blood loss.

The efforts by conservationists

led to a turning point in 2013, when CITES imposed the first trade restrictions on some shark species.

Delegates have been considering 52 proposals to change the protection levels of more than 600 species.

They also approved new protections for the guitarfish ray, crocodiles, frogs and some turtle species.

“Many of the proposals adopted here reflect there is ongoing overexploitation and unsustainable trade, and escalating illegal trade, and some are due to complex interactions of other threats reducing species populations





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## GLOBAL WILDLIFE SUMMIT APPROVES SHARK PROTECTIONS

**FROM A2**

in the wild, including climate  
change, disease, infrastructure

development and habitat  
loss," said Susan Liberman of  
WCS.

CITES, which came into  
force in 1975, has set inter-

national trade rules for more  
than 36,000 wild species.

Its signatories include 183  
countries and the European  
Union. —AFP