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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE



Yulo-Loyzaga: From the ivory tower to the environmental frontlines

By VIRGILIO DC. GALVEZ

It's been a year since Toni Yulo-Loyzaga has moved out from the ivory tower, as it were, down to the frontlines – to lead the fight to preserve, protect, and bring back to life, what some would say, the remains of the country's natural resources.

In keeping perhaps with her persona, she has quietly adopted innovative ways to enable the DENR bureaucracy to work together in achieving goals she has set during her watch.

Navigating her way through what she has described as the department's silos has been "very challenging".

"We've had to deal with a lot of legacy issues, as you know, and we've had to deal with some cultures and practices that are part of the history of this department," says Yulo-Loyzaga without elaborating in an interview.

Innovations

Yulo-Loyzaga has laid down the infrastructure which will provide her department with the data she needs to make difficult, and maybe even controversial, but science-based decisions in the days ahead.

She has brought in two new under-secretaries – one to oversee organizational transformation and the training of the "next generation leadership" of the department, and another known expert in the field of environmental science to manage a geo-spatial database.

"These two achievements, along with the organization of the Water Resources Management Office, I hope will characterize our first year as the introduction of evidence-based decision making in this department," says Yulo-Loyzaga.

She explains that the geo-spatial database aims to properly account for, value, and manage our country's natural resources, as well as a basis to identify priority areas for forestation, reforestation, and afforestation.

It can detect encroachment on public coastal areas, illegal mining activities, and industries without necessary permits and pinpoint water systems that can be developed for hydropower and water supply.

Mindoro oil spill

Even as she puts her department in



DENR SECRETARY Toni Yulo-Loyzaga

order, Yulo-Loyzaga has had to go out to the field to deal with a different set of challenges.

In February this year, a fuel tanker sank off Naujan, Mindoro Oriental and spewed out about 800,000 liters of oil resulting in damages amounting to over a billion pesos.

Yulo-Loyzaga flew out to check on the situation, met with the governor and the coast guard, and deployed a hydrographer ship to locate the sunken vessel.

"We needed to find out where the oil was heading. For that, we turned to the UP Marine Science Institute. We were able to anticipate the flow towards the shore," she says.

Water quality has since improved in most areas affected by the oil spill. She however takes pains to point out it is the local government that can best monitor and protect the environment.

"We are not there 24 hours, we are undermanned as a department. But the local gov't is present and they do have environment officers...and we will support them," she says.

Reclamation at Manila Bay

Yulo-Loyzaga has also begun to look into the multi-billion peso (P330.6 billion) reclamation projects in Manila Bay.

"Reclamation, of course, is one way forward in terms of the economic development of the different areas. However, we need a thorough approach that welcomes different perspectives from all groups," she told reporters.

A task force composed of Filipino scientists and foreign experts will be formed this month to conduct an evaluation of the environmental impact of the ongoing reclamation projects.

An initial assessment has already shown possible violations and the DENR is reviewing the ECC issued to the contractors to check for compliance.

El Nino and Water Security

Yulo-Loyzaga sees water security as a priority and immediate concern, especially with El Nino looming large on the horizon.

"Conservation is on top of our list. But we are also ramping up efforts at installing water collection facilities in areas projected to be hit hard by El Nino," she says.

PAGASA has projected that most areas will experience below-normal rainfall conditions from November 2023 to January 2024.

The creation of the Department's Water Resources Management Office (WRMO) is expected to spur efforts at ensuring "universal access to safe, sufficient, affordable, and sustainable water supply, sanitation, and hygiene by 2030."

A resilient future

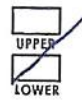
Having been executive director of the Jesuit-run Manila Observatory from 2007-2016, Yulo-Loyzaga has long adopted a science-based approach to sustainable development and poverty reduction.

With five years to go, Yulo-Loyzaga has wasted no time in doing what she thinks needs to be done to accomplish the goals she has set during her watch.

The bespectacled professor-scientist with a hairdo that has sparked comparisons online with the Edna Mode character in the movie *Incredibles* is more than ready to fight in the environmental frontlines.

With a growing consensus among scientists that the world's climate has gone beyond the tipping point, Yulo-Loyzaga has the credentials to help steer the country towards a resilient future.

(Virgilio DC. Galvez is a freelance journalist, a writer, student of history, and development management specialist. He was deputy director general of the Philippine Information Agency (PIA) in 2010-2016, and president of the Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines (FOCAP) in 2004-2005.)



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The Metro Pacific Investments Foundation celebrates the 15th anniversary of its environmental flagship program, 'Shore It Up!' Gracing the occasion are (from left) Rep. Edgar Chatto, Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, Sen. Cynthia Villar, Department of Tourism Undersecretary Shereen Gail Yu-Pamintuan and Metro Pacific Investments Corp. chief financial officer Chaye Cabal-Revilla.

Shore It Up! marks 15th anniversary, renews pledge to guard shorelines

By Paola Navarette

CELEBRATING the 15th anniversary of its environmental flagship program "Shore It Up! (SIU)," the Metro Pacific Investments Foundation (MPIF) bared its plans for the future and highlighted the need for collective efforts in preserving and conserving marine biodiversity.

"In the next five years of SIU, we plan to provide livelihood, create more blue carbon, and help mitigate climate change. Let it be a call to action for individuals, businesses, and governments to unite and work together in preserving our beautiful shorelines and securing the brighter, more sustainable future," said MPIF president Melody del Rosario.

With the theme "Enlarging Our Blue Footprint for PH Marine Biodiversity Conservation," the event was highlighted by the launch of Shore it Up mobile application, which would allow instant updates and actionable insights for SIU volunteers.

"This application will not only encourage participation and engage our partners in our programs and event initiatives, but also create a sense of community among our members, scuba divers, enthusiasts, and volunteers," said del Rosario.

Joining the blue revolution are environmental stakeholders Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, who said her office would continue to implement a ridge-to-reef approach to contribute to the enrichment of coastal areas, and Department of Tourism Undersecretary Shereen Gail Yu-Pamintuan, who will further support local communities by providing community-based tourism industry training.

Senate Committee Chair on Environment and Natural Resources Cynthia Villar said she has been actively promoting organic farming to reduce carbon footprint and create healthier soil.

"So far, we have been distributing composting machines all over the Philippines to produce organic fertilizer so we don't have to buy chemical fertilizer anymore. A typical city in Metro Manila would typically spend P400 million to throw away their waste—if you help recycle, we can save P300 million a year because we recycle 3/4th of our waste," she said.

Bohol congressman Rep. Edgar Chatto pushes to save the seas by promoting a whole-of-nation approach to climate change. **With Erica Cayme and Zofia Tadeo**



Intervention needed to address full cycle of plastics—advocates

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

[@jonlmayuga](#)

ADVOCATES of a toxic-free environment welcome the initiative of the government in investing in climate-neutral approaches and direction toward a circular economy. However, BAN Toxics Inc. said a more sustainable approach to address the concerns of overproduction and consumption is needed as the country embarks on the full implementation of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) law, particularly on plastic packaging waste.

BAN Toxics Policy Development and Research Head Jashaf Shamir A. Lorenzo issued the statement in reaction to recent policy pronouncements of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) serves as the lead responsible agency and has released the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of Republic Act 11898.

As DENR chief, Yulo-Loyzaga is spearheading the campaign to enjoin big companies to implement waste-recovery programs to reduce plastic waste production. Recently, the DENR chief also announced the move to explore co-processing with cement companies to make use of plastic waste as fuel in the production of cement.

"While the EPR law focuses on waste management, particularly on waste reduction, recovery and recycling, and circularity in plastics, it should be complemented with interventions and solutions that address the full lifecycle of plastic," Lorenzo was quoted in a statement as saying.

"The implications of the existing EPR model, which primarily centers on the end-of-life phase, must be taken into account. We don't want to end up incentivizing producers, distributors, and retailers with tax deductions and fiscal incentives for recovery schemes that include 'thermal treatment' and 'pollutive' waste diversion and disposal technologies such as incineration, pyrolysis, or waste-to-fuel," he explained. "There is a clear necessity to amplify efforts to cover the entire lifecycle of plastics, from the extraction of the raw

materials, and promoting the eco-design of products, to reducing and minimizing waste generation during the production process to enhance the efficacy of the legislation."

The group believes "reducing plastic use is the most effective means of avoiding plastic waste. Therefore, EPR implementation must be guided by principles of sustainable production, consumption, and zero waste to reduce plastic use substantially. Strengthening it requires addressing the plastic governance across its lifecycle, with a priority on upstream solutions."

"Our policies and regulations would benefit from a systems change approach to tackle the root causes of plastic pollution. A significant reduction in plastic use could be achieved by focusing on redesigning products based on their societal function and transitioning towards sustainable plastic alternatives. We need stronger commitments from the industry to move away from non-ecologically acceptable packaging towards more sustainable alternatives and innovations."

According to BAN Toxics, banning single-use plastics, which are primarily derived from plastic packaging, is a practical solution to prevent plastics from burdening waste management systems.

"Banning has been shown to prevent tons of plastics from entering the waste stream and coastal pollution, as demonstrated by local and global practices," said BAN Toxics.

The group noted that President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. urged Congress in his second State Of the Nation Address to pass a law that will impose excise taxes on single-use plastics instead of banning them. Numerous bills and resolutions have been introduced in both chambers of Congress aiming to ban single-use plastics without significant progress.

The EPR law (RA 11898) represents the first amendment to the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act.

BAN Toxics has been engaged in international negotiations pertaining to a legally binding global plastics treaty to end plastic pollution. "It is important that this global plastic treaty addresses plastic production at its core and incorporates provisions to freeze and phase down plastic production."



Sen. Cynthia Villar to seek SC intervention vs Manila Bay reclamation project

By MARIO CASAYURAN

Senator Cynthia Villar wants the Supreme Court (SC) to step in and stop the ongoing Manila Bay reclamation project.

As chairperson of the Senate Environment Committee, Villar also said she would call for a Senate inquiry into the project.

On Dec. 18, 2008, the Supreme Court issued SC Mandamus on Manila Bay (G.R. 171947-48) directing 13 government agencies to clean up, rehabilitate, and preserve Manila Bay, and restore and maintain its waters to SB level to make them fit for swimming, skin-diving, and other forms of contact recreation.

Villar emphasized that there were no consultations on the project but that officials concerned just "signed and signed" the contract papers.

"Yan ang pinagawayan natin ni Director Honrado at (former Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Roy) Cimatu ▶ 4

bigay sila ng bigay ng ECC (environmental certificate of compliance). (We had a fight with Honrado and Cimatu over their issuance of ECCs. Di sila nag-aaral ano effect nyan long-term (They did not undertake studies on its long-term effect) Look at Jakarta now, it is underwater, baka ganun mangyari sa atin (We might experience the same thing as Jakarta)," she pointed out.

"The Manila Bay is ours, owned by government and people bakit makikinabang ang private sector yang outlet ng water natin coming from cities, municipalities and provinces (why should the private sector benefit. It is the outlet of water coming from the cities, municipalities and provinces)," she said.

The lady legislator from Las Piñas city said waters from the upland areas of Cavite flow from Las Piñas to Manila Bay.

"I always fought against the reclamation of Manila Bay," she added.

Villar recalled that there were orders suspending the reclamation project.

"Kaya lang matitigas ang ulo, ayaw tumigil. Sana pumara muna at

makita ano ang permanent damage sa Metro Manila para di rin sila magkagasta baka gagawa sila tapos aayusin ang damage (They were hardheaded and they continued with the project. They should see the permanent damage to Metro Manila but they kept on spending)," she added.

Legality of reclamation project

Senator Joseph Victor "JV" Ejercito is wary about the legality of the Manila Bay reclamation project.

Ejercito said he would let the executive branch--through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)--do its work first before making a decision on whether or not he would file a resolution seeking a Senate inquiry.

"Kung kailangan ng in aid of legislation I will file a reso pero kausapin ko rin ang majority, si SP Zubiri (Senate President Juan Miguel Zubiri) sa plano ko (I will talk to the Senate majority and Senate President Zubiri if there is a need for a Senate probe in aid of legislation)," he said.

DENR Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga recently said that her department would form a team to re-

view all ongoing reclamation activities amid the controversy regarding the involvement of a Chinese company in a Manila Bay project.

"The public will be updated when the team is formed," Loyzaga said, adding that the DENR would also tap foreign experts to assist the panel in conducting the review.

The United States (US) embassy in Manila had earlier raised with the Philippine government its concerns over ongoing reclamation projects in Manila Bay and the project's ties with a Chinese firm blacklisted by the US for helping Beijing construct and militarize artificial islands in the South China Sea.

Senator Sherwin Gatchalian has maintained that processes were observed involving the 318-hectare reclamation project of the Waterfront Manila Premier Development Inc. (MWPDI) led by the senator's family.

Ejercito lamented that the charm of Manila, the famous Manila Bay sunset, would only be enjoyed by the rich.

He also questioned whether the city of Manila has the right to part with the country's patrimonial properties.



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Editorial

Impact of Manila Bay reclamation needs thorough scrutiny

THE Department of Environment and Natural Resources is reviewing the reclamation projects in the Manila Bay to assess their cumulative impact on the environment.

Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said a team would be formed to conduct the assessment. Experts will be called in to assist the team.

The findings of the team will determine the next steps that the DENR will take. One possible scenario is that the projects found to have an adverse impact on the bay's environmental well-being could be suspended until the deficiencies are addressed.

Land has been reclaimed from the Manila Bay since the 19th century, but it was in 1977 when the first large-scale reclamation operation was carried out. More than 600 hectares were converted into real estate on which the Cultural Center of the Philippines complex and adjoining structures, including the Mall of Asia, were built.

Since then, other projects that will forever change Manila Bay's beachfront have been envisioned. In 2017, the Manila city government approved four major reclamation projects totaling 1,342 hectares. Not to be outdone, Pasay City came with its own 265-hectare reclamation project.

As of last year, the Philippine Reclamation Authority had received 25 reclamation proposals for Manila Bay and had approved six.

The DENR review casts an ominous cloud of uncertainty over those projects.

Yulo-Loyzaga made it clear that the DENR is authorized to review or modify reclamation contracts. "Until we get a very good sense of what scientifically is going to happen in this area and until we can get a good sense of how the rule of law can be followed in this area, we want to proceed with much caution," she said.

What happened in the case of Manila Bay is that "individual projects were somehow processed without taking into consideration the cumulative impact of all the projects together. This is actually critical for future use," she said.

One environmental watchdog, Oceana, is demanding prompt action and is calling for a halt to all reclamation activities in the bay while the impact assessment is being carried out.

"Time is of the essence. The DENR cannot be reviewing all these projects without exercising precaution. It is clear that these projects have already started and resulted in an alarming degradation of the environment, destroying the mangroves, denying fisherfolk their fishing livelihood and sources of food, and the destruction of seagrass and the seabed by dredging," one Oceana official said.

A stop to all reclamation activities is also being pushed by the fisherfolk advocacy group Pamalakaya. It blamed the reclamation projects for the worsening flooding in the northern part of the bay.

The Pamalakaya complaint may hold water. The 1,994-square-kilometer Manila Bay, which is bounded by Cavite, Metro Manila, Bulacan, Pampanga and Bataan, drains rainwater from watershed areas. The runoff water naturally flows into the bay. If the flow is impeded, the rainwater is trapped, spawning widespread and lingering floods.

Geophysical risks such as land subsidence, storm surge and earthquake-generated liquefaction could also threaten communities and structures built on reclaimed land, geologists warn.

Reclamation proponents must be cringing at the prospect of their multimillion investment frozen by a suspension order from the DENR, keenly aware that delays can wreak havoc on deadlines and bloat budgets.

Reclamation operations were challenged in 2012, when the then Las Piñas representative Cynthia Villar, representing 315,849 Las Piñas residents, petitioned the Supreme Court for a writ of kalikasan to stop the project of Alltech Contractors, which she claimed threatened the Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area, a mangrove forest and marine sanctuary along Manila Bay's coast.

In 2021, the court denied Villar's petition, saying that Alltech had complied with all the government requirements for its project.

It may have been a victory of sorts for reclamation proponents, but their celebration may be shortlived.

The DENR must guarantee that the assessment will be a fair, judicious and transparent process. But it must carefully weigh the proposal to suspend all reclamation activities even before it releases its findings. It can only resort to that option if it can provide an acceptable timeline for completing the assessment.



FACTS ABOUT THE MANILA WATERFRONT RECLAMATION PROJECT

Waterfront Manila Premier Development, Inc (Waterfront Manila), the Joint Venture Partner of the **City Government of Manila** clarifies its position on the recent allegations circulating on the alleged opposition of the US Embassy against the Manila Waterfront City Reclamation Project.

The initial concerns of the US Embassy which were communicated to the City of Manila pertain only to the flooding that they experienced last August 2022, and possible heavy traffic flow in the area. Moreover, in coordination with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), the US Embassy would simply like to participate in a discussion on the possible environmental effects and a better understanding of land reclamation. However, to Waterfront Manila's surprise, the matter has been blown out of proportion and was hyped up by media, adversely affecting the members of the Gatchalian family.

For the record:

The City of Manila and its Developer, Waterfront Manila are **compliant** with all the requirements of the **Philippine Reclamation Authority (PRA)**, including the **payment of regulatory fees of about Pph800 Million to the government**. The 318-hectare Manila Waterfront City Reclamation Project (the "Project") with the City of Manila has been given a **Notice to Proceed (NTP)** and **Notice to Mobilize (NTM)** and/or **Notice to Commence Actual Reclamation Works (NTCARW)** by the **PRA**. Several government offices interposed **no objection** to the Project. The Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) was issued by the DENR. The Project was studied and master-planned by AECOM, a US based company. The Project involves billions of dollars worth of investment that is expected to immediately spur economic activities across business sectors and immediately generate around 100,000 employment opportunities, billions of taxes and the much-needed income to the country, in general and to the City Government of Manila and its constituents in particular. Reclamation has socio-economic benefits well recognized by the State as early as the time of then President Marcos, Sr. This has been continued with the successful establishment of the CCP Complex, Mall of Asia (MOA) and the like. In fact, the US Embassy sits on a reclaimed land.

For the record:

The Project did not commence reclama-

tion works last August 2022. Thus, it cannot be the cause of the flooding within the US Embassy area. Flooding and traffic have been perennial problems even without reclamation in Manila Bay.

As for the recent issue on national security, the Project has complied with the requirements of the DENR to make sure of the safe passage of vessels and that the distance of the Project from the US Embassy will not to impede the natural flow of water, and security protocol, as necessary.

For the record:

The DENR, in its letter dated 02 March 2022 gave **CLEARANCE** to the Project as to its compliance with the conditions to the Notice to Mobilize (NTM) and Notice to Commence Actual Reclamation Works (NTCARW) issued to the Project.

It was clarified that DENR only requires coordination with the Philippine Navy (PN) relative to their requirements on safe passage, and the proponent has secured clarification from PN which satisfies the said condition stated in the Area Clearance issued by the DENR.

As to the issue of the eligibility of the Project's EPC Contractor, **CHINA FIRST HIGHWAY ENGINEERING CORP. (CFHEC)** is not backlisted by the World Bank. **CHINA COMMUNICATIONS CONSTRUCTION COMPANY LTD. (CCCC)** is a separate juridical entity from CFHEC. Moreover, the Project is not funded by the World Bank but by the Private Proponent/Developer, Waterfront Manila and **at no cost to the government**. In fact, the National Government will get **51% share** of the reclaimed land once the Project is completed.

For the record:

In a letter dated 30 April 2018, the DENR-EIAM Division invited the US Embassy to attend the Public Hearing of the proposed Project scheduled last 21 May 2018 as part of the proponent's application for an Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC). Despite receipt of the DENR letter invitation, no representative from the US Embassy attended the said Public Hearing as shown on the Public Hearing Attendance Sheet.

Likewise, there were public scoping and consultations held in 2017 and 2018. Based on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIS) approved by DENR, the US Embassy was invited but likewise did not attend the hearing.

DENR-EMB Meetings:

a. **Public Scoping – 19 December 2017;**

b. **Public Consultations – May 7 and May 14, 2018;**

c. **Public Hearing – 21 May 2018**

Further, the US Embassy further sent its representative in the PRA's initial rationalization plan meeting sometime on January 17, 2019.

In all these meetings/consultations, the US Embassy did not object or file a comment as to the Manila Waterfront Reclamation Project.

More importantly, the Project Proponents have ensured in the Project's plans that there is enough distance from the shore to the reclaimed land. This plan was incorporated and **submitted in its Detailed Engineering Design (DED) last 05 December 2019 and resubmitted in its Final Landform Design last 10 September 2020** to the PRA. Likewise, the Proponents have mitigation plans on environmental effects submitted to the PRA and the DENR.

The Project Proponents assure the public that the Project has all the necessary permits. They will comply with all government regulations, as they continue to do so, as well as their unwavering commitment to preserve and protect the environment and not to endanger national security. The Project Proponents remain committed to abide by all environmental laws and regulations to ensure that there will be no violations that will prejudice every Filipino people. The Private Proponents are open to working together and commits to cooperate with all stakeholders including the US Embassy to address all concerns.

The Project Proponents recognize that there is a way to harmonize industrial development with the preservation and protection of the environment. Bearing this in mind, the world-class reclamation development envisioned by the City of Manila is in furtherance of **its Vision of becoming "the premier city of the Philippines, mindful of its glorious past and conscious of its exciting future."**



Antiporda in a bind on dumpsite issue

THE Commission on Audit (COA) has charged that former Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Undersecretary for Solid Waste Management Benny Antiporda misrepresented the situation on the closure of dumpsites when he announced in May 2021 that all open dumpsites in the country have ceased operations.

“In 2021, the DENR announced the successful closing of all dumpsites nationwide. However, our validation from March to April 2022 revealed that not all dumpsites were successfully closed,” the audit team said.

Antiporda, an erstwhile National Irrigation Administration (NIA) head, was

put under six-month preventive suspension without pay by the Office of the Ombudsman while under investigation.

The case stemmed from complaints by the agency’s employees accusing him of grave misconduct, harassment, and oppression.

“After a careful evaluation of the

records, this Office finds that among the respondents, respondent **Benny D. Antiporda’s** guilt is strong and that the case against him involves Grave Misconduct, Conduct Prejudicial to the Best Interest of the Service, and Oppression, which may warrant his removal from service,” the Ombudsman said.

Later, President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr. appointed Pidig, Ilocos Norte Mayor Eduardo Guillen to replace Antiporda at the NIA.

More than 70 percent of local government units (LGUs) have no access to landfills, the CoA also said.

Only 478 or 29 percent of 1,634 local

government units in the country have access to operational sanitary landfills according to 2021 data from the DENR-Environmental Management Bureau at the National Solid Waste Management Council (NSWMC).

The figures were cited in the **May 2, 2023 Performance Audit Report** of the CoA on the Solid Waste Management Program.

“As of 2021, the country has 245 total operational Sanitary Landfills (SLFs) servicing 478 (29.25 percent) of 1,634 LGUs. Due to the limitation in disposal facilities, the operation of the illegal dumpsites could not be avoided in some LGUs,” the government auditors said.

Korea helps PH combat marine plastic pollution

To aid the current plastic pollution situation, South Korea grants \$9 million assistance to the Philippines and Timor-Leste to combat marine plastics pollution in their respective countries.

The six-year initiative called "Reducing Marine Plastics in the East Asian Seas Region" aims to improve the management of marine plastics in two countries through science-based governance, innovative solutions to promote circular economy, regular beach monitoring on marine plastics, relevant training, and community awareness drive.

The project will be implemented in 10 sites including the four coastal municipalities of Atauro, Manatuto, Liquica, and Dili in Timor-Leste and six coastal communities of the municipalities of Bulan and Daanbantayan, and the cities of Calbayog, Dipolog, Puerto Princesa, and Tandag in the Philippines.

East Asia is considered an ecologically important region,



■ Government representatives from Korea, Philippines and Timor-Leste convene to discuss strategies in reducing marine plastic pollution in selected sites in East Asia. PHOTO COURTESY OF PEMSEA/JOHN CASTILLO

being home to one-third of the planet's coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds. But it is also a hotspot for marine pollution including plastics. The Philippines is considered as one of the top five contributors to marine plastic pollution globally, while Timor-Leste is facing challenges in managing its wastes and plastics due to poor infrastructure and challenging geography.

In 2019, Asean adopted the

Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in Asean Region and the Asean Framework of Action on Marine Debris, aiming to reduce marine debris in the region by 75 percent in 2025.

South Korea has been advocating for the reduction of marine plastics pollution in recent years. In 2021, the third basic plan of Korea was established to reduce marine plastic waste generation by 60 percent in 2030, and an ambitious zero waste by 2050 through the life-cycle management system that involves marine debris generation, collection, treatment, and recycling.

"Through this project, we hope to contribute to enhance the capacities for combating marine debris and plastic pollution in the Philippines and Timor-Leste with opportunities to share experiences and best practices on RO Korea's marine plastic wastes management policies and recycling technologies," said Sunhyung Ryu, Director of Marine Conservation Division of the Ministry of Oceans

and Fisheries (MOF).

South Korea's MOF partners with Partnerships in Environmental Management for Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), a regional coordinating mechanism for the sustainable development of coastal and marine resources in the region, to implement the project.

"These pro-active local, national and regional actions to combat plastics are happening globally, with governments placing significant importance on the issue. Negotiations to establish a global treaty to manage plastics are ongoing. Such actions are crucial: if marine plastic pollution is not addressed now, it is predicted that there will be more plastics than fish in the ocean by 2050," said Aimee Gonzales, Executive Director of PEMSEA.

The project is also collaborating with the Philippines Department of Environment and Natural Resources and its relevant bureaus as well as Timor-Leste Secretary of State of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.



■ Single-use plastic litters the marine waters of coastal areas in the Philippines, particularly those near commercial establishments and public markets. PHOTO COURTESY OF PEMSEA/RIZZA DEJUCOS



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DENR WANTS MORE COMPANIES TO JOIN EFFORT

ONLY 17% OF FIRMS COMPLY WITH PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT

By Jane Bautista
@janebautista

Only 16.55 percent, or 662 out of around 4,000 enterprises registered with the Department of Trade and Industry, have so far submitted their programs for the proper management of plastic packaging waste.

Based on the data of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) as of July, 508 of those 662 enterprises are producer responsibility organizations—entities which practice packaging waste recycling—and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

“At this point, we appeal for support from the private sector

and partners in disseminating the information about our EPR implementation,” Environment Undersecretary Jonas Leones said during an EPR campaign launching on Aug. 4.

He was referring to the requirement—under Republic Act No. 11898 or the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Act—for enterprises to manage their plastic packaging waste.

Leones said the private sector could help formulate an industry-led roadmap on managing marine litter and establishing a national network to promote recycling.

Industries could also promote EPR sustainability collaboration and support research

and development on products that are not environmentally acceptable, he said.

‘Obligated enterprises’

The DENR has partnered with the United Nations Development Programme for a nationwide campaign called “LOOPFORWARD: Linking Opportunities and Partnerships Towards Circular Economy through EPR.”

The department said the campaign would emphasize the relevance of the EPR concept and law, gather insights from stakeholders, and also convene the biggest private firms referred to as “obligated enterprises” under RA 11898.

“We’re expecting more obligated enterprises to submit their programs as they become more aware of the modes of implementation and other activities under the law,” Leones said.

According to Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga, the country generates an estimated 61,000 metric tons of solid waste every day.

“We use—as we hear in estimates—more than 163 million plastic sachet packets, 48 million shopping bags, and 45 million thin-film bags a day, 33 percent of which is disposed of in landfills and dumpsites and around 35 percent is actually leaked into the open environment and eventually into our

oceans and fields,” Loyzaga said at the launching.

Through the EPR Act, obligated enterprises are required to establish their EPR programs, guided by two goals: reduce nonenvironment-friendly packaging products and introduce recovery programs that will prevent waste from leaking into the environment.

Incentives, penalties

The National Ecology Center will evaluate the proposed EPR programs to see whether these are compliant with the law.

Once approved, the programs will be given an EPR registry number, then endorsed to the National Solid Waste Man-

agement Commission and the Environmental Management Bureau office, Leones said.

Companies that will implement effective solid waste management programs are entitled to fiscal incentives—including tax incentives, tax deductions, and tax and duty exemption of donations, legacies and gifts.

But obligated enterprises that fail to register their EPR programs could face penalties of P5 million to P20 million as well as the automatic suspension of their business permits.

The DENR expects that by 2028, enterprises would be able to recover at least 80 percent of their generated waste, Leones said. INQ



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UPPER
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EDITORIAL

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OVER SUPPOSED INACTION ON ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLAINT

DENR REPLACES AGENCY'S HEADS IN EASTERN VISAYAS

TACLOBAN CITY—Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo Loyzaga reassigned the top officials of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) in Eastern Visayas region following a complaint by a Leyte lawmaker.

The reassignment came after Rep. Richard Gomez of Leyte's fourth congressional district called the DENR's attention for its officials' alleged inaction on what he described as environment violations in the operation of a poultry farm owned by Mayor Ramon Oñate of Palompon town.

Arturo Fadriquela, DENR regional executive director in Eastern Visayas, was sent to the Zamboanga Peninsula. He was replaced by Lormelyn Claudio, who was from Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, Palawan) region. Martin Desdi, EMB-East-

ern Visayas director, was moved to Central Luzon after he was replaced by Wilson Trajeco.

The revamp order was issued by Loyzaga on July 6 and implemented on July 24.

The DENR in the region declined to issue a statement when asked if the changes in leadership had something to do with the request made by Gomez to Loyzaga.

Victory

The Inquirer tried but failed to reach Gomez for a statement. But in his social media account, the actor-turned-politician said the revamp involving the DENR-EMB officials in the region was a victory for the people of Albuera and Palompon towns.

"I am very passionate about this environmental problem in our district because if this violation will not be acted according-

ly, what will happen to our environment, especially in the fourth district of Leyte," Gomez said.

"That is why I am here, standing up against this environmental violator," he added.

Gomez had earlier took to task the DENR officials in Eastern Visayas for failing to act on the alleged environmental violations committed by the poultry farm owned by Oñate, which allegedly discharged waste directly to a major watershed in Palompon.

Aside from polluting the environment, Gomez said the improper discharge of waste from the poultry farm also resulted in health and sanitary problems among residents, particularly those residing in Barangay San Joaquin, where the farm is located.

Gomez earlier called for a congressional inquiry on the matter. —JOEY GABIETA INO



Mayor wants oil spill cleanup to continue

BY IRE JOE V.C. LAURENTE

CALAPAN CITY, Oriental Mindoro: The move of the provincial governor ordering the demobilization of oil spill response operations has drawn opposition from Pola Mayor Jennifer "Ina Alegre" Cruz.

In a post on his social media page, Gov. Humerlito Dolor said his order meant that the focus of the provincial government's intervention on the oil spill would be on restoration of natural resources damaged, 155 days after the incident.

The governor also said his order is based on a declaration of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) that the shorelines of the province are 100 percent "acceptably clean" but it does not mean that there would be no traces of the oil spill.

He added that according to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, it would take

years before the oil slick totally disappears because of its chemical components.

"Would the provincial government stop what it is doing? Again, all the government agencies would be on stand-by. What we wanted is to push through with our recovery program to bring back our natural resources. Is the provincial government remiss in its intervention in the town of Pola? The people in the town know what is the truth and they are the ones that could answer that," Dolor said in his post.

The governor further said the 11 barangay (village) captains of the

coastal areas affected by the spill had signed a certification that the oil spill is already contained and the same certification was signed by the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office, the PCG and a representative from the Department of Health.

Cruz countered that she is opposing the declaration that the oil spill along Pola town's shorelines was 100 percent clear.

She clarified that what she agreed with the governor when they talked about the matter is that the demobilization would be on the offshore.

"What we agreed upon is only for offshore operations but they should not terminate all operations, particularly along our shorelines where oil sludge can still be seen. That is why I did not sign the document that they brought to my office declaring that we are 100 percent oil spill-free," Cruz said in a text message.

The mayor also said the sup-

posed support claimed by the governor given to the fishermen affected by the oil spill came mostly from the senators, Cabinet secretaries, the Office of Vice President Sara Duterte and from First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos who visited her town.

"Even the gasoline subsidy from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the Office of the Civil Defense had not been given to the affected residents in our town. The food packs that were given came from the DSWD (Department of Social Welfare and Development) and I know what directly came from the provincial government: are the gallons of water," Cruz noted.

Cruz said she is letting the Department of Justice through the National Bureau of Investigation to handle the legal complaint that the fishermen and the municipality filed against the owner of the ship and maritime officials.



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Group: Fishers set up mangrove nursery in Sorsogon

By JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

[@jonlmayuga](#)

TO protect and conserve the marine ecosystem in the province of Sorsogon, local fishers have established a mangrove nursery which they intend to use to rehabilitate degraded mangrove forests in the province.

The move is part of the effort to enrich the marine ecosystem in Sorsogon.

A mangrove nursery is a place for raising and tending seedlings or propagules until they are ready for permanent planting on suitable soil. While still attached to the mother tree, the propagules are able to synthesize and receive necessary nutrients from the parent tree.

A local affiliate of the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya), Save Gubat Bay Movement is spearheading protest actions against the construction of a coastal road

project in the area because of its threats to the livelihood of small fishermen coastal the communities that depend on the bounty of Gubat Bay.

Their efforts to develop mangrove areas are part of their sustainable alternatives to the destructive coastal road project, says Pamalakaya.

On Saturday, August 5, the group lambasted Senator Chiz Escudero who hails from Sorsogon, and asked the lawmaker to "refrain from dismissing" the legitimate concerns of fisherfolk and coastal families on the impacts of land reclamation.

"Senator Escudero appears oblivious to the grave implications of reclamation to coastal communities and marine environment. Our opposition against reclamation is not merely based on fears, as downplayed by Senator Escudero. Rather, it is grounded in the concrete experiences of the fisherfolk and coastal residents who have been threatened

by displacement and livelihood loss by these profit-oriented reclamation projects," the group said in a statement.

According to the group, land reclamation, also called dump-and-fill has been proven by many scientists and experts to be catastrophic to the environment and socioeconomic rights.

"We dare Senator Escudero to go touch some grass, by talking to the affected coastal families on why the struggle against reclamation, for us, is a matter of life and death," Allan Espallardo, President of Save Gubat Bay Movement, said.

A former Governor of Sorsogon province, Escudero acclaimed reclamation projects as among the biggest initiatives of the private sector and that it would be disadvantageous to continue it over "simple fears." His statement came after the United States Embassy in Manila raised concerns over the environmental impacts and security threats

of reclamation in Manila Bay.

Pamalakaya earlier questioned the statement of the embassy, saying that "if the US is genuinely concerned about the marine environment, it should express opposition against every single reclamation project in Manila Bay and throughout the country, instead of just singling out a specific project that involves a Chinese firm and threatens its security protocols."

The group expressed support for the initiative of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to investigate all land reclamation projects in Manila Bay and urged Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga to issue a freeze order following the massive flooding experienced in Bulacan and Pampanga.

The group said massive floods is only to be expected as predicted by scientists and experts in marine science and geology because of the massive land reclamation projects in Manila Bay.



Rain allows Candaba Swamp to reclaim its natural territory

THE 32,000 hectare Candaba swamp in Pampanga province is now an ocean expanse after heavy monsoon rain poured over Luzon and the rest of the Philippines last week. Gone for the moment are the swathes of green rice fields that can be seen when one is traveling to the north on the section of the Candaba Viaduct of the North Luzon Expressway.

The swamp's water obviously rose high enough to submerge every vegetation thriving in the area. Only a few mango and palm trees are out of reach of the swelling water. Small islands are formed and jut out from the vast swamp as a result of rising water.

One will have an eerie feeling when he sees the present state of the Candaba wetlands. It's water world out there, with the full might of the swamp dangerously creeping into residential houses hugging its fringes.

The inundated Candaba Swamp is a reminder to us of what nature can restore if the environment is altered or reduced to accommodate man-made formations or structures. The Candaba Swamp is merely reclaiming its natural territory to start a rejuvenation process and play its role as an agent of biodiversity.

The Candaba Swamp is comprised of marshes, freshwater ponds and grasslands. The field is normally submerged during the wet season and dries out between November and April. Local farmers convert it into an agricultural area, where they plant rice and watermelon that are sold across the globe.

The swamp also serves as fishing grounds covering 43,000 hectares of arable farmlands. Its fields are very fertile because of the sustained deposits of humus and decaying plant residues.

For photographers and bird watchers, the Candaba Swamp is a paradise for their profession due to the many species of colorful ducks and threatened water birds that flock to the area to escape the biting cold of the northern hemisphere during the winter season. It is a staging and wintering area for ducks, egrets and other water birds, or the Anatidae species.

Migratory birds arrive from as far as

Siberia, Korea, Japan, China, Australia and New Zealand to breed in the Candaba Swamp. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources says between 5,000 and 10,000 birds regularly visit the swamp from October up to April. The department has recorded 54 species of migratory birds in the wetlands since 1940. About 100,000 ducks, according to the DENR, were observed in a single day in 1982.

Aside from acting as a staging area for exotic birds, the Candaba Swamp plays a key role in preserving the ecological balance. Similar to marshes and other



BIODIVERSITY 101
RAY S. ENANO

season. They offset extreme weather events and protect communities from disasters. Swamps also function as kidneys of the planet because they improve water quality.

They collect surface runoff from cities and farmlands and act as natural water filter by eliminating other pollutants and catching suspended sediments that can kill aquatic plants and animals. In the case of the Candaba Swamp, it filters toxic chemicals coming from the upstream water of the Pampanga River before it drains to Manila Bay, and recharge groundwater aquifers that are crucial for irrigation and drinking water.

But the swamp's role in the ecosystem may diminish due to challenges bedeviling the

water system. A DENR executive cited excessive growth of vegetation, drying of wetlands and fishponds due to climate change, land conversion of wetland into agricultural land, and hunting, trapping and poaching of birds in the area.

Climate change, drought and land conversion may be altering the ecosystem in the swamp and turning away migratory birds, whose numbers have declined in recent years. The Candaba Swamp as a key habitat for animals and plants must be given a chance to breathe and act its role as protector of the environment.

Editor's notes: Biodiversity 101 column is open to contributors who share the advocacies of protecting the environment and promoting sustainable practices that are being pushed by the United Nations. Such contributions are subject to the availability of space and the paper's editorial policies. The contributions should not exceed 600 words or 4,000 characters.



Source: bestfootforward2012.wordpress.com

wetlands, the Candaba Swamp provides an important habitat for everything from microbes to frogs to waterfowl. Peatlands, mangroves, swamps and seagrass beds, according to one DENR official, are the world's most effective carbon sinks.

Wetlands capture and store carbon from the atmosphere through plant photosynthesis and by acting as sediment traps for runoff. Carbon is held in the living vegetation as well as in litter, peats, organic soils and sediments that have built up, in some cases, over thousands of years.

Peatlands cover just 3 percent of the planet's surface but they store about 30 percent of all land-based carbon, or twice the number of all the world's forests combined. The same DENR official added inland wetlands, like rivers and lakes, absorb and store water from excessive rains and mitigate floods.

Swamps appear as wastelands but healthy wetlands absorb and accumulate excess rainfall that is stored for the dry



El Niño continues to intensify

THE Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) has issued a second El Niño alert following climate monitoring and analyses that showed the unusual warming of sea surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific has further developed.

"El Niño is showing signs of strengthening in the coming months," Pagasa's officer in charge Esperanza Cayanan said.

She said the warmer-than-average sea surface temperature across most of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific signified that a weak El Niño might grow moderate to strong toward the end of 2023.

Pagasa said El Niño increases the likelihood of below-normal rainfall, which could affect some areas of the country and adversely impact different climate-sensitive sectors such as water resources, agriculture, energy, health and public safety.

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

"The climate outlook further suggests that the aggregate impacts of El

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El Niño continues to intensify

El Niño are expected toward the last quarter of the year and first half of 2024, bringing dry spells in most areas of the country," she added.

In Pagasa's outlook, by end of December Abra, Batanes and Cagayan in Luzon and Negros Oriental, Bohol, Cebu and Siquijor in the Visayas will start experiencing dry conditions.

In Mindanao, provinces that will have a similar condition include Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, Bukidnon, Camiguin, Lanao del Norte, Misamis Occidental, Mis-

amis Oriental, Davao de Oro, Davao del Sur, Davao Occidental, Davao Oriental, South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Basilan, Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Sulu and Tawi-tawi.

Only Camarines Norte in the Bicol Region will likely experience a drought within this period.

Areas that will be under a dry spell are Metro Manila, Abra, Benguet, Ifugao, Apayao, Mountain Province, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Isabela, Nueva Viscaya, Quirino, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Batangas, Laguna, Rizal, Quezon, Marinduque,

Mindoro, Romblon, Palawan, Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales, Spratly Islands, Camarines Sur and Catanduanes.

By the end of January next year, areas in Luzon that will experience drought are Metro Manila, Abra, Benguet, Ifugao, Apayao, Mountain Province, Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Isabela, Nueva Viscaya, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Batangas, Laguna, Rizal, Occidental Mindoro, Oriental Mindoro, Palawan, Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales and Spratly Islands.

The provinces of Cagayan and

Cavite will have a dry spell.

In the Visayas, the provinces of Antique, Guimaras, Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Negros Oriental and Siquijor will have a dry spell.

So will Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, Misamis Occidental, Sultan Kudarat, Basilan, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-tawi in Mindanao.

But before El Niño peaks, at least four weather systems — the intertropical convergence zone, the low pressure area, the southwest monsoon and localized thunderstorms — will bring rain in August.

Cayanan said the rainfall forecast for the month shows generally near-normal conditions in most of the country, with some areas in western Luzon likely to receive above-normal rainfall.

"Moreover, we are expecting two to three tropical cyclones that may enter and develop inside the Philippine Area of Responsibility this August," she said.

El Niño is the warming of water surface temperatures in the eastern and central Pacific Ocean, which is associated with extreme weather conditions like droughts and typhoons. **ARLIE O. CALALO**



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'Angat Dam level good for 2 months water supply'

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The National Water Resources Board (NWRB) has assured the public of uninterrupted water supply for two months as the level of Angat Dam has reached 199.69 meters.

In a radio interview, NWRB Executive Director Seville David Jr. said that the current water level of Angat Dam can last for 60 days before it

returns below its normal operating level of 180 meters in the event that rains will not come to replenish the reservoir.

As of 6 a.m. yesterday, the water level of Angat Dam had increased by 0.36 meters compared to its previous level of 199.33 meters.

David noted that while the rains brought by Typhoon Egay and the southwest monsoon caused flood-

ing in many areas in the country, the dams were able to replenish as the Angat Dam has already increased by more than 20 meters since the second week of July.

He added that the NWRB hopes that the water level of Angat Dam will further improve and attain its normal high operating level of 210 meters to 212 meters to ensure enough supply of water for Metro

Manila and the irrigation systems until next year and next summer.

"We want that the July level will not happen again. The rains brought by the monsoon rains are equivalent to our two months supply for Metro Manila. We are confident that the rains will continue to be experienced in the watersheds of Angat Dam to be able to sustain the present level until we reach 210 meters,"

David added.

At the same time, David reiterated his call for the public to conserve water amid the threat of El Niño.

"We need to be responsible in our consumption of water especially because it is expected that El Niño will affect us. It is better for us to have enough water stored in our dams. It is better not to waste water when using it," he said.



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Law firm explains absence of quarry permit for Leyte poultry producer

A PASIG City-based law office tagged as "false and misleading" allegations that a large poultry enterprise in Palompon, Leyte had committed environmental and land violations.

The Valeña Law Office issued the statement as the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office in Leyte denied having conducted an investigation on the purported environmental infractions by the DBSN Farms and Agriventures Corp. owned by the family of Palompon Mayor Ramon Oñate.

DBSN, one of the largest agriculture companies in the Visayas, employs more than 600 workers.

Lawyer Arnel Victor Valeña said the charg-

es aired by the camp of Rep. Richard Gomez against DBSN stemmed from "a typical case of error in interpretation" of PENRO's statement that it has "no existing records for any permit applied for or application submitted by DBSN/DBSN Breeder Farm relative to any quarry operations in San Joaquin, Palompon, Leyte."

"It is correct that DBSN does not have any such permit—the reason being that they do not operate any quarry," Valeña said.

Valeña was referring to a certification issued by the PENRO "upon request of a person in authority" regarding DBSN's quarry permit.

Valeña said the PENRO certification was quoted out of context, alleging that the DBSN

"has no permit to quarry or dig dumpsites to contain the wastes the farm produces in the area."

He also sought to clarify online news report stating that DBSN was "reportedly" owned by local officials. "DBSN is proudly owned by the Oñate family. They are not hiding this," Valeña said.

Valeña also denied that a House investigation found that the breeder farm has been burying its solid wastes in a dumpsite "illegally excavated" in Barangay San Joaquin.

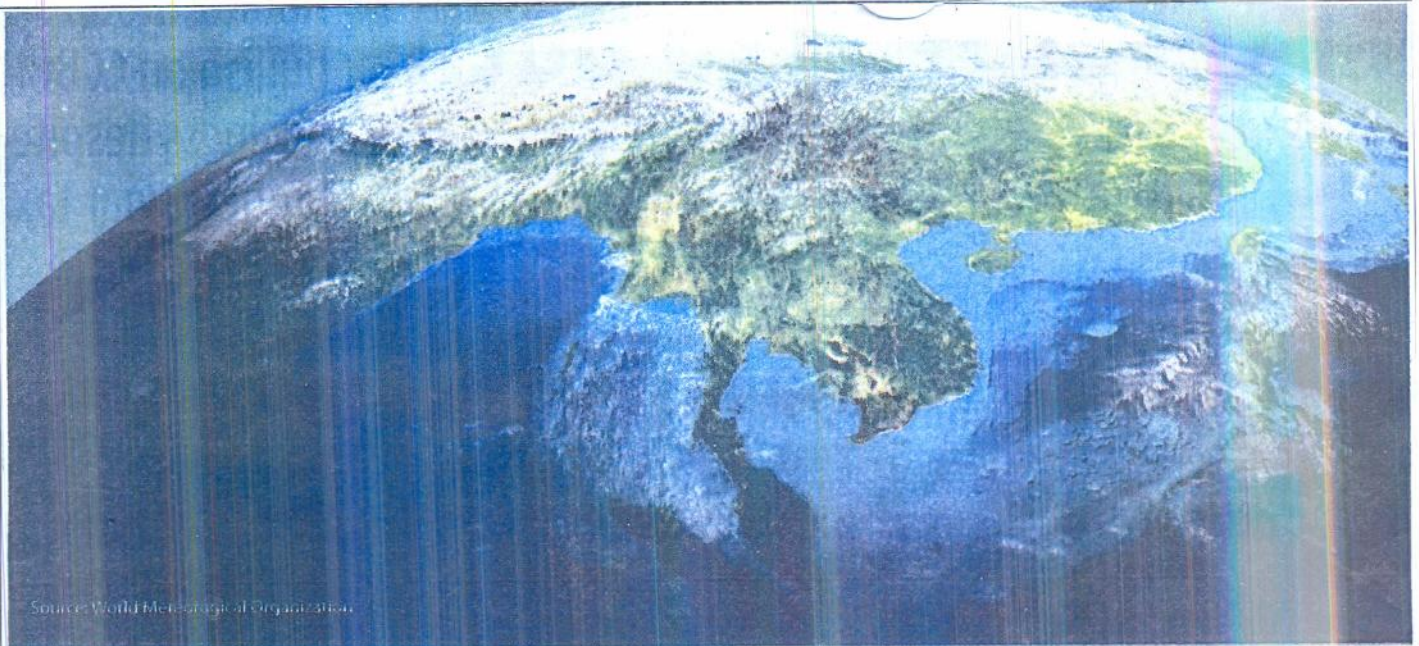
"This is misleading. The investigation is still ongoing, and we are not aware of any findings that have been made," he said.



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Source: World Meteorological Organization

Warming trend in Asia to cause more economic disruptions—UN

MELTING ice and glaciers and rising sea levels threaten more socio-economic disruption in future, according to the agency's latest State of the Climate report for the region.

The mean temperature over Asia for 2022 was the second or third warmest on record and was about 0.72 degrees Celsius (°C) above the 1991–2020 average, which was itself roughly 1.68°C above the WMO 1961–1990 reference period for climate change.

Asia is also the world's most disaster-prone region, according to the agency's new report.

In 2022, there were more than 80 disasters on the continent, mainly floods and storms, which killed upwards of 5,000 people and affected 50 million more. Overall economic damage exceeded \$36 billion.

WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said many areas in Asia experienced drier-than-normal conditions and drought last year.

He cited the case of China, where prolonged drought conditions affected water availability and the power supply. The estimated economic losses were over

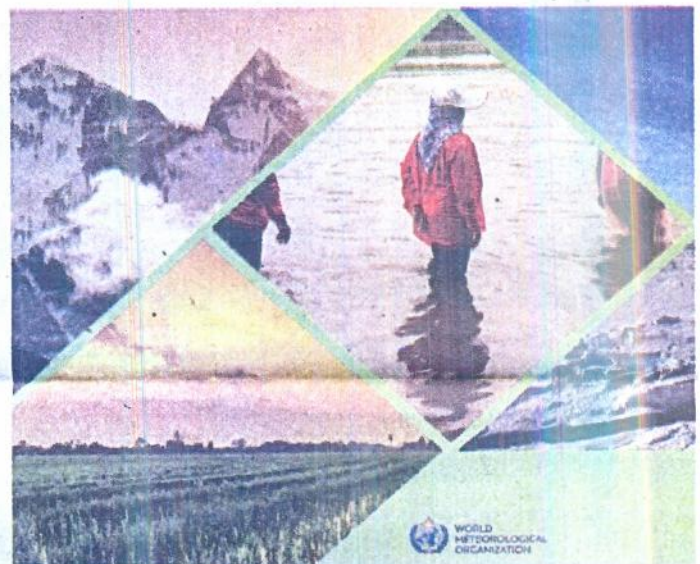
\$7.6 billion.

"Most glaciers in the High Mountain Asia region suffered from intense mass loss as a result of exceptionally warm and dry conditions in 2022. This will have major implications for future food and water security and ecosystems," he added.

Last year also saw severe flooding in Pakistan. The country received 60 percent of its normal monsoon rain within just three weeks of the start of the monsoon season last June.

More than 33 million people were affected, or roughly 14 percent of the population, and more than \$15 billion in losses were recorded. National authorities put the death toll at over 1,730, while nearly eight million people were displaced.

Asia also shows an overall surface ocean warming trend beginning in 1982. In the northwestern Arabian Sea, the Philippine Sea and the seas east of Japan, the warming rates exceed 0.5°C per decade,



WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION

roughly three times faster than the global average.

The report was released during a meeting of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific's (ESCAP) Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction. It is accompanied by an inter-

active story map, with a special focus on agriculture and food security.

WMO said the expected increase in the frequency and severity of extreme events over much of Asia will impact agriculture, which is central to all climate adaptation planning. **UN News**