

17 JULY 2023 Monday



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Phl among most vulnerable to El Niño

By LAWRENCE AGCAOILI

The Philippines is among Asian countries that are most vulnerable to El Niño in terms of the weather phenomenon's impact on agricultural crops and other produce, according to Japan's Nomura.

In a report, Nomura said Asia is bracing for El Niño this year after three years of La Niña.

The Japanese investment bank expects a mild El Niño to lower the Philippines' gross domestic product (GDP) growth by 0.03 percentage points, while a severe one could drag growth by 0.11 percent.

On inflation, Nomura sees an upside risk of 0.08 percentage points in a mild scenario and a much higher 0.26 percent in a severe scenario.

"Relative to baseline, GDP growth could be lower by 0.1 percentage points and inflation higher by 0.1 to 0.3 percentage points. India and the Philippines are most vulnerable," Nomura said.

Nomura said the change in the year-on-year overall GDP growth of the Philippines is 0.1 percentage points under a severe scenario and 0.5 percentage point under a mild scenario.

It said the change in year-on-year agricultural real GDP is at -2.6 percentage points under a severe scenario and -1.7 percent under a mild scenario.

On inflation, Nomura said the impact of a severe El Niño on Philippine headline inflation is -2.5 percent under a severe scenario and -0.7 percent under a mild scenario.

For food inflation, the impact of a severe El Niño is -4.7 percent, while the impact of mild El Niño is at -1.1 percent.

"The Philippines - a net food importer - is more vulnerable to higher inflation," Nomura said.

Inflation in the Philippines stayed above the two to four percent target range at 7.2 percent in the first half despite easing to 5.4 percent in June from 6.1 percent in May.

This prompted the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) to extend its prudent pause by keeping key policy rates untouched during its back-to-back rate-setting meetings in May and June.

"Monetary policy is unlikely to be used, though rate cuts could be delayed. Given the Philippines' limited fiscal space and high inflation risks, the BSP may need to resume its rate hiking cycle (versus our baseline view of an extended pause)," Nomura said.

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Phi From B1

According to Nomura, uncertainty remains high with respect to the severity of the El Niño this year and its impact, but current buffer stocks appear ample in the case of cereals (rice, wheat), edible oils and cotton.

It added that low stocks of sugar and coffee could result in higher prices for these crops.

"In case of an El Niño, we expect fiscal and supply-side policies (e.g., social assistance, price controls and subsidies) to serve as the first line of defense," it said.

In theory, an El Niño is a stagflationary shock (higher inflation, lower growth), since it results in less rainfall and

limits agricultural production.

Earlier, the BSP said the return of El Niño would have minimal impact on the prices of goods and services.

BSP Deputy Governor Francisco Dakila Jr. earlier told reporters that the central bank has yet to include the impact of the lower than usual rainfall in the Philippines in the latest inflation forecasts set by the Monetary Board on June 22.

"We have not yet included El Niño in our baseline (forecasts)," Dakila said.

For El Niño, the BSP official said the impact is relatively moderate at about 13 basis points.



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EDITORIAL

El Niño preps: Why only now?

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) predicted as early as May this year that the El Niño weather phenomenon characterized by an extended dry spell may emerge in June and will likely persist until the first quarter of next year.

Because El Niño increases the likelihood of below-normal rainfall conditions that would have a negative impact on people's health and livelihood, particularly in agriculture, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council through the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) directed concerned government agencies to prepare and implement necessary measures to minimize its impact.

Unfortunately, it seems that the government did not heed its own advice, as the National Action Plan to mitigate the adverse effects of El Niño has yet to be finalized and the OCD is scheduled to convene the National El Niño Team only on July 19. "We are looking forward to the finalization of the National Action Plan for El Niño by this team as we continue to undertake various activities specific to our agency mandates to ensure that the effects of El Niño-induced dry spells and drought to the country can be countered," OCD administrator Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno said late last week.

The primary question on Filipinos' minds is: Why only now?

Where is the sense of urgency considering that the government already knew it was coming months back and the Philippines knows far too well the potentially devastating effects of El Niño, which could become more severe with worsening climate change? Did the government agencies tasked to prepare for this weather phenomenon wait for Pagasa to officially announce on July 4 the onset of El Niño before springing into action and drawing up a mitigation plan, just when precious time had already been wasted?

Indeed, the effects of this weather phenomenon that occurs every two to seven years are already being keenly felt, with the lack of rain in agricultural areas leading to reduced harvests and therefore raised selling prices, keeping inflation rates at stubbornly high levels.

Pagasa revealed that as of June 30, dry spells—three consecutive months where rainfall was reduced by as much as 60 percent—had already hit Apayao, Kalinga, and Cagayan provinces.

Meanwhile, dry conditions—two consecutive months of a 21-60 percent drop in average rainfall—were also witnessed in the rice-producing provinces of Isabela and Tarlac, which will mean a possible increase in the price of the staple down the road. Plus, last week, west zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc. started daily water supply interruptions in its concession area, affecting some 600,000 customers.

In May, when Pagasa started monitoring El Niño more closely, the government could have already mounted a more aggressive campaign to enjoin households and commercial enterprises to conserve water so that the drawdown from Angat Dam, which supplies 95 percent of the water needs of the National Capital Region, could have been slowed down. Conservation measures may not have prevented Maynilad from altogether avoiding supply interruptions with Angat's water level dropping to below minimum operating level, but perhaps the extent may be not as long as 11 hours in some of its concession areas.

To think that El Niño is just starting to make its presence felt with its effects expected to strengthen toward a "moderate to severe" degree by the latter part of this year. Bitter experience tells us that even a "mild" El Niño—as expected for this year's episode—will already have considerable impact. In 2019, when a "weak" El Niño hit the country, a Department of Agriculture (DA) report showed that damage and losses reached P5.05 billion. DA reported then that the damage reached P2.69 billion for rice and P2.36 billion for corn, affecting hundreds of thousands of hectares of farmlands. At that time, 42 provinces experienced a dry spell while 22 were hit by drought.

The regular occurrence of El Niño and other natural disasters should have already made preparedness second nature for the Philippines, especially—as experts have long pointed out—that the best time to prepare is when they have not happened yet.

Instead, what happens far too often is planning and action come late in the game, and they are promptly forgotten as soon as the disaster is over. For example, when it became clear in 2019 that there would be "full-blown" El Niño, the Duterte administration extended discussions of creating a Department of Water to address water supply issues and mitigate effects of El Niño.

There was likewise talk then of interventions such as a campaign to conserve water and energy, plus the installation of water tank systems, establishment of water treatment plants, dredging of waterways, and the streamlined regulation of the country's water and river basins to ensure adequate water supply for drinking and for irrigation.

The weather phenomenon is back but little progress, if any, had been made on these measures proposed. These will again be likely listed on the things-to-do when the OCD and other government agencies meet this week.

The question now is whether these will actually be implemented or just another case of a lot of expensive talk and too little action.



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Use bicycles to fight climate change, Pinoys urged

By **HELEN FLORES**

To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Filipinos are encouraged to use bicycles as an alternative mode of transportation, an official of the Climate Change Commission (CCC) said.

CCC Commissioner Albert dela Cruz noted that motorized transportation is a major factor in the aggravating impact of climate change.

Apart from bicycles, the official also backed the shift to electric vehicles to hasten the country's efforts toward decarbonization.

Dela Cruz said President Marcos during his term as senator filed Senate Bill 2924, or the proposed Bicycle Commuters Incentives Act of 2011, which seeks to grant incentives to promote the use of bicycles and other safe and viable non-motorized transport vehicles as a mode of daily commuting and travel.

"It must be noted that studies have consistently shown that bicycle use has wide-reaching benefits, from environmental and

urban planning to public health," Dela Cruz noted.

"Furthermore, bicycle-users would also enjoy savings on transportation cost, in view of the lessened dependence on motorized transport system, which is admittedly more expensive due to the current fluctuations in the prices of gasoline and diesel fuel," he added.

Early this year, the Department of Transportation announced its plan to improve walkways and bicycle lanes across Metro Manila.

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, for its part, had said it plans to build elevated bicycle lanes along EDSA to promote urban bike tourism in the National Capital Region.

Climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts remain on top of the administration's priorities, according to Marcos.

"We are also very conscious of our situation in the Philippines wherein we are very sensitive to climate change," the President said in his speech in Agusan del Norte on July 12.



Natural catastrophe insurance and why we need it



INSURANCE
INSIGHTS

MICHAEL P.
RELLOSA

IF the topic of climate change is du jour, so will the topic of Nat Cat coverage be, and with it the slew of issues that accompany Nat Cat insurance, especially in the Philippines. My previous columns touched on the need to adjust the rates of Nat Cat protection to make it sustainable in the face of the ever-hardening reinsurance market and the fact that the local rates have not been reviewed in two decades. What is the point of having a solution that will not be sustainable and will be pulled out after a streak of losses? We also talked about the launch of initiatives that will provide more local Nat Cat capacity and maximize the efficiencies of a pooling arrangement to obtain better terms from the international reinsurance market. Another topic talked about is the launching of a new product especially designed for the underserved portion of the populace who are disproportionately exposed to Nat Cat events and are prey to their dire results.

I am not exactly sure what is keeping us from finalizing these initiatives as well as reviewing the current pricing of Nat Cat coverage. There are some intricacies that need the regulators' nod as the initial steps depend on it; hopefully they will get to see the forest for what it is and not just the trees. In the end, it is the insuring public that will benefit from having access to the appropriate coverage provided by a sustainable industry that will be there when the rubber hits the road.

What baffles me to no end is that the general insurance stakeholders are not only aware of the situation but also understand how it came about and have a rather good idea of the solution. What is then preventing us to band together, put our cards on the table and agree on the best way forward for our good and the good of the insuring public? To go the usual way of undercutting each other just to get the business is no longer feasible and will be downright foolhardy.

The other players, such as the multilateral aid organizations such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank; foreign aid organizations such as USAid, GIZ; the academe, NGOs and even civil society; and the various regulators, the prime of which is the Insurance Commission, are all busy with their pet projects. But what if we all sat down, agreed on the low-hanging fruit, and agreed to work on each in succession, guaranteeing greater success for each of the chosen projects? The past years have seen fits and starts, with none of the projects having been fully accomplished despite the enormous amount of time, effort and resources poured into getting these various projects off the ground.

Let us not wait for another catastrophe — a typhoon, the floods it causes, or a major earthquake — to spur us on to action and results. Let statistics, history and science move us to complete the initiatives already set into motion so that when such a catastrophe occurs, we are ready for it and the vulnerable will have the means, albeit limited, to pick up the pieces of their lives and start over.

On a related note, I would want to plug a planned workshop to be held in Manila for the first week of August, collaborated on by the Insurance Development Forum; the Micro-insurance Network, the InsuResilience Global Partnership, the Insurance and Risk Facility of the UNDP, the Insurance Institute for Asia and the Pacific as well as the Philippine Insurers and Reinsurers Association. This forceful coalition brings together all the important stakeholders to discuss and allow for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to address the issues at hand. These are being held around the world in chosen countries, one of which is the Philippines, on account of the vulnerabilities we have to Nat Cat events and the sizeable protection gap that has been identified. Hopefully, the sheer number of individuals and groups working towards providing insurance protection to the least of our compatriots will make us see the value of each of these individual initiatives and convince us to hastily work toward their fruition.



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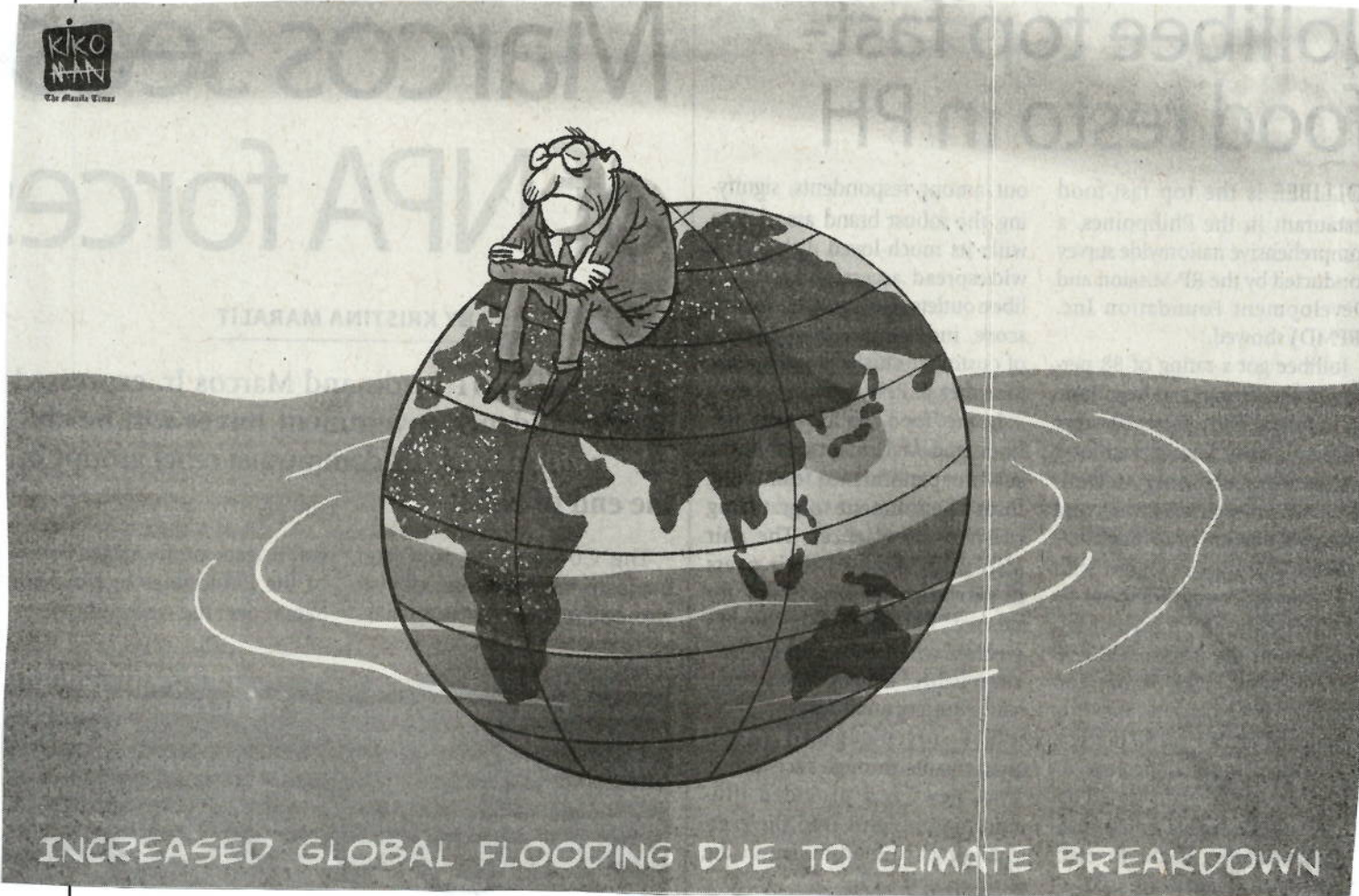
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The Manila Times





Angat Dam water level improves slightly

By **BELLA CARIASO**

The water level of Angat Dam increased by 58 centimeters following the rains brought by Tropical Storm Dodong but is still below the 180-meter minimum normal operating level, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

As of 6 a.m. on July 16, the water level of Angat Dam reached 179.06 meters or 0.58 meters more compared to its previous level of 178.48 meters.

Residents affected by the nine to 11 hours water inter-

ruption caused by the critical decrease in the water level of Angat Dam experienced four days of continuous supply after Maynilad Water Services Inc. implemented a 24-hour service from July 13 to 16 amid the rains experienced in many areas in the country.

"We did not implement this weekend, July 15 and 16, our scheduled daily water interruptions in areas in Caloocan, Malabon, Manila, Valenzuela, Navotas, and Quezon City. The rains brought by Dodong helped the Ipo watershed, that's why we mitigated the impact of lower water allocation from the Angat Dam," Maynilad said in an advisory.

Maynilad added that the daily water interruption will resume today, unless rains will still persist at the Ipo watershed in the next days.

Angat Dam supplies more than 90 percent of Metro Manila's potable water needs and provides for the irrigation needs of 25,000 hectares of farmlands in Bulacan and Pampanga.

"We continue to encourage everyone to participate in the conservation to prolong the current water supply of Angat Dam," Maynilad added.

On the other hand, the water level of Ipo Dam in Bulacan dropped by one centimeter after it reached 100.02 meters

compared to its previous level of 100.03 meters.

Aside from Ipo Dam, the water level of Ambuklao Dam in Benguet also decreased by 0.09 meters after it reached 741.82 meters compared to its previous level of 741.91 meters.

The water level of Caliraya Dam in Laguna also fell by 0.06 meters as it reached 286.22 meters compared to its previous level of 286.28 meters.

Bustos Dam spill

Rains dumped by the southwest monsoon caused Bustos Dam in Bulacan to release excess water.

As of 7 a.m. on July 16, the

water elevation of Bustos Dam was at 17.40 meters, higher than its spilling level of 17 meters.

The dam's Sluice Gate 1 and Sluice Gate 2 have both been raised at 1.5 meters high and have been discharging a total of 78 cubic meters per second of water on its downstream river system.

The Provincial Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office of Bulacan added that as of Sunday noon no villages in the province were reported to be inundated by floodwater and the flooded portions of MacArthur Highway were probably caused by the overflowing drainages.

Meanwhile, the water level of La Mesa Dam in Quezon City improved by 0.22 meters after it reached 78.99 meters compared to the previous 78.77 meters.

Binga Dam in Benguet at 568.58 meters is 0.22 meters more compared to its previous level of 568.36 meters. San Roque Dam in Pangasinan is at 237.765 meters or up by 1.12 meters compared to its previous level of 236.64 meters.

Pantabangan Dam in Nueva Ecija is at 179.77 meters or 0.76 meters more compared to its previous level of 179.01 meters, and Magat Dam in Isabela is at 164.08 meters or 0.52 meters more compared to its previous level of 163.56 meters.



Maynilad lifts water interruptions

By DANESSA RIVERA

past days.

West zone concessionaire Maynilad Water Services Inc. has

Maynilad said the rains brought about by Tropical Storm Dodong helped raise the water

Angat Dam water level improves slightly. Story on Page 3.

lifted the daily water service interruptions imposed in parts of its service area indefinitely, due to the rains in the

level at Ipo Dam.

This in turn enabled the west zone concessionaire to get its required

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2.4 million liters per day from the Ipo Dam portal, despite lower releases from Angat Dam.

"We will provide an update once the daily nighttime service interruptions will again have to be reinstated," Maynilad said.

Last July 12, the water company implemented water service interruptions for 591,000 customers in affected barangays in Caloocan, Malabon, Valenzuela, Navotas, Quezon City and Manila.

The daily service interruptions were limited to the nighttime hours of 7 p.m. to 4 a.m. or to 6 a.m. in the affected areas.

The service interruption came after the National Water Resources Board effectively reduced the raw water allocation of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System

(MWSS) and its concessionaires to 48 cubic meters per second after Angat's water level breached the 180-meter minimum operating level.

Maynilad is the largest private water concessionaire in the Philippines in terms of customer base.

It is a concessionaire of the MWSS for the west zone of the Greater Manila area, which is composed of the cities of Manila (certain portions), Quezon City (certain portions), Makati (west of South Super Highway), Caloocan, Pasay, Parañaque, Las Piñas, Muntinlupa, Valenzuela, Navotas and Malabon; and the cities of Cavite, Bacoor and Imus, and the towns of Kawit, Noveleta and Rosario.



Maynilad eyes reactivation of 60 deep wells amid water shortage threat

The Maynilad Water Service, Inc. (Maynilad) will be tapping deep wells to generate more water supply amid the threat of shortage in Metro Manila.

In a statement, Maynilad said it is eyeing the use of existing 60 deep wells which, it said, are expected to generate around 32 million liters per day (MLD) which will be able to supply the water requirement of some 175,000 customers in the western part of Metro Manila.

Maynilad is currently running eight of these new and reactivated deep wells.

It said the total production from deep wells in 19 different locations will rise to 12.38 MLD by the end of July.

To reopen more deep wells in the upcoming months, it is carefully cooperating with many homeowners' groups and government agencies.

Maynilad, however, said that groundwater is not a sustainable

source of water supply and the use of deep wells is only allowed during times of contingency, such as during expected supply shortage due to El Niño.

"The number of deep wells we can reactivate in the West Zone is limited because our proximity to Manila Bay makes groundwater reserves salty and unusable in some areas," Maynilad said. (Nicole Magmanlac)



'LPA outside PAR may develop into typhoon'

By **BELLA CARIASO**

A new low-pressure area (LPA) has developed outside the Philippine area of responsibility (PAR) in the eastern section of Mindanao and may soon develop into a typhoon, the Philip-

pine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) said yesterday.

"At 2 p.m. in the afternoon (of July 16) the cloud clusters outside PAR have developed into a low-pressure area and may develop into a typhoon within 24

to 48 hours," PAGASA weather specialist Adlczar Aurelio said.

He added that the LPA will be named "Egay" once it turns into a typhoon.

Aurelio said that as of 3 p.m. on July 16, Severe Tropical Storm Dodong (international name Talim), now outside

PAR, was located 565 kilometers west-northwest of Laoag City, Ilocos Norte or 710 km west of Basco, Batanes and would no longer affect any areas in the Philippines.

PAGASA weather specialist James
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Villamil, on the other hand, said that the southwest monsoon or *habagat* will continue to bring rains in many areas in Luzon, including Metro Manila and Western Visayas in the next days.

He added that among those expected to experience monsoon rains are Zambales, Bataan, Occidental Mindoro, northern portion of Palawan.

"Monsoon rains are normally experienced in the afternoon until evening and early morning. There may be a break of rain in the morning and until noon," Villamil added.

He said occasional rains will be experienced in the rest of western section of Luzon, particularly in Tarlac, Bulacan, Pampanga, Benguet, the rest of Mimaropa, Cavite and Batangas.

"For the next two days until July 18, the entire Luzon will be affected by the southwest monsoon, especially the northern and central Luzon,

Metro Manila cities and Baguio City," he said.

Villamil said the new LPA outside PAR will bring rains in eastern

and central sections of Visayas and Mindanao.

PAGASA expects two to three more typhoons this month after Dodong.



Over 1.6K individuals affected by TC 'Dodong,' 'habagat'

By MARTIN SADONGDONG

More than 1,600 individuals were affected by flooding and heavy rains brought by the combined effects of Tropical Cyclone "Dodong" and southwest monsoon or "habagat," the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) reported Sunday, July 16.

The NDRRMC said 491 families composed of 1,638 individuals were affected in Ilocos Region (Region 1), Central Luzon (Region 3), Calabarzon (Region 4A), Mimaropa (Region 4B), and Western Visayas (Region 6).

The affected provinces include Pangasinan (Region 1); Bulacan and Zambales (Region 3); Cavite and Batangas (Region 4A); Palawan (Region 4B), and Iloilo (Region 6).

Of those affected, a total of 400 families or 1,419 individuals were brought to 36 evacuation centers across the five regions.

The NDRRMC has yet to report whether or not there were casualties recorded due to Dodong and habagat.

But the heavy rains brought by the two weather systems inundated 29 areas in the affected regions. Four landslides were also monitored by local DRRM offices in Regions 1 and 6.

In Pagudpud, Ilocos Norte, a minor landslide occurred along the Manila North Road in Sitio Banquero, Brgy. Pancian.

Several families were also affected by two landslides in Pangasinan: one in San Jose Zone 3, Sitio Oboy-Oboy; and another one in Tiep Zone 1, Zigzag Roadside. Both are in the municipality of Bani.

A landslide also occurred Brgy. Corong-Corong, El Nido, Palawan due to heavy rainfall.

The NDRRMC said it has provided ₱267 million worth of relief assistance to the affected residents.

The NDRRMC urged the public to stay at home to keep themselves safe amid the bad weather, always listen to weather updates, and adhere to calls for an evacuation from local officials if it is necessary.



Monsoon floods hit Valenzuela, Malabon

Several areas in Valenzuela and Malabon experienced flooding due to continuous heavy rainfall brought by the southwest monsoon since Saturday morning.

In Valenzuela, residents were evacuated from Barangay Viente Reales before noon on Saturday but were allowed to return a few hours later.

Floodwaters along the Viente Reales bypass road reached six to eight inches deep on Saturday but subsided yesterday, according to the city government's disaster risk reduction and management office (DRRMO).

The flood along T. Santiago street in Barangay Canumay West ranged from 10 to 12 inches deep on Saturday and subsided to four to five inches yesterday. No residents were evacuated, according to the Valenzuela DRRMO.

Barangay Arkong Bato was also flooded on Saturday but its residents were not told to evacuate. The flood along M.H. del Pilar street reached five inches deep while the flood at the intersection of MacArthur Highway and C. Santiago street was at two inches, allowing all types of vehicles to pass through, the Valenzuela DRRMO said.

Yesterday morning, the city government reported flooding along MacArthur Highway anew due to rising water levels in Angat Dam in Norzagaray, Bulacan.

As of 7 p.m. yesterday, the city government reported that the flood in Dalandanan reached four inches deep, making the area impassable to small vehicles.

Eight families in Barangay Balangkas were evacuated yesterday.

In Malabon, Dampalit street in Barangay Muson and Flamingo street in Barangay Panghulo were also flooded before dawn on Saturday.

Barangay Santolan in Malabon reported flooding seven inches deep yesterday but floodwaters receded quickly, according to DRRMO head Roderick Tongol.

- Mark Ernest Villeza



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Record heat waves hit US, Europe, Asia

ROME: Tens of millions of people battled dangerously high temperatures around the world on Sunday as record heat forecasts hung over parts of the United States, Europe and Asia, in the latest example of the threat from global warming.

A powerful heat wave stretching from California to Texas was expected to peak, the US National Weather Service said, warning of an "extremely hot and dangerous weekend." Daytime highs were
➤ Heat wavesA8



DRY COUNTRY Picture taken on Thursday, July 13, 2023, shows a field of pistachio trees growing in a very dry field in Daimiel, in the Castilla La Mancha region. With high temperatures, a lack of rain and being hit by several heat waves, Spain suffers from a severe drought, also due to the high water needs of agriculture.
AFP PHOTO



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forecast to range between 10 and 20 degrees Fahrenheit above normal in the west.

Arizona's state capital Phoenix recorded 16 straight days above 109 F (43 degrees Celsius), with residents facing temperatures of 111 F on Saturday, en route to an expected 115 F.

California's Death Valley, one of the hottest places on Earth, was also likely to register new peaks on Sunday, with the mercury possibly rising to 130 F (54 C).

Authorities have been sounding the alarm, advising people to avoid outdoor activities in the daytime and to be wary of dehydration.

At a construction site outside Houston, Texas, a 28-year-old worker who gave his name only as Juan helped complete a wall in the blazing heat.

"Just when I take a drink of water, I get dizzy, I want to vomit because of the heat," he told Agence France-Presse.

The Las Vegas weather service warned that assuming high temperatures naturally come with the area's desert climate was "a DANGEROUS mindset! This heat wave is NOT typical desert heat." Southern California is fighting numerous wildfires, including one in Riverside County that has burned more than 7,500 acres (3,000 hectares) and prompted evacuation orders.

Further north, the Canadian government reported that wildfires had burned a record-breaking 10 million hectares this year, with more damage expected as the summer drags on.

Historic highs forecast in Europe, Italy faced weekend predictions of historic highs with the health ministry issuing a red alert for 16 cities including Rome, Bologna and Florence.

The weather center warned Italians to prepare for "the most intense heat wave of the summer and also one of the most intense of all time." The thermometer is likely to hit 40 C in Rome by Monday and 43 C on Tuesday, smashing the record of 40.5 C set in August 2007.

The islands of Sicily and Sardinia could wilt under temperatures as high as 48 C, the European Space Agency warned — "potentially the hottest temperatures ever recorded in Europe." The Acropolis in Athens, one of Greece's top tourist attractions, will close during the hottest hours on Sunday, for the third day running.

In France, high temperatures and resulting drought are posing a threat to the farming industry, earning Agriculture Minister Marc Fesneau criticism from climatologists for having brushed aside conditions as "normal enough for summer." This June was the second-hottest on record in France, according to the national weather agency, and several areas of the country have been under a heat wave alert since Tuesday.

There is little reprieve ahead for Spain, whose meteorological agency warned that a new heatwave Monday through Wednesday will bring temperatures above 40 C to the Canary Islands and the southern Andalusia region.

Killer rains

As torrential rains lashed northern Japan on Sunday, a man was found dead in a flooded car, a week after seven people were killed in similar weather in the country's southwest.

Parts of eastern Japan are expected to reach 38-39 C on Sunday and Monday, with the meteorological agency warning temperatures could hit previous records.

In South Korea, rescuers on Sunday battled to reach people trapped in a flooded tunnel, after heavy rains for the

last four days triggered floods and landslides that killed at least 33 people and left 10 missing.

The country is at the peak of its summer monsoon season, with more rain forecast through Wednesday.

In northern India, relentless monsoon rains have reportedly killed at least 90 people, following burning heat.

Major flooding and landslides are common during India's monsoons, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency and severity.

China on Sunday issued several temperature alerts, warning thermometers could reach 40-45 C in the partly desert region of Xinjiang, and 39 C in southern Guangxi region.

Morocco was slated for above-average temperatures this weekend with highs of 47 C in some provinces — more typical of August than July — sparking concerns for water shortages, the meteorological service said.

River Tigris shrinking in Iraq, where scorching summers are common, 37-year-old Wissam Abed usually cools off from Baghdad's brutal summer by swimming in the Tigris river.

But as rivers dry up, so does the age-old pastime.

With temperatures near 50 C and wind whipping through the city like a hairdryer, Abed stood in the middle of the river, but the water only comes up to his waist.

"Year after year, the water situation gets worse," he told AFP.

While it can be difficult to attribute a particular weather event to climate change, scientists insist that global warming — linked to dependence on fossil fuels — is behind the multiplication and intensification of heat waves.

The EU's climate monitoring service said the world saw its hottest June on record last month.

AFP



Responsible mining for an energy-secure future



#MINDANAO

JOHN TRIÁ

The recently announced Davao Public Transport Modernization Project will reportedly establish the country's first organized public bus system. It plans to use traditional and electric buses to cater to 800,000 commuters converging in 1,000 stops in Davao City. This project raises hopes for commuters not only in Davao City but for other major cities where similar systems will be needed.

The use of electric buses is perhaps its most innovative feature since it promises fares that are more stable because the bus is not dependent on expensive foreign fuel. Increased bus use will also reduce dependence on private vehicles and thereby lower vehicular traffic in the city. I hope this paves the way to electrifying more of our public transport system, and more livable, cleaner cities.

Electrifying our public transport system will create a large demand for renewable sources of electricity and reduce our demand for foreign oil. With the green energy option mandated by the Department of Energy, we are now required to source a growing portion of all electricity from renewable sources by 2030. These mandates ensure that the electricity used to power mobility is also renewable. Likewise, the electric vehicle (EV) law will spur demand for EVs and hybrid vehicles.

Increased electrification will drive demand for more electric equipment such as transformers, insulators, wires, and cables to distribute this electricity. EVs will require more batteries. These materials and equipment are often made from minerals.

This increased demand for electricity is an opportunity for our rich minerals sector. Locally abundant copper and nickel are elements that are essential for steel and battery production. Turning them into batteries will create local downstream industries that can boost employment and add value to the economy, while also reducing our imports. Exporting the balance of mineral-derived prod-

ucts will allow us to earn foreign exchange as well.

At present mining employs 200,000 and contributes \$7.5 billion in export revenue. Imagine how much more income and employment will come from local battery and electric equipment manufacturing. Apart from direct employment, whole new indirect employment opportunities will be generated from the mines to the communities - from canteen concessions to the provision of uniforms from local tailors, haircuts from salons, and food from local farms. This can be increased further if we create more downstream industries, such as the local manufacture and export of more processed goods like reinforcing bars and cement for construction, and metals for battery manufacture from which energy sustainability and independence may be achieved.

With these benefits in mind, it is therefore essential that we promote responsible mining and mineral processing investments. Otherwise, others will engage in illegal mining. Illegal and irresponsible mining diminishes the opportunity to manufacture since the raw minerals mined illegally will likely be smuggled out rather than used for local manufacturing.

Mineral resources need to be harnessed responsibly and profitably because mines are essentially government projects. Mining companies are contractors of the government required to remit to the state the people's share of the mineral wealth. The Mines and Geosciences Bureau, therefore, is tasked with promoting responsible mining so that the state earns its share and social benefits are delivered and environmental and social impacts are mitigated by mining and environmental laws.

Our resources have value and must be used for our benefit. Responsible use of our mineral resources holds the key to an energy-secure future.



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High seas treaty too late to stop seabed mining

When the International Seabed Authority begins accepting applications for deep-sea mining operations in the coming weeks, there will remain a lingering question. How much control will authorities have over operations to ensure environmental protection of marine habitats far from coastlines, or will it turn into a wild high seas free-for-all?

The answer seems to be: the new High Seas Treaty is powerless.

The International Seabed Authority, established under the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982, regulates and controls all mineral-related activities on seabeds in international waters and is currently negotiating a mining code to establish the rules under which companies will be allowed to extract minerals from the seabed.

But the clock is ticking. The Authority has been forced to speed up finalizing the code after the tiny Pacific nation of Nauru triggered a two-year rule to allow applications for seabed mining from July 2023.

Although commercial mining has not yet started, companies such as De Beers, China Minmetals Corp., UK Seabed Resources Ltd., and others from Tonga, Nauru, Germany, Japan, and Singapore are lining up to make it a reality.

As a result, there are fears environmental protection for international waters will be drowned in the rush by these companies hoping to exploit one of the planet's final frontiers for mining.

Deep seabed mining for metals such as cobalt, manganese, and nickel could potentially support mass production of essential electronics such as smartphones and tablets as well as stimulate the development of green technology like electric vehicles and wind turbines.

Realizing the imminent impacts of deep-sea mining and how it could affect the marine environment, the world in March this year

COMMENTARY

MOHD HAZMI MOHD RUSLI

reached what could well be a turning point in the protection of the world's oceans—the adoption of the High Seas Treaty.

Without such a treaty, the high seas and deep seabeds beyond national jurisdictions had, for decades, been governed and managed in a fragmented way.

The treaty—which took two decades to finalize and will not be signed off until later in 2023—seeks to change this by establishing a new framework to address marine resource conservation with new management tools and institutional mechanisms for decision-making and equitable benefit sharing.

But the treaty doesn't have any power over mining activities overseen by the International Seabed Authority because it does not apply directly to activities already regulated by existing bodies.

In other words, the High Seas Treaty would not impede or hamper deep-sea mining exploration and any mining activities.

It only prepares the world with an institutionalized and coordinated protective measure without any clear provisions to obstruct mining. The International Seabed Authority can issue licenses to companies intending to explore the deep sea without much hindrance.

Not only that, there are no guarantees the High Seas Treaty could even offer environmental protection despite clauses in it allowing for the creation of marine protected areas beyond national jurisdictions.

It also remains to be seen how nations might work together for the establishment of marine protected areas beyond national jurisdictions.

Proposals would first have to be submitted by participating countries to the Interna-

tional Maritime Organization supported by a draft management plan detailing whether or not activities like fishing, shipping, and deep-sea mining would be restricted within the suggested designated area.

In the meantime, regulations allow countries to apply to the International Seabed Authority for 15-year exclusive rights to explore a specific area for deep-sea mining.

It's an expensive endeavor, costing up to \$1.4 billion over five years. A 2017 UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization report stated that ocean research vessels may cost between \$10,000 to \$40,000 a day to operate. The projected total cost to process the minerals is estimated to be approximately \$135 million.

Contractors are expected to follow best environmental practices and work closely with the Authority to come up with programs for monitoring and evaluating the biodiversity impacts of their exploration and mining activities.

As seabed explorations are now ongoing but mining is yet to start, contractors, scientists, legal experts, and the authority must continuously work together to monitor the environmental impacts.

With more scientific data, it would then be possible for member countries under the High Seas Treaty to unearth the most sustainable way of balancing mining activities with the protection of the marine environment. *The Jakarta Post/Asia News Network*

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