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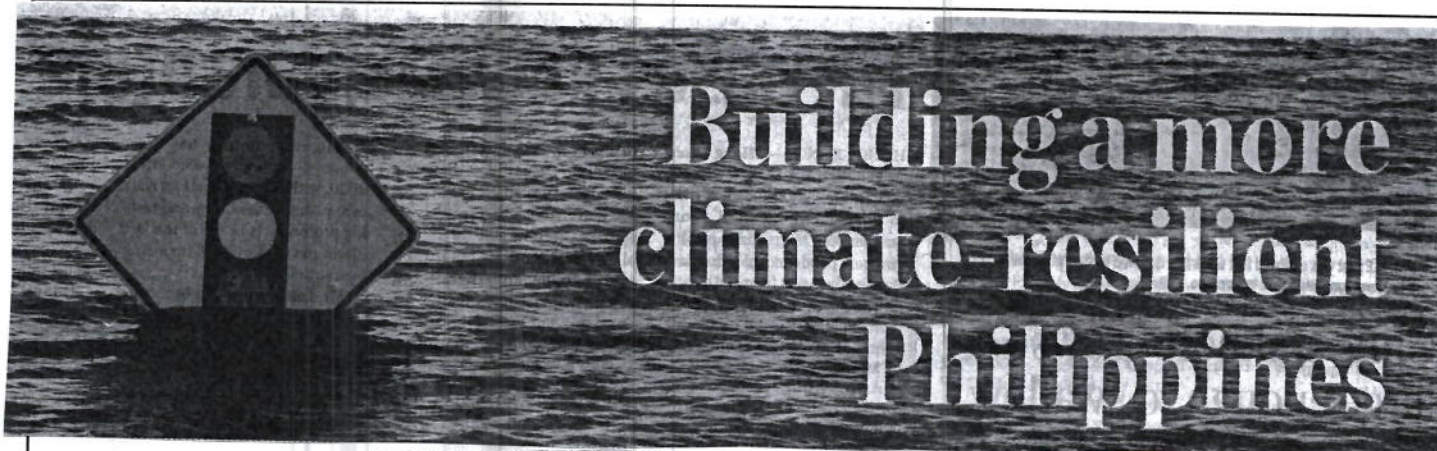


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Building a more climate-resilient Philippines

It's been three weeks since I arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I never thought I would have to experience heat waves to know how serious climate change is. It's not even on the list of courses I want to study at the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS). But the discussion on climate change is part of our summer program, and it's quite intense.

It is also part of my ordeal, having to walk daily for 15-20 minutes under the heat of the sun from my apartment to HKS. It's definitely hotter than the summer in the Philippines. I even got a dry cough and a cold in the second week. But it's not COVID-19, that's climate change!

The first time I heard about climate change was in 2015. The Paris Agreement was all over the news. At that time, it seemed to me that the problem was solved already. I'm not sure how many people around the world did care much about it, but I joined our government in celebrating since the Philippines is a signatory of the climate agreement, without clearly understanding what it really meant for me and our country.

Unfortunately, the Philippines is a disaster-prone country and more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. While we are

MAP INSIGHTS RAYMOND A. ABREA

used to tropical storms and flash floods which usually result in the cancellation of classes (especially in Metro Manila), we have also been experiencing earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and El Niño has been happening more often recently, and then the COVID-19 pandemic happened.

A new department to deal with disasters was already proposed prior to the pandemic. It is separate from the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), an attached agency under the Department of National Defense, which is currently handling disaster-related concerns. In the opening of the 19th Congress, a proposal for the creation of the Department of Disaster Resilience (DDR) was filed again. In House Bill No. 13, it was reiterated that 74% of Filipinos and 80% of the country's land area are exposed to the risk of natural calamities.

Consequently, President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. expressed his support for the creation of the new department during his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) on July 25. He said that renewable energy is on top of his climate agenda to further lower

our carbon footprint. He briefly mentioned building new nuclear power plants, using more solar power, and providing investment incentives by clarifying the uncertain policies on upstream gas, particularly in the area close to the Malampaya gas field – a deep-water gas-condensate reservoir located offshore, 65 km north-west of the island of Palawan.

After attending the lectures and discussions on climate change as part of the MPA Summer Program at the HKS, I got even more confused and, at the same time, overwhelmed about how it affects the Philippines and what exactly are we doing back home.

So, I became more curious. I started reading and searching for all related laws and regulations, policies and programs, and anything about climate change.

I'm not a climate change expert but we all have to know and support what our country is doing to save the planet. A strategy roadmap is needed to engage all stakeholders, especially with the use of a balanced scorecard which the public can understand to monitor progress, similar to the World Bank Report on Ease of Doing Business.

As Co-Chair of the Ease of Doing Business on paying taxes, I have witnessed how all stake-

holders, both from the public and private sectors, have been very much involved and committed to improving our competitiveness ranking in the World Bank report.

The Philippines has committed to 75% Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reduction and avoidance by 2030. With less than 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions, we are definitely not a major source of carbon emissions, unlike China, the US, and Russia who are the Top 3 countries with the largest carbon footprint. But why should we care? And who is on top of all these climate change initiatives?

The simple answer is we are all in this together. We have one earth to save, regardless of our country's CO₂ emission. We can choose to blame other countries, or resolve to contribute to mitigating the risks and effects of climate change.

In the Philippines, it's the Climate Change Commission (CCC) that is the sole policy-making body of the government tasked to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate the programs and action plans of the government relating to climate change.

As a fiscal policy and tax consultant, I have worked with the CCC on tax incentives and regulations to build resilience against climate change. In the same way

that we strive to have an efficient tax system, a climate-resilient Philippines requires a whole government approach involving all stakeholders, not just to push for a climate agenda but to transition to a more sustainable lifestyle for every Filipino.

While we laud the CCC's leadership and accomplishments, we need a balanced scorecard to objectively measure the impact of all existing laws, particularly those granting tax incentives, whether they're really promoting green industries, cities, or jobs – e.g. the Renewable Energy Act of 2009 (RA 9513), the Green Jobs Act (RA 10771), the Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999 (RA 8749), and the Philippine Clean Water Act of 2004 (RA 9275), among others.

Given the challenges we face in implementing the existing laws related to climate change, the CCC must work closely with Congress to make sure mechanisms are in place before new taxes are imposed. We have to be careful so as not to pass the burden of new taxes to the consumers.

The CCC will be in the best position to give an impact assessment and make recommendations as to what policies or best practices can be adopted to achieve our target of 75% GHG reduction by 2030. They should

also be part of the discussion and deliberation in the Ways and Means Committee regarding the laundry list of proposed taxes, e.g., carbon tax, congestion tax, energy tax, air pollution tax, biodiversity services tax, single-use plastic tax, and even a border carbon adjustment so we can impose carbon tariffs on carbon intensive products.

In the end, we are one with the CCC in its vision of a climate-resilient and climate-smart Philippines with healthy, safe, prosperous, and self-reliant communities, and more environment-friendly, earth-loving and responsible Filipinos.

This article reflects the personal opinion of the author and does not reflect the official stand of the Management Association of the Philippines or MAP.

RAYMOND "MON" A. ABREA is a member of the MAP Ease of Doing Business Committee, the Founding Chair and Senior Tax Advisor of the Asian Consulting Group, and Co-Chair of the Paying Taxes – EODB Task Force. He is a Trustee of CSR Philippines, the advocacy partner of the Bureau of Internal Revenue,

Department of Trade and Industry, and the Anti-Red Tape Authority on ease of doing business and tax reform.
map@map.org.ph
mon@acg.ph





Climate emergency declaration awaited from national gov't

By Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza

Reporter

THE government must declare a climate emergency to wield extraordinary powers that will facilitate a shift to renewable energy, which analysts and economists said will address prevailing problems like the unreliable food supply and the Philippines' vulnerability to calamities. They said on Sunday that senior officials and the public should initiate wide-ranging discussions on the economic costs of climate change.

"The climate crisis precedes — and is a factor in — many of the issues we are facing today, and so declaring a climate emergency should have been done years ago," Lea Guerrero, country director of Greenpeace Philippines, said in an e-mail.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. said in his first address to Congress that he will work towards a shift to green energy and boost investment in climate-resilient infrastructure.

Mr. Marcos has yet to declare a climate emergency, which would authorize the government to mobilize funds to step up climate mitigation efforts.

Makati City, home to a major business district, declared a climate emergency last week, introducing a plan to put up solar panels in schools and government offices to ensure uninterrupted power services during disasters. It also encouraged the business community to enforce mitigation measures.

The House of Representatives made a similar declaration in 2019, but Greenpeace said "we have not seen the follow-through from our national government."

"This tells us that a declaration itself isn't enough — the sitting administration must ensure there is a coherent plan to address the climate crisis with urgency and efficiency," it said.

"More than 60% of (the Philippine) population is coastal, and the majority of our cities are in coastal areas," Greenpeace said, noting that extreme

weather events and slow-onset impacts of climate change, including ocean heating and acidification, also affect economic performance.

"The World Bank estimates that we spend 0.5% of our gross domestic product on natural disasters annually," it said.

Citing its own study on rising sea levels, Greenpeace said as much as 80% of Manila could be submerged by 2030, "potentially impacting 87% of its GDP."

"(Climate change) will further affect not just fisheries and agriculture and livelihoods, but also access to water and secure shelters and homes."

Renato E. Reside, Jr., an associate professor at the University of the Philippines School of Economics (UPSE), said climate change effects impede economic productivity — a reality that the government should recognize as early as now.

"Climate and environmental problems lead to poor health outcomes which reduce worker and student productivity," he said in a Messenger chat. "So, the social cost of climate problems is very large and growing. The cost of abatement and cleanup is itself part of the social cost and it is growing too."

Climate change took its toll on Europe recently, with the region experiencing record-breaking temperatures last month. The European Parliament declared a climate emergency in 2019.

The US has also not been spared from the effects of climate change. Last month, some 100 million Americans from New York City to Las Vegas were under heat warnings as temperatures rose well above 100°F (38°C), Reuters reported.

The US has yet to declare a climate emergency, nor has China. The two economies accounted for 41.89% and 34.75% of world GDP in nominal and purchasing power parity terms, respectively.

Mr. Marcos, 64, needs to collaborate with Congress to implement a massive plan to combat climate change, policy analyst Michael Henry Ll. Yusingco said in an e-mail. "The supermajority support he has in both chambers is a



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huge plus, but he will still have to deal with various interests and agenda that could dilute his original objective.”

Mr. Yusingco said the President and his team need to provide an evidence-based rationale that can be understood by the public to gain broad support.

“Whether the emergency declaration is as provided for in the constitution or not, a coherent and cogent explanation is very crucial in order to gain public support for the declaration as well as the moves that will follow after it,” he said.

“A lot of sacrifices will be made by the people, so it’s very important that they understand why we are doing this radical step,” he added. “More critically, civil society and the business sector need to be engaged every step of the way.”

Mr. Marcos has said he would make infrastructure more resilient to disasters, vowing to modernize ports and update housing standards.

Terry L. Ridon, convenor of infrastructure think tank InfraWatchPH, said “infrastructure and government projects must be designed to achieve net zero emissions.”

“It means incorporating climate adaptation... in designing various infrastructure projects,” he said in an e-mail. “It means installing solar panels and other renewable energy solutions in unused infrastructure spaces.”

The former legislator said the government needs to determine an appropriate level of climate intervention, “as we are not expected to introduce advanced measures... unlike developed economies.”

“The appropriate level of intervention determines whether low or moderate levels of emissions produced by infrastructure projects remain acceptable in the medium term,” he said. “A higher level of intervention will certainly incur significantly higher immediate costs, and this is a question which both government and the private sector will have to address together.”

Mr. Ridon said the government needs to expand tax and nontax incentives for firms undertaking climate-resilient projects and programs. “This

is ‘the only way’ for the private sector to participate in accelerated climate intervention.”

“These incentives should be long-lasting, as the purpose for the incentive, climate intervention and resilience, is a long-term national and international undertaking,” he said.

Mr. Reside of UPSE said the government needs to revisit climate abatement laws and rules, including a policy that provides incentives to businesses that reduce air pollution. “Have they actually abated pollution in any way since they were passed? If so, by how much? No one is doing the math.”

“We already have the Clean Air Act and this law provides tax incentives for pollution abatement, but the take-up of tax benefits from this law in exchange for abatement is very low,” Mr. Reside said. “Climate-targeted financing could also be made available to fund initiatives to protect the environment at various levels of government.”

Greenpeace urged the government to institute a “rapid and just” transition to a low-carbon pathway through a massive uptake of renewable energy solutions.

“It should strengthen energy security starting by scaling up renewable energy targets to at least 50% by 2030, and instituting a blueprint for 100% RE by 2050,” it said.

The government also needs to ratchet up its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) under the Paris Agreement, it said. The Philippines has promised a 75% carbon emissions reduction between 2020 and 2030, subject to foreign funding. The reduction target using internal resources is only 2.72%.

Greenpeace also challenged the government to expand coverage of the coal-fired power plant moratorium to include projects in the pipeline and implement a phaseout plan for operating coal projects.

It said businesses should be required to align with the government’s commitments under the Paris Agreement “to address the human rights impacts of climate change.”



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U.S. affirms climate change mitigation aid

Ambassador Carlson said the US government felt very reassured with the appointment of Secretary Diokno and the other economic team members

As the Philippines belongs to the countries most vulnerable to climate change, the United States government said they are willing to scale up its financial assistance to the country, among other cooperation in health security and digitalization.

This was affirmed by US Ambassador to the Philippines Marykay Loss Carlson when she met Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno on Monday, airing intentions to strengthen the Philippine-US development cooperation further.

"I am very pleased to hear of Ambassador Marykay Carlson's willingness to increase our cooperation in health security, climate finance and the digitalization of our tax system," said Secretary Diokno in a tweet following his meeting with the US Ambassador.

Complementing Diokno's statement, Ambassador Carlson said the US government felt very reassured with the appointment of Secretary Diokno and the other economic team members. It sends a positive signal to US companies who want stability, predictability and transparency.

During the meeting, Ambassador Carlson expressed willingness to scale up climate financing support to the Philippines, recognizing the threat of climate change as the most existential problem the world is facing today.

The Philippines, for instance, has been named by several reports and studies as one of the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change.

During his first State of the Nation Address, President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. identified climate change as among the critical issues his administration will address.

The Philippine government previously set an ambitious commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 75 percent by 2030, despite contributing only 0.3 percent of the total global emissions.

While in terms of health security, the two sides discussed efforts to increase the Covid-19 vaccination rate.

RAFFY AYENG



Climate change to be taught in schools

BY KRISTINA MARALIT

THE Climate Change Commission (CCC) on Monday hailed the Department of Education's (DepEd) move to integrate climate change into the basic education curriculum.

In a statement, CCC Secretary Robert Borje underscored the importance of including climate education in the K to 12 program as this is key in raising the awareness of the Filipino youth.

"Climate change education is imperative as we develop our homegrown science, and engage our children, youth, educators and education administrators in transformative climate actions,"

Borje said.

"A strengthened curriculum integrating climate change education is a vital step in empowering the citizenry in thinking critically and preparing for the challenges of climate change," he added.

Consistent with the pronouncement of President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. toward a "Climate Resilient and Climate Smart Philippines 2050," the CCC will continue to work with the education department and other key agencies in transform-

ing the country into upper middle income, low carbon and climate-resilient economy by 2050.

DepEd established its Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Service (DRRMS) to ensure the integration of climate literacy in the basic education sector pursuant to the Climate Change Act of 2009.

The DRRMS has been promoting climate education through different programs, projects and activities aligned with the updated K to 12 curricula as mandated by

Republic Act 9729 or the "Climate Change Act."

Additionally, climate change concepts have been integrated with the curriculum in subjects such as Science, Health, Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies), Edukasyon sa Pagpapa-katao (Values Education), Mathematics, English, Filipino, Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan (Home Economics and Livelihood Education), Technology and Livelihood Economics, and Music, Arts and Physical Education.



Tuesday, August 9, 2022

Climate change, scarcity chip away at degrowth taboo

DEGROWTH - the idea that a finite planet cannot sustain ever-increasing consumption - is about the closest you can get to a heresy in economics, where growth is widely held as the best route to prosperity.

But, as climate change accelerates and supply chain disruptions offer rich-world consumers an unaccustomed taste of scarcity, the theory is becoming less taboo and some have started to ponder what a degrowth world might look like.

After the U.N. climate science agency this year called for cuts in consumer demand - a core degrowth premise - the think tank that runs the Davos forum published a degrowth primer in June and the issue has even begun to crop up in investment notes.

"It is a provocative term," Aniket Shah, Global Head of ESG and Sustainability Strategy at Jefferies said of the New York-based bank's June 13 note on the "Degrowth Opportunity".

"But it's not about going to a low-income country saying 'You can't grow anymore'," he said. "It's saying: We need to look at the entire system and see how do we over time decrease total consumption and production in aggregate."

First coined in its French guise "décroissance" in 1972, the theory gained backers after the "Limits To Growth" report in the same year described a computer simulation by MIT scientists of a world destabilized by growing material consumption.

Controversial from the start, that simulation has been attacked as flawed by some and applauded by others as uncannily prescient in its prediction of accelerating planetary stress.

In recent decades, the world's economy has grown faster than the carbon emissions it generates. But this partial decoupling has been nowhere near enough to halt or reverse those emissions, allowing them to drive global warming further.

In April, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that outright cuts to consumer demand were needed to reduce carbon emissions, a shift from a previous focus on the promise of sustainable fuel technology.

The IPCC's biodiversity counterpart IPBES last month included degrowth among a number of alternative economic models with insights that could help to arrest environmental degradation.

"In the plenary, even the word 'degrowth' wasn't challenged. That's very interesting," IPBES report co-chair Unai Pascual told Reuters of conclusions that won approval from 139 member countries, including China, India, Russia and the United States.

The article on degrowth published in June by Davos-organiser

the World Economic Forum hinted at degrowth impacts, suggesting "it might mean people in rich countries changing their diets, living in smaller houses and driving and travelling less".

For Jefferies' Shah, it is such behavioral changes that could inspire a degrowth-aligned investment portfolio.

"Would Zoom for example ever want to be called a degrowth stock? I doubt it. But I can certainly see how a world that uses more web-conferencing ... means less travel, which is a very high-carbon-intensive way of transportation," said Shah.

It is easy to see how other products and services, such as mobility- and fashion-sharing, technologies that allow a transition from fossil fuel to renewable energy, or even just bicycles, could find a place in a hypothetical degrowth fund.

But how far ESG funds and the companies in which they invest are ready to align with degrowth is open to question given how the theory explicitly prioritizes societal, environmental and other non-financial values over profit-making.

"Degrowth is really about true sustainability," Jennifer Wilkins, a researcher on emerging business sustainability issues whose work was featured in the Jefferies note, told Reuters.

"It's about delivering what is needed in terms of meeting human needs, within planetary boundaries. And current ESG investors don't really understand planetary boundaries," she said, adding their focus remained "what impacts the business".

That perhaps is not surprising.

Some countries have tried to measure economic outcomes differently - the tiny Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan famously devised a "gross national happiness" index and Japan is looking into developing a "green GDP" measurement.

But still, economic policy and markets overwhelmingly run on the dual track of increasing consumption and production.

Tim Jackson, an economist who has long critiqued that model, said the current debate on growth was "very, very confused", with different strands of thought vying for supremacy.

He pointed to the UK Conservative Party leadership contest - a race that will decide who replaces Boris Johnson as prime minister - as an example of what he called a "gung-ho" focus on economic growth as an unchallenged priority.

On the other hand, he said, more ecologically-minded politicians across Europe and beyond were receptive in private to arguments around limits to growth but "want to find other ways to talk about it that don't scare the horses". - Reuters



NATIONWIDE ROUND-UP

Senate bill on digitalizing government processes refiled

A SENATOR has refiled a bill that seeks to digitalize government processes for an efficient delivery of services.

Senate Bill 334 or the proposed E-Government Act of 2022 will allow Filipinos to apply for claims or loans, pay taxes, renew licenses and engage in related government transactions using digital technology.

"Filipinos certainly deserve the convenience of accessing government services and information at their fingertips," Senator Mary Grace S. Poe-Lamanzares said in a statement on Monday.

"Amid the new normal, swift and reliable access to state and local institutions anytime, anywhere is more crucial than ever," she added.

The proposed measure mandates the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) to establish and promote an e-government master plan that will serve as a framework for the rollout of online services by agencies.

The master plan will deal with archives and records management system, online payment system, citizen frontline delivery services, and public finance management and procurement system. It will be reviewed and revised every three years.

"Waiting in line for hours for cash aid, loans, benefits and the like should be a thing of the past," Ms. Poe said. — **Alyssa Nicole O. Tan**



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BILL AIMS TO REMOVE QUEUES IN GOV'T OFFICES

By Melvin Gascon
@melvingasconINQ

Sen. Grace Poe has filed a bill that seeks to set up online transactions in government offices to get rid of long lines.

Senate Bill No. 334 or the proposed E-Government Act of 2022 seeks to mandate government agencies on the efficient delivery of services, allowing the public to perform transactions through their mobile phones or desktop computers.

"Filipinos certainly deserve the convenience of accessing government services and information at their fingertips. Amid the new normal, swift and reliable access to state and local institutions anytime, anywhere is more crucial than ever," Poe said.

E-gov't master plan

Under the proposed bill, the public can apply for claims or loans, pay taxes, renew licenses and engage in related government transactions without having to leave their houses or offices.

"Waiting in line for hours for cash aid, loans, benefits and the like should be a thing of the past. We must spare our people, especially the elderly and persons with disability, from

this unacceptable strain in the hands of the government," Poe said.

SB 334 tasks the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) to establish and promote an e-government master plan (EGMP) to serve as a framework for the rollout of online services by agencies.

The DICT secretary will head the e-government initiative while each local government unit (LGU) will have an information officer to supervise the adoption of the master plan and report compliance.

The EGMP will deal with archives and records management system, online payment system, citizen front-line delivery services, and public finance management and procurement system.

The bill also provides for the review and revision of the master plan every three years.

The EGMP was first crafted under Executive Order No. 47, issued by then President Benigno Aquino III in 2011, which directed the then Information and Communications and Technology Office to provide an ICT infrastructure, systems and resources to support "efficient, effective, transparent and accountable governance."

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According to Poe, her bill aims to continue government efforts to "harmonize and integrate ICT" in the implementation of the master plan, which was first implemented from 2013 to 2016.

Another six-year EGMP was released for 2016 to 2022, which the DICT updated this year, she said.

For Poe, the digital transformation of processes involved in delivering services was more urgent now with physical interaction still limited due to COVID-19, making reliable access to government services "within the confines of our homes... more crucial than ever."

Over the years, several bills were approved to make business transactions more convenient for the public, including Republic Act No. 11032 or the Ease of Doing Business and

Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018.

Signed on May 28, 2018, it was part of the Duterte administration's 10-point socio-economic agenda to increase competitiveness and the ease of doing business in the country.

It sought to reduce the processing times of business transactions in government agencies and government-owned and -controlled corporations to three working days for simple transactions, seven days

for complex transactions, and 20 working days for highly technical transactions.

RA 11032 also required all LGUs to come up with a unified business application form to streamline procedures for the issuance of business permits, clearance and other types of authorizations.

At the same time, LGUs were mandated to set up one-stop shops to facilitate business permits applications. —WITH A REPORT FROM INQUIRER RESEARCH INQ



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CREATING A MANILA BAY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL A MUST

NAVOTAS City Rep. Toby Tiangco is pushing for the creation of the Manila Bay Management Council that will manage and control the Manila Bay and formulate a unified policy for its protection and preservation, among others.

Taking into consideration the mandamus issued by the Supreme Court on Manila Bay several years back which required concerned government agencies and local government units to clean up, rehabilitate and preserve the bay, his House Bill 2926 will have the MBMC the supervision, management and control the Manila Bay.

"Through this measure, we seek to amend Section 16 of the Philippine Fisheries Code, giving the MBMC supervision and control of the Manila Bay," he said.

Restoring Manila Bay to its pristine state will only be feasible if all concerned government agencies and LGUs follow and implement unified rules, policies, and procedures, he said.

The Navotas lawmaker said the MBMC will be composed of the secretaries of agriculture and environment, chair of the Metro Manila Development Authority, and the governors of Bataan, Pampanga, Bulacan, and Cavite.

Navotas gains more skilled workers

The city government has gained more skilled workers following the virtual graduation of 198 technical and vocational trainees of Navotas Vocational Training and Assessment (NAVOTAAS) Institute.

Of these, 12 completed and



received national certification (NC) II for Shielded Metal Arc Welding; 10, Dressmaking; 13, House-keeping; 16, Massage Therapy; and 13, Hairdressing.

Fifteen trainees also finished Bread and Pastry Production NC II, and 16 each graduated from Barista and Food and Beverages NC II.

Mayor John Rey Tiangco encouraged the graduates to keep on learning and work on improving themselves.

"Seize the opportunity to learn. Our training centers offer various free courses. Enroll and equip yourselves with the right skills to

pursue your dream career."

He said that more employment opportunities will be available to Navoteños when the Tanza Airport Support Services begins its operation.

"Make sure you are learning the necessary skills and proficiencies to qualify for the jobs that will soon be offered," he said.

Navotas has four training centers that are open to Navoteño and non-Navoteño trainees. Residents may study at the institute for free while non-residents may enroll and take assessment exams for a fee, depending on the course they will take.



Modular nuclear plants eyed

BY GAB HUMILDE VILLEGAS
@tribunephil_gab

Modular nuclear power plants are being explored by the Philippines as a new clean energy source, according to Philippine Ambassador to the United States Jose Manuel Romualdez.

Interviewed on television, Romualdez said the US has offered power plants that are being rapidly created.

"So we are seriously going to look into it. I think President (Ferdinand "Bongbong") Marcos is quite excited about it. As a

matter of fact, I think NuScale which is a company developing this technology is now having a partnership with the local energy company here in the Philippines," he said.

"Hopefully, President Marcos will be able to meet with the NuScale if and when he goes to the United States to do this further."

Romualdez clarified that the modular power plants are different from the Bataan nuclear plant.

"The modular nuclear power plants are very small in nature and they say that they are even easier to install," he said.

"I'm told by those developing it that it really is quite the way of the future as far as clean energy is concerned."

Marcos has expressed his support for incorporating nuclear energy into the nation's energy mix.

The advanced compact modular reactors now being developed in the US represent a variety of sizes, technology options, capabilities, and deployment scenarios, according to the US Office of Nuclear Energy.

These cutting-edge reactors, which are expected to range in size from tens to hundreds

of megawatts, can be utilized for desalination, electricity generation, and other industrial purposes.

Light water or other non-light water coolants, such as a gas, liquid metal, or molten salt, may be used in SMR designs in place of light water as a coolant.

Small modular reactors may generate a power capacity of up to 300 megawatts of energy per unit, about one-third of the generating capacity of traditional nuclear power reactors, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency.



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Solon urges: Revive Bataan power plant

The BNPP will help our country cut electricity cost by almost half, in comparison to the rates of the coal-fired power plants

A lawmaker on Monday is urging the national government to revive the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP) as it has a huge potential to produce cheaper electricity in the country amid the rising costs in fuel and other basic commodities.

Negros Oriental Third District Representative Arnolfo Teves Jr. said that he has filed House Bill 2921 – also known as the Philippine Nuclear Act of 2022 – which seeks to mandate the government to utilize the \$2.118 billion-BNPP or acquire another nuclear facility in case the existing power plant is no longer feasible for operation.

“The BNPP will help our country cut electricity cost by almost half, in comparison to the rates of the coal-fired power plants,” Teves said.

The solon added that around 441 nuclear power plants are now in operation in at least 30 countries, which shows that nuclear power is a safe means of generating electricity and a reliable source of energy.



Solar-powered building eyed to nudge shift to clean energy

BOCAUE, Bulacan – The installation of a 50-kilowatt on-grid solar energy system at the office of a church-based credit cooperative here could be the first step to the switch to renewable energy for cost savings and a cleaner community in the province of Bulacan.

The statement came from former chief justice Reynato S. Puno, chairman of GenWATT Energy Solutions, which installed the solar energy system on the building of the St. Martin of Tours Credit and Development Coop-

erative inaugurated Saturday.

GenWATT chief executive officer, Wendell R. Tamayo, said the system, which has a 50-kW inverter with 40-kW solar panels installed on the building's roof, could produce 180 kW to 200 kW of electricity on a normal sunny day, covering 60 percent to 80 percent of the building's requirements during office hours.

"It has the potential to save P45,000 to P70,000 in electricity bills every month at a price of P11 per kilowatt hour. Over the 25-year guaranteed production ef-

iciency of the solar panels, it is projected to generate 1,500 megawatts of electricity," Tamayo said.

Daniilo D. Esteban, chairperson of the SMTCDC, a credit union cooperative, agreed, saying the solar energy system could bring great savings to their cooperative.

Puno said the solar energy system would help address high electricity bills.

He expressed hope that other cooperatives and local government units would likewise start using renewable energy.



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Marcos to address UN Assembly next month

By PIA LEE-BRAGO

President Marcos is expected to attend the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)'s annual gathering of world leaders next month, the Philippine ambassador to the United States said yesterday.

In an interview on *ANC*, Ambassador Jose Manuel Romualdez said Marcos is expected to address the UNGA on Sept. 20.

He said Marcos' flight had been booked even before he formally assumed the presidency since this was a "first come, first served" basis.

"So President Marcos is expected to speak at the UN on September 20th which is the day it starts," Romualdez said.

According to Romualdez, several heads of state have asked for a meeting with Marcos.

"There are many people who are very eager to listen to him from what I'm told. We have several heads of state who have asked if they could have a meeting with President Marcos. So it's going to be something that's going to be very important for the country," he added.

Romualdez said Marcos may mention the West Philippine Sea and the 2016 arbitral ruling.

"I think that that's probably going to be mentioned, generally, I suppose," he said.

Former president Rodrigo Duterte raised the South China Sea ruling in his UNGA speech in September 2020. However, there was absolutely no follow-through in terms of the specific steps that need to be taken to enforce the Award.

Part of the follow-through is making use of all available instruments of the UN, including the filing of UNGA resolutions which would allow a general debate or referral to a particular UN committee for further discussion.

Placing the subject under continued deliberation by the international community would be a good avenue in drawing international attention to and support for the Award in the West Philippine Sea.

Romualdez said Cabinet secretaries have also been asked for inputs to Marcos' UNGA speech.

The high number of leaders attending reflects the importance of the annual UN gathering, officially called the General Debate, and its role in diplomacy. While all countries speak publicly in the assembly, many of the world's business gets discussed at private meetings, lunches and din-

ners on the sidelines.

Meanwhile, a militant fishers' group yesterday warned that a joint patrol between the United States and the Philippines in the West Philippine Sea could escalate tensions in Philippine waters.

Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) was reacting to a statement by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken who, during a weekend visit, affirmed that a joint patrol in the West Philippine Sea "can take place" in his view.

Pamalakaya said that the joint patrol could be seen as an aggravating move against China. "Similar to (US Speaker Nancy) Pelosi's trip to Taiwan last week, Blinken's meeting with Bongbong Marcos can be deemed as a provocative act against China, which has been aggressive in our territorial waters," Pamalakaya vice chair for Luzon Bobby Roldan said in a statement.

"The US official's visit can't be expected to appease the tensions in the West Philippine Sea. Rather, this threatens and could trigger

China to expand its military presence and become more aggressive in occupying our territorial waters at the expense of fishing security and rights of the Filipino fisherfolk," he added.

Roldan said the joint patrol could heighten the Chinese military presence in the sea.

"Our traditional fishing grounds are already militarized by Beijing; we don't need another superpower parading its naval vessels that could further impede our fishing activities. We want a demilitarized West Philippine Sea so

we could fish peacefully," he said.

The fisherfolk group called for a peaceful and diplomatic settlement to the issue, in the face of possible military intervention from China's rival countries.

Pamalakaya also urged that unequal military treaties with the US be scrapped, including the Mutual Defense Treaty and Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, which the group said pose a "similar threat" to national sovereignty and security.

- With Ralph Edwin Villanueva



Taal emits high levels of volcanic sulfur dioxide anew

By ELLALYN DE VERA-RUIZ

The volcanic sulfur dioxide (SO₂) emitted from Taal's main crater on Sunday, Aug. 7, exceeded 17,000 tons – the highest SO₂ emission since the volcano's alert status was lowered to level 1 on July 11, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said.

In its 11:30 p.m. advisory, Phivolcs said Taal Volcano emitted 17,141 tons of SO₂ Sunday morning.

The average SO₂ flux since July 15 was at 6,041 tons per day – higher than the 1,289 tons per day average between May and mid-July 2022.

"Increased degassing has been visible in the form of upwelling in the main crater lake and voluminous steam-rich plume activity in the past three days," Phivolcs said.

It warned of airborne volcanic gas that could be drifted to

►5

Taal emits high levels of volcanic sulfur dioxide anew 1◀

the general east to west of Taal Volcano Island, based on the air parcel trajectory data from the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration.

In the past 24 hours, Taal Volcano also had three tremor events.

Phivolcs reminded the public that Alert Level 1 prevails over Taal Volcano, which means that it is still in abnormal condition and should not be interpreted to have ceased unrest nor ceased the threat of eruptive activity.

"Should an uptrend or pronounced change in monitored parameters forewarn of renewed unrest, the Alert Level may be raised back to Alert Level 2," it said.

"Conversely, should there be a return of monitoring parameters to baseline levels after a sufficient observation period, the Alert Level will be further lowered to Alert Level 0," it pointed out.

Under Alert Level 1, sudden steam-driven or phreatic explosions, volcanic earthquakes, minor ashfall and lethal accumulations or expulsions of volcanic gas can occur and threaten areas within the Taal Volcano Island (TVI).

"Phivolcs strongly recommends that entry into TVI, Taal's permanent danger zone or PDZ, especially the vicinities of the main crater and the Daang Kastila fissure, must remain strictly prohibited," it said.



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More gas emission recorded in Taal Volcano anew

THE Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) reported an increase in volcanic sulfur dioxide (SO₂) emission in the Taal Volcano.

In an advisory late Sunday, Phivolcs said 17,147 tonnes of SO₂ emission was recorded on Aug. 7, higher than the 12,125 tonnes last Aug. 3.

The latest figure is also the highest gas emission since the volcano was placed under Alert Level 1 (low-level unrest) last July 11.

Airborne volcanic gas is forecast to drift east to west of Taal Volcano Island (TVI).

Increased degassing has been visible in the form of upwelling in the Main Crater Lake, and the voluminous steam-rich

plume activity in the past six days.

Yesterday, Phivolcs said three volcanic tremors that lasted four to 12 minutes, and a low-level background tremor, were recorded for the past 24 hours. Three volcanic tremors were also recorded in the previous 24-hour observation period.

These tremors were volcanic earthquakes signifying fluid or gas movement, Phivolcs Director Renato Solidum Jr. said earlier.

Moderate plume emission reaching 1,500 meters high was also observed in the past 24 hours.

Phivolcs reminded the public that Taal Volcano is still under Alert Level 1, which means sudden steam-driven or phreatic

explosions, volcanic earthquakes, minor ash-fall and expulsions of volcanic gas could threaten areas within TVI or Taal's permanent danger zone.

Local government units are likewise urged to continuously assess previously evacuated barangays around Taal Lake for damage and road accessibilities, and to strengthen preparedness, contingency and communication measures in case of renewed unrest.

Civil aviation authorities were urged to advise pilots not to fly near the volcano as airborne ash and ballistic fragments from sudden explosions and wind-remobilized ash could pose danger to aircraft. PNA,

Jojo Magsombol



Taal Volcano emits increased sulfur dioxide anew

By JOJO CESAR
MAGSAMBOL

BATANGAS - The Taal Main Crater spewed 17,141 tons per day of volcanic sulfur dioxide or SO₂ gas early Monday, the highest amount since the volcano was downgraded to Alert Level 1 a few weeks ago, according to the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs).

It is estimated that the released volcanic gas will be blown into the air in a general east to west direction based on the air parcel trajectory data of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

The average SO₂ flux from July 15 - dropped to

6,041 tonnes per day, with an increase from the average of 1,289 tonnes per day from May to July 15, 2022.

The degassing is notable for the restoration of upwelling in the Taal Main Crater lake and the emission of thick smoke here in the past three days.

On the other hand, three tremor events that lasted for nine minutes were recorded during the past monitoring day.

Phivolcs reminds the public that Alert Level 1 has been raised at Taal Volcano, which means that the volcano is not in normal condition, and its activity or threat of eruption has not yet subsided.

If there is an aggrava-

tion or drastic change in the monitoring parameters, the alert level may be raised again to Alert Level 2.

On the other hand, if the monitoring parameters return to the baseline level after a sufficient period of monitoring, the alert level can be lowered to Alert Level 0.

At the current Alert Level 1, sudden bursts of steam or phreatic explosions, volcanic earthquakes, thin ash-fall, and accumulation or emission of toxic gases may occur in the atmosphere of Taal Volcano Island or TVI.

Phivolcs strongly suggests a strict ban on entering the TVI, which is the "Permanent Danger Zone" or PDZ of the Taal Volcano, especially around and

inside the Main Crater and the Daang Castilla fissure.

Local Government Units (LGUs) are urged to continue to assess the damage and condition of roads and paths and to strengthen preparedness, contingency, and communication methods in case the condition of the volcano changes.

People are advised to be careful of the movement of the ground that has a crack (fissure), possible ash rain, and weak earthquakes.

Civil aviation authorities are urged to advise pilots not to fly near the volcano to avoid sudden eruptions of ash and large rock fragments or flying ash carried by strong winds that could pose a danger to aircraft.



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Bulkang Taal muling nag-alburoto, 3 pagyanig naitala

MULING nag-alburoto ang Bulkang Taal matapos makapagtala ng tatlong volcanic tremors sa paligid nito, iniulat ng Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs).

Ayon sa Phivolcs, bukod sa pagyanig at nakataas din sa alert level 1 ang paligid ng bulkan.

Sinabi ng Phivolcs na patuloy pa rin ang pagbuga ng usok sa bunganga ng bulkan.

Mahigpit na ipinagbabawal ang pagpasok ng sinoman sa permanent danger zone (PDZ) ng bulkan lalo na sa main crater at ang paglalayag ng bangka malapit sa Taal Lake dahil sa banta ng pagsabog.

Nagbabala rin ang Phivolcs sa posibleng panganib sa Taal dahil sa paulit ulit na pagsabog nito, paglindol, pagtalsik ng maliit na abo at gas na maaaring makasama sa kalusugan ng tao.

SANTI CELARIO



Aftershock sa Luzon quake pumalo ng 3,200

PUMALO na sa 3,200 ang aftershock na naitala sa ilang lugar sa Northern Luzon matapos ang malakas na lindol na sumentro sa Tayum, Abra noong Hulyo 27.

Ayon sa Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs), nakapagtala ang kanilang mga monitoring station ng kabuuang 3,235 aftershock na may lakas ng mula 1.4 hanggang 5.1 magnitude.

Anila, 63 sa mga ito ang naramdaman sa ilang lugar sa nasabing rehiyon.

Matatandaang naramdaman maging sa Metro Manila ang epekto ng malakas na pagyanig na gumimbal sa Northern Luzon bandang alas-8:43 ng umaga noong Hulyo 27.

Sinabi ng Phivolcs na isa ang Northern Luzon sa 'seismically active region' sa bansa dahil sa mga aktibo fault line dito kabilang ang mga northern segment Philippine Fault, Abra River Fault, West Ilocos Fault System at Naglibacan Fault.

Bukod anila pa rito ang mga local fault na maaaring natabunan ng mga deposito ng bulkan na posible ring pagmulan ng mahihina hanggang malalakas na lindol.



Lechon buwaya patok sa Davao

HEAVEN talaga sa sarap ang lechon! Mapapa-'Sharon' (balot ng pagkain) ka talaga dahil halos lahat ng bisita mo ay may dalang plastic labo para magbalot.

Pero, titikim ka kaya kung ang lechon na nakahanda sa harap mo ay gawa sa buwaya sa halip na baboy?

Ganyan ang naging handa para sa ika-70 na kaarawan ni Tiyo Poldo na pinost ni Fe Libranza Buaga na taga Tagum, Davao. Kamakailan lang ay nag-viral ang kanyang Facebook post na umani ng atensyon dahil sa kakaibang lechon na nakahain sa kanilang selebrasyon.

Ito ay lechong buwaya. May sukat ito ng humigit-kumulang 3-4 metro. Kulay brown din ang balat nito na tila lechong baboy talaga ang porma. Nakatali ang bunganga nito at matatanaw mo pa ang matutulis nitong mga ngipin.

Maraming mga netizen ang nagtaka at napananong na lang kung puwede pa talagang kainin ang ganitong hayop.

Komento ni Joven Tipay Dimatatac, "Ngek buwaya pala."

"Mas mejo makunat ung meat nia.. same lng yung taste typical, Tried sisig in Davao Crocodile Park.." pagbabahagi ni Hannah Limbo.



(Fe Libranza Buagas Facebook)

Naka-relate rin sa post si Oscar Benavidez, aniya, "Mas arap po iyan adobong Karne ng buaya nakakain na ako nyan sa Puerto Princesa Palawan."

"Kung kulang pa yan order kayo sa congress o kaya sa senado maraming buaya doon," pabirong banat ni Risde Atar.

Nag-iwan naman ng hinaing si Alexandrei Luigi America, ani, "Pati ba Naman buwaya kinakain nyo na walang Wala naba kayo para na kayong Chinese e."

Sa kabila nito, nilinaw din ni Buaga na noong inorder nila ang lechong buwaya ay may kasama itong permit mula sa Davao Crocodile Park kaya naman siguradong safe at legal ito. **(Moses Caleon)**



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Makati to focus on flood control programs

Following the declaration of a state of climate emergency, the Makati government will push for the implementation of medium and long-term environmental goals, Mayor Abby Binay announced yesterday.

Binay said the local government would focus on addressing the recurring problem on flooding.

"Flooding has been our problem for a long time. The scenes of evacuation of residents every time there is a typhoon should be over," she said.

Binay said among the city's priorities aside from flood control is the widespread implementation of programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The local government's plans are hinged on the city's infrastructure investments that aim to power buses with electricity under its smart transport initiative, according to the mayor.

Makati targets to roll out e-buses and install solar panels in public schools and government offices next year.

"I don't want these plans to end on the drawing board," Binay said.

She said the local government would strictly implement the Solid Waste Management Code, Green Building Code, single-use plastic ban in households and business establishments, smoking ban as well as the anti-smoke belching ordinance.

- Neil Jayson Servallos



HOW SUSTAINABILITY CAN HELP COMPANIES TO STAY RELEVANT AND CAPTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The sustainability movement is gaining momentum globally, with growing awareness and calls to act on environmental and social challenges. This has resulted in active steps being taken by various stakeholders to address these issues.

In line with this, we see an increasing demand by customers for more sustainable products and services. Some enterprises have also begun to take steps to incorporate sustainability in their businesses, choosing sustainably sourced raw materials or adopting the relevant sustainability related standards. Governments, too, have stepped up efforts to drive sustainability with many from key economies committing to ambitious carbon reduction targets to address urgent issues on climate change.

Singapore is similarly advancing its efforts in sustainable development, with the launch of the Singapore Green Plan 2030 last year. Decarbonization is a major theme, and includes efforts such as increasing solar deployment, deploying electric vehicle infrastructure, improving energy efficiency of buildings, and piloting the use of lower-carbon alternative fuels in its aviation and maritime sectors. Several government initiatives have also been announced to drive environmental sustainability efforts among enterprises, including an increase in the carbon tax to accelerate decarbonization efforts, and the implementation of a mandatory packaging reporting requirement as the first step to reduce packaging waste.

However, we are still at the beginning of our sustainability journey. Awareness of the concept of sustainability is low among enterprises and many are unsure of its relevance to their businesses, while others



lack knowledge on how to start. Business owners are also understandably cautious and worried about the costs of pursuing sustainability.

SUSTAINABILITY DEVELOPMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

With increasing demand for sustainable practices, products and services, it is merely a matter of time before sustainability becomes more than a nice to have for enterprises to do business.

Key business stakeholders are already placing more emphasis on sustainability. Apart from having to adhere to new sustainability policies and regulations imposed by governments in Singapore and overseas, enterprises will need to step up on Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) factors when seeking investments and loans as financiers and investors take steps to green their portfolios. More multinational corporations are

also taking steps to improve sustainability in their supply chains and require suppliers to meet sustainability standards or achieve sustainability outcomes. We also see employees increasingly preferring to work with businesses that have embedded sustainability values, requiring enterprises to do more to attract talent.

So what benefits does sustainability bring to enterprises?

Sustainability can help enterprises to achieve cost savings and greater resilience. Efforts to review resource use, reduce waste and improve efficiency contribute not only to environmental sustainability, but also to enterprises' bottom line. With rising energy and material prices, as well as supply chain shortages, enterprises that act early to improve resource efficiency will be able to realise sizeable savings and reduce their exposure to price fluctuations. An example is Containers Printers, a leading local packaging solutions company supplying to major brands across nutrition, food

and medical industries. An early mover in sustainability, the company started setting targets for energy and carbon emissions reductions in 2018. An Energy Management team was set up to track energy performance and work on energy efficiency projects, which included the deployment of solar panels on the company's rooftops, retrofitting factory lighting, and replacing equipment to energy efficient models. These projects helped Containers Printers to achieve significant energy savings and carbon emission reductions, with the deployment of solar panels alone providing annual clean energy potential of 1,800MWh and annual carbon emissions reduction of 800 metric tons.



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HOW SUSTAINABILITY CAN HELP COMPANIES TO STAY RELEVANT AND CAPTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The rising demand for sustainable products and services also presents new growth opportunities for enterprises. A survey commissioned by UOB in 2021 found that about one in three respondents in Singapore are willing to pay more for sustainably-sourced goods and services, while 36% replaced their current purchases with more sustainable alternatives. These findings mirror other overseas studies. There are already examples of enterprises that have benefited from stronger engagement with their consumers from building a sustainable brand. Pure Senses is a leading retailer of fragrance and beauty products such as Yankee Candle. In 2021, Pure Senses rolled out Purely — a new retail concept incorporating circularity, which include collecting and turning used containers and jars into new products such as terrariums. These efforts have helped Pure Senses to improve its brand proposition and strengthen its connection with customers around the theme of sustainability.

Investments by the government and industry to green the environment also present opportunities to enterprises. These include the supply of green solutions for the built environment or alternative fuels for various industries. Barghest Building Performance (BBP), an energy efficiency technology company that uses sensors, control systems, and patented software algorithms to significantly reduce energy consumption for commercial and industrial buildings, and Equatorial Marine Fuel (EMF), a Singapore oil trading and marine logistics company that is taking steps to supply biofuels and has adopted relevant standards such as the International Sustainability and Carbon Certification (ISCC) to comply with requirements to do so, are but some companies that have benefited from opportunities that have arisen in this space.

Other companies are intensifying their corporate R&D activities and making significant investments in sustainability-focused innovations to capture new opportunities. Penguin International Limited, a Singapore designer-builder-owner-operator of

aluminium high-speed craft, is strengthening its portfolio of sustainable, green vessels, including retrofitting their ferries with solar installations and developing Singapore's first hybrid-electric seagoing vessel. This has allowed Penguin to capture demand for more sustainable vessels, with contracts to construct hybrid-electric vessels, as well as a contract with Shell to develop Singapore's first fully electric passenger ferries.

So rather than just being an additional cost or compliance factor, we see sustainability as a new capability that can help enterprises achieve business outcomes in the long run. And it is very encouraging to see many businesses beginning to recognize that their long-term success is inextricably tied to sustainability.

UNDERSTANDING KEY SUSTAINABILITY CONCEPTS

To get started on this journey, enterprises can begin by understanding

key sustainability concepts, identifying the relevant sustainability areas that are material and key to their business, and focusing on improvements in these areas. The next stage would be to develop more comprehensive plans to integrate sustainability into their business strategies and operations.

Enterprises should also look at identifying sustainability trends that are relevant for their industries, and look for ways to differentiate their offerings or develop new products and services to tap on the emerging demands for sustainable solutions.

To enable these efforts, it is important for businesses to strengthen the understanding and knowledge of sustainability among management and staff, and set aside time and resources to examine the sustainability issues facing the company.

Government agencies are doing their part to guide and support enterprises in making this transition.

Enterprise Singapore (EnterpriseSG) has introduced a \$180 million Enterprise Sustainability Program. The program supports companies that want to take their first steps towards sustainability through specially curated courses for business owners that cover key sustainability trends and concepts such

as decarbonisation, circular economy and sustainability reporting. The programme also provides support for businesses embarking on projects and building capabilities in areas such as sustainability strategy development, resource optimisation, standards adoption and innovative product development. EnterpriseSG has also spearheaded new platforms such as the Sustainability Open Innovation Challenge to help companies source, develop and adopt innovative sustainability solutions.

The industry too is doing its part. Trade associations and chambers and other industry players are driving industry-specific sustainability plans, and various programmes have been launched in partnership with EnterpriseSG to help enterprises build specific sustainability capabilities, such as reducing carbon emissions or adopting sustainability standards.

With so much at stake, we urge enterprises to adapt and leverage the opportunities offered in this new area, so that they can stay ahead of the competition.

Written by Geoffrey Yeo, Assistant Chief Executive Officer (Urban Solutions, Sustainability & Enterprise Finance), Enterprise Singapore.



First measures



ZILCH
**LOURDES
TIQUIA**

THE 19th Congress opened with the State of the Nation Address (SONA) of the 17th president. The 19th saw a first cousin of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., Rep. Martin Romualdez, taking the speakership and a Mindanaon (Bukidnon) and from sugarlandia (Negros Occidental), in Sen. Juan Miguel Zubiri, become Senate president. Both are consummate politicians. Romualdez is a lawyer, while Zubiri has finished an agribusiness degree and has a master's degree in environment and natural resources management.

Romualdez (59 years old) is from the Visayas, and has represented the first district of Leyte since 2019, after completing three full terms from 2007-2016. Under the 18th Congress, Romualdez was elected majority leader. Zubiri (53 years old) started his career as a House representative from 1998 to 2004. He ran and won in the Senate race in 2007, only to resign in 2011 after being elected majority leader in 2008.

Zubiri's political career was said to have ended on Aug. 3, 2011 when he resigned during a privilege speech, over what he said were "unfounded" accusations of election cheating. "Without admitting any fault and with my vehement denial of the alleged electoral fraud hurled against me, I am submitting my resignation as a duly elected senator of the Republic of the Philippines in the election for which I am falsely accused without mercy and compassion."

Zubiri ran again for senator in 2013 and lost. He won in 2016 and became majority leader. In the recent May 2022 elections, Zubiri finished eighth with 19 million votes. Who would have thought Zubiri would become the uncontested Senate president in the 19th Congress? If the Marcoses are getting their redemption, Zubiri rose to the challenge while performing the national canvassing for the president by announcing his intention to seek the Senate presidency in May. By June, Sen. Cynthia Villar had withdrawn her plan to secure the Senate presidency and backed Zubiri. It took 12 years to get to the top position and redefine his political career going into 2028.

There is a tradition in both

chambers to reserve the first 10 or 20 measures to the leadership of the chamber. In the case of the House, the first measure filed was by the speaker; in the Senate, it was by Sen. Loren Legarda, the second ranking senator in the May 2022 elections. She is currently the president pro tempore in the 19th Congress.

The first measures filed in both chambers are solutions to problems attributed to the pandemic. The first bill filed in the House seeks to assist micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The first bill filed in the Senate seeks to provide tablets to all public students from primary all the way to tertiary level, or an internet allowance for those who already have a device.

House Bill 1 in the 19th Congress was filed with Romualdez, together with his wife, party-list Rep. Yeda Romualdez and Rep. Jude Acidre, and his nephew and the President's son, Senior Majority Leader Sandro Marcos (District 1, Ilocos Norte). The measure is known as the "Government Financial Institutions Unified Initiatives to Distressed Enterprises for Economic Recovery Act," or "Guide."

Guide attempts to strengthen the capacity of the Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) and the Land Bank of the Philippines (LandBank) to provide needed assistance to MSMEs. The measure expands the credit programs of the DBP and LandBank to assist affected MSMEs to meet their liquidity needs. Both banks are directed to expand their credit and rediscounting facilities to affected MSMEs in agriculture, infrastructure, manufacturing and service industries. The measures likewise adopt the SPAV process of years back by creating a special holding company (SHC). Equity participation in SHC may be held by qualified private sector investors with DBP and LandBank to maintain at least a majority

ownership over the SHC until such time that they have recovered their investment. The SHC is intended to be a major player in the financial and capital markets by providing aid to strategically important companies with solvency/liquidity issues brought about by the pandemic.

In the 2020 List of Establishments of the Philippine Statistics Association (PSA), a total of 957,620 business enterprises are recorded as operating in the country; 952,969 of these are MSMEs and 4,651 (.49 percent) are large enterprises. Micro enterprises constitute 88.77 percent (850,127) of total MSME establishments, followed by small enterprises at 10.25 percent (98,126) and medium enterprises at .49 percent (4,716).

Senate Bill 1 was filed by Legarda. The bill is known as the "One Tablet, One Student Act of 2022." The measure clearly lays down two things to happen in blended learning: stable internet connection and reliable gadget. Today, the internet is a right, and I hope the providers are listening and seriously taking into consideration their important role in the community and in education. The PISO internet is not the way to go. Or sitting by the canal of one's neighbor to catch an open internet should not be the case. If the private sector cannot provide what its franchisees are supposed to do, then local government units (LGUs) should be able to operate their own internet, allowed to have their own franchise and allocated a bandwidth during classes as a redundant protocol at the local level.

There are 27 million elementary and high school students, and 1.6 million students enrolled in state universities and colleges and local universities and colleges, or a total of 28.6 million — and this number does not even include teachers. Experience in the field is such that an internet allowance is needed to connect to the internet.

Both measures can be designed in such a way that national and local funds can provide counterparts and incentives so that it is not just a national directive but a complementary yet holistic approach is taken. In the case of MSMEs, the local govern-

ments can suspend the payment of business permits and taxes for three years so that enterprises are given the allowable financial air to breathe. Exemptions from taxes at the national level and filing of GIS before the Security and Exchange Commission can be made to aid financial recovery to those who are willing to jumpstart their business again. On the part of one tablet, one student, local governments can strengthen their internet connection around schools and use barangay (village) centers as learning hubs connecting each via a mesh built on wireless internet. No need to build towers; use the existing buildings in the locality enhancing line of sight, and link the different barangay thereby creating an internet community mesh. This way, the internet becomes a service done by LGUs at the barangay levels for public students.

Ensuring connectivity creates a unique solution to class sizes and infrastructure limitations in public schools. Blended learning is a leapfrog for both the teachers and the students and their parents. It is a jump that assures several skills and behavior among the education stakeholders. By converting barangay centers into learning hubs, a public good is enhanced. Mandating the barangay to reach out to the community ensures the redefinition of their roles in development.

Congress should fast-track passage of measures that respond to the problems created by the pandemic. Those should be the priorities in their first 100 days, if not their first regular session. The One Tablet, One Student program can even be included in the national expenditure program of the Marcos administration, a low-hanging fruit.

Instead of the proliferation of the pay-as-you-go on appointments, the so-called best and brightest should first attend to solving problems brought by the pandemic at the household and community levels. Don't be a problem to the President. You were appointed to do your job and to do it well. And Mr. President, "you cannot expect loyalty from people who will do anything for money."