# Philippine government says it can't deal with climate change alone

THE Philippines needs to take a "whole of society" approach in tackling climate change because of the government's inability to shoulder the burden on its own, officials said, citing the need for full-scale efforts in mitigating disaster risk and transitioning to renewable energy.

"We need to invest in early warning systems, social protection, resilience building, R&D (research and development), and innovation and technology," socioeconomic planning Undersecretary Rosemarie G. Edillon said at the Disaster and Climate Emergency Policy Forum on Thursday.

"There are limits to government resources... Government itself is just responsible for 12-15% of GDP (gross domestic product); the rest is really private sector contribution," she added.

Finance Assistant Secretary Neil Adrian S. Cabiles said at the same event that over the long term, typhoons and earthquakes can inflict P177 billion worth of annual losses to public and private assets in the Philippines.

"In the next 50 years, the country has a 40% chance of experiencing a loss exceeding P989 billion, and a 20% probability of experiencing a loss of as much as P1.5 trillion," he said.

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Assistant Governor Lyn I. Javier said the resulting risks to the banking sector are substantial.

"With extreme weather episodes, there is a decline in the total deposits, total resources, (and) total loans, while there is an increase in the nonperforming loans of the banks. This would actually impede them, or make it challenging for them, to lend to households, consumers, and businesses," she said.

"We expect banks to progressively increase their exposure to sustainable projects, and also assist their borrowers in terms of transitioning and being resilient to the impact of climate change and other environmental risks," she added.

Ms. Edillon said that responsible consumption and production, or sustainable development goal (SDG) 12, is at the heart of all SDGs, prompting the creation of a Philippine Action Plan for that specific purpose.

"It's about editing those choices, editing those menu(s), so that people will just choose from those sustainable consumption and production goods," Ms. Edillon said, noting the importance of R&D, innovation, and technology.

"We need to provide them the options (and) alternatives to these unsustainable goods and services, and then, of course, the infrastructure is needed to be in place so that we encourage the sustainable behavior and discourage the unsustainable behavior."

However, implementors face a lack of institutional capacity, both in terms of knowledge and funding.

"The estimated cost to implement climate change mitigation actions for the sectors of energy, forestry, industry, and transport alone is around $4.12 billion from 2015 to 2030," Mr. Cabiles said, noting how this does not yet include the costs the Philippines shoulders to fulfill its Nationally Determined Contribution commitment of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 75%.

Robert E.A. Borje, vice-chairman of the Climate Change Commission (CCC) said that the current funding access of the Philippines for climate change initiatives is low compared to other countries.

"The CCC identified only P74 billion worth of financial support committed for 15 climate change projects from 2022 onwards. Why do I say this with a little trepidation? Because the grants amount to only to P6.9 billion and the loans are P67.1 billion," he said.

"The position of the Philippines is that while we want a mix or a blend of financing, as a developing country, we need better access to grants."

Budget Assistant Secretary Romeo Matthew T. Balanquit said P338.2 billion was allocated for adaptation projects next year under the proposed budget, against P114.9 billion this year. He added that the government's efforts are aimed at minimizing the negative effects of extreme weather events to help ensure the attainment of national development targets.

The government hopes to expand the economy by 6.5-7.5% this year, and by 6.5-8% next year until 2028.

Energy Undersecretary Felix William B. Fuentebella said that the department hopes to raise the share of renewable energy (RE) in the fuel mix to 35% by 2030 and 50% by 2040.

"We have seen that we have a lot of (fuel) imports, and what happens when the dollar goes up against the peso. So where's the opportunity? We really have to pursue RE," he said.

"Six years ago, it was difficult to push for RE because of the cost; now it's easier (because costs have fallen)."

Albay Rep. Jose Ma. Clemente S. Salceda said that RE can help solve the problem of high power rates that disincentivize investors from doing business in the Philippines.

"Rapid, inclusive growth requires cheap renewable energy, and cheap energy can come from a combination of dependable base load, a surplus of renewable, and setting aside legacy issues for a fresh start," he said.

He said the main obstacles to expanding RE involve restrictions on foreign capital. — **Diego Gabriel C. Robles**

# DoE sees facility investment for gas imports topping P69B

THE natural gas industry will require investment of P69.23 billion to help navigate the transition from domestically produced to imported gas, the Department of Energy (DoE) said on Thursday after announcing the completion of the Natural Gas Development Plan (NGDP).

The estimated capacity of the receiving facilities required for the transition is 24.6 million tons per annum (MTPA) of liquefied natural gas (LNG) by 2040, the DoE said. The capacity requirement is only 15.6 MTPA under a scenario of greater adoption of clean energy.

The plan estimates natural gas consumption in the Philippines to be at least 16.8 million tons of oil equivalent (MTOE) for power generation and 0.05 MTOE for non-power applications by 2040.

It said much of the gas demand will be "mainly driven by the displacement of coal and oil-based fuels in power generation and greater use of gas-fired power plants as sources of balancing power."

"Reductions in production levels are anticipated starting in 2022, with the Malampaya concession expiring by 2024. While the gas field will continue to produce significant amounts of natural gas until 2027, the impending depletion of the Malampaya gas fields, ongoing lack of LNG infrastructure, price volatility due to geopolitical and other international issues, and the increasing urgency to reduce coal and oil-based fuel utilization are providing a high level of uncertainty for potential investors and industry stakeholders, given the possibility of stranded assets should projected demand fail to pan out," according to the plan.

The DoE said it prepared the NGDP with the University of the Philippines Statistical Center Research Foundation, Inc. The plan will serve as a guide in developing the downstream natural gas industry.

"We underscore the importance of developing our natural gas industry. As part of our strategy and ensuring energy security, we need to strengthen our strategies and policies," Rino E. Abad, director of the DoE's Oil Industry Management Bureau, said in a media statement.

The NGDP is a US-funded gas policy development plan guiding the DoE in drafting policy recommendations to promote clean energy.

The NGDP outlines for potential investors the legal framework, gas demand outlook, ongoing projects, industry practices and product and facility standards. It also calls for the establishment of a technical committee on downstream natural gas.

"With the challenges facing the current supply of our natural gas from the Malampaya gas field, this NGDP is also timely in providing our prospective investors' guidance and policy framework, legal requirements, and incentives in putting up LNG facilities and other infrastructure," Mr. Abad said.

The DoE also said that the NGDP also contains proposed regulatory processes, including the recommendations to government agencies and local government units (LGUs).

"These include technical, administrative, and regulatory guidance for agencies and LGUs, a simplified process for securing permits and clearances, documentary requirements, and technical standards to comply with," the DoE said.

To date, the DoE has approved six proposed LNG terminal projects with operations expected to start between 2023 to 2025.

These include the FGen LNG Corp., Linseed Field Corp., Energy World Gas Operations Philippines, Shell Energy Philippines, Vires Energy Corp., and Luzon LNG Terminal. — **Ashley Erika O. Jose**

# 2023 budget boosts virus R&D funding by over 58%

FUNDING for virus research has been raised by 58.14% to P419.3 million to support the establishment of the Virology and Vaccine Institute of the Philippines, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) said.

"We need to be proactive and fund a Virology Institute composed of highly-trained experts who will conduct studies on emerging virus strains as quickly as possible and prepare us in case of health emergencies," Budget Secretary Amenah F. Pangandaman said in a statement.

In his first State of the Nation Address last July, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. cited the creation of the institute as a legislative priority.

Speaking in his budget message, Mr. Marcos said that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic highlighted "the need for faster identification of and response to outbreaks."

"At present, the Department of Science and Technology's (DoST) Industrial Technology Development Institute (ITDI) and the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine (RITM)" have taken the lead on virus-related medical and scientific research, the DBM said.

Specifically, these research projects include the identification of viruses in the Philippines with pandemic potential, tests on combination therapy for drug-resistant bacteria, the development of diagnostics for food and water-borne bacterial pathogens, and an onsite detection method for African Swine Fever.

The 2022 General Appropriations Act also sets aside P360.5 million to establish the institute, including its operations to a second year, and P356.2 million to acquire scientific and laboratory equipment and vehicles.

This week, legislators filed House Bill 308, which seeks to establish the institute, proposing research funding of P2 billion.

The 2023 budget of the Department of Public Works and Highways sets aside P250 million to build the institute's facility in Capas, Tarlac. — **Diego Gabriel C. Robles**

# PHL lifts ban on poultry products from Hungary

THE Department of Agriculture (DA) has lifted the temporary ban on imports of poultry products from Hungary, which is now free from Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) or bird flu.

"In accordance with the provisions of the World Organisation for Animal Health Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Hungary is now free from HPAI," according to the memorandum order.

The HPAI events in Hungary that led to the import suspension order are now deemed resolved, it added.

According to the DA, the risk of contamination from Hungarian imports is "negligible."

The DA imposed its ban in December on Hungarian domestic and wild birds and their products, including poultry meat, day old-chicks, eggs and semen. The government also lifted the ban on poultry imports from the US and Japan in August, after both countries were declared HPAI-free. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

# Chip industry to pitch gov't on aid

THE Semiconductor and Electronics Industries in the Philippines Foundation, Inc. (SEIPI) said it needs government help in attracting more investment to the industry, and hopes to make its case to Cabinet officials next month.

"The organization requested to meet with key Cabinet members to initiate its partnership with the new government and discuss the causes of low electronics industry foreign direct investment (FDI), the high production costs, improvements in the Incentives Rationalization component of the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises (CREATE) Law, and supply chain issues," SEIPI said in a statement on Thursday.

SEIPI said the industry remains the Philippines' top exporter, with shipments in the seven months to July at $26.51 billion, up 1.9% year on year. The semiconductor and electronics industry accounted for 59.25% of all exports during the period.

Asked to comment, SEIPI President Danilo C. Lachica said in a Viber message that the group hopes to meet with government agencies in October.

"We have requests to meet with President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. and cabinet (Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Finance, National Economic and Development Authority). We hope to have meetings in October," Mr. Lachica said.

Mr. Lachica has said that the industry lost out on over $3 billion worth of investment that elected to locate elsewhere in Asia following the rationalization of incentives under CREATE.

For 2022, SEIPI has set a 10% growth target. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**



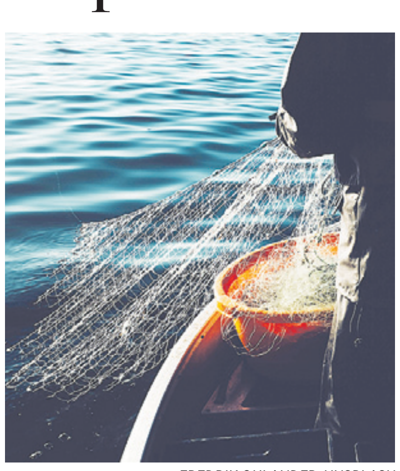
# Conservation NGO calls for crackdown on illegal fishing, suspension of fish imports

THE government needs to crack down on illegal fishing in municipal waters and reduce fish imports if it expects fisherfolk and marine resources to thrive, a conservation group said.

"We are already feeling the pinch of a global food crisis, including decreasing national fish stock. The country's aquaculture and marine resources should be prioritized as a major source of food and nutrition for Filipinos, but these continue to degrade because of lack of political will to fully and vigorously implement fishery laws, policies and regulations," Oceana Philippines Vice-President Gloria E. Ramos said in a statement.

"We are asking President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. to stop importing fish; implement an inclusive, science-based fisheries management plan; and prosecute commercial fishers encroaching in municipal waters," she added.

Ms. Ramos said that the government should protect the 15-kilometer zone marking the extent of municipal waters from commercial fishing operations and support programs to develop the 12 designated Fisheries Management Areas (FMAs).



FREDRIK OHLANDER-UNSPLASH

"While there are initial successes in Eastern Visayas, Zamboanga Peninsula and Davao regions, and that the 12 FMAs have their respective management boards and scientific advisory groups, much is still to be desired in the implementation of their FMA management plans to effectively restore our fishing grounds and ensure that small fisherfolk are provided ample assistance for their livelihood, post-harvest facilities and perhaps fuel and food subsidies to improve their income and their families' well-being," she said.

"The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources should continuously work hand in hand with fishing industry stakeholders and local government unit (LGU) officials to ensure that our marginalized fisherfolk and coastal communities are taken care of," she added.

Oceana Philippines is also calling for the full compliance with fisheries law via the mandatory use of vessel monitoring devices by all registered and qualified commercial fishing vessels.

"In lieu of importing fish, the government should instead protect our municipal waters, home to coral reefs, seagrass and mangroves, which serve as fish shelters and spawning grounds, and thus must be preserved as mandated by the existing fisheries and environmental laws," Mrs. Ramos said.

"In particular, they should be protected from illegal entry of commercial fishing vessels. Government should fully implement the vessel monitoring rules to track and identify the ownership and location of commercial fishing vessels," she added. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

## Concepcion: PH entering a 'phase of acceptance' in pandemic

Go Negosyo founder Joey Concepcion said the Philippines is entering a "phase of acceptance" in the Covid-19 pandemic, where people are aware of the risks but are learning to manage them.

"I call it a phase of acceptance; I believe it has started and that we will have to live with the risks of the virus still being around," he said.

Doctors have been warning that the country may experience more Covid cases as outdoor masking rules have been relaxed despite vaccination rates still remaining sluggish. The return to in-person classes also raised fears that the virus might reach even home-bound elderly citizens and the immunocompromised, who are much more likely to suffer severe illness and even death.

Infectious diseases expert Dr. Benjamin Co said that the country cannot wait for everyone to decide on their personal health. "We cannot protect everyone all the time. I guess we have already provided everyone with the tools to prevent, diagnose and treat Covid-19. The next move is ours on an individual basis," said the OCTA Research fellow.

Dr. Co further explained that it may appear that Covid cases are going down globally, but that it is not because there are fewer people getting infected, but that because "people are not testing as frequently as before and prefer to move on in spite of the pandemic."

Dr. Co further likened the pandemic to the stages of grief: anger, denial, bargaining, depression and acceptance. "The sixth stage is the final journey after acceptance – finding meaning," said Dr. Co. "With lives upended by the pandemic … it really is difficult to get back to the way it was. We will never be the same anytime soon. Yet we need to be."

Concepcion, meanwhile, said that Filipinos have been guided and advised for the last two years, and that vaccinations remain free to avail across the country. "Doctors advise us on how we should handle Covid, but in the end it is us that makes the choice," he said. "We suffer the consequences of our wrong decisions in life; this is no different," he said.

Concepcion explained that since the country cannot legally mandate vaccinations, it will need to stock up on antiviral medicines, especially to be able to treat those who become severely ill.

"The world has started moving on; let's not be the last ones to accept this fact," he said.