

# Poor air quality increases TB risk

By Patricia B. Mirasol Reporter

AIR POLLUTION has an unequal impact on health, with the most vulnerable people bearing the brunt of its ill effects, according to Greenpeace.

In a report released on Sept. 1, the independent global campaigning network said that socioeconomic deprivation increases an individual's vulnerability to air pollution and chronic health conditions.

Among them is tuberculosis (TB), a continuing problem in the Philippines, which has the third highest TB prevalence rate in the world and where nearly 10 million people reside in urban slums.

"We have [made] significant strides in TB control and improving the health

of Filipinos nationwide. However, Filipinos would continue to suffer and [be] more susceptible to TB if we allow the continued deterioration of the quality of the air that we breathe," said Michelle Lang-Alli, director of the Office of Health at USAID Philippines, at a webinar organized by non-profit human development organization FHI 360.

An estimated 66,000 Filipinos die every year due to poor air quality. The economic cost of ambient air pollution is P4.5 trillion, roughly equivalent to \$87 billion, said Climate Change Commissioner Rachel Anne S. Herrera at the same webinar.

This cost is 23% of the country's gross domestic product in 2019, she added, citing a November 2021 study by the Institute for Climate and Sustain-

able Cities and the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

According to the Greenpeace report, Benguet, Rizal, and Metro Manila have the worst air quality in the Philippines.

## BREAKING DOWN SILOS

There is a need to break down silos among agencies toward the development of green technologies needed for climate-resilient communities, said Ms. Herrera, adding that legislators are looking to update the Clean Air Act of 1999.

"We recognize that we should look at long-term solutions," she said in a Sept. 6 e-mail. "Our health sector must be resilient and must be strengthened — so it can protect the most vulnerable against climate change."

Integration between climate and health is possible through research and advocacy, said Dr. Rosalind G. Vianzon, head of the healthy settings and environment division of the Health Promotion Bureau of the Department of Health.

"We will review healthy settings like homes, schools, and workplaces, and adopt a life-cycle approach, so we can understand how climate change affects the health of babies, children and adults," she said.

The National Government has earmarked P296.3 billion for the health sector in 2023, a 10.4% increase from its 2022 budget.

The proposed National Expenditure Program for 2023 will include P453 billion for climate change adaptation and mitigation programs and projects, 56.4% higher than the P289.73 billion for 2022.

## OPINION

# 'PinasLakas,' AI chatbot boost vax efforts

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is not yet over. While cases are slowly trending downward, the highly transmissible Omicron subvariants are still around. Fortunately, total and ICU (intensive care unit) bed utilization rates for COVID-19 at both the national and regional levels remain at low risk, according to the Department of Health (DoH).

"With a continuous rise in COVID-19 cases, the DoH reminds the general public to remain vigilant and adhere to our minimum public health standards such as wearing the best-fitting masks, social distancing, and immediate isolation at the onset of symptoms. We also encourage the eligible population to get vaccinated and boosted with our COVID-19 vaccines to continue building a strong wall of immunity against the virus," said Health officer-in-charge Maria Rosario S. Vergere.

As of this August, the DoH, working with local government units and private sector partners, has administered more than 160 million total doses through the Bayanihan Bakunahan (National Vaccination Days) and Resbakuna Kids campaigns. At least 71 million Filipinos have completed the primary vaccination series, with over 15 million Filipinos having at least one booster dose, which represents roughly 21% of the fully vaccinated population.

To increase vaccination coverage, the National Government launched this July a campaign dubbed "Sa Boosters: PinasLakas." The initiative aims to fully vaccinate 90% of A2 or senior citizen population (1,074,110 recipients), as well as increase booster dose coverage to 50% of the total target population (23,840,032 recipients) before Oct. 8, which marks the first 100 days of the Marcos administration.

As of this August, more than 18,900 PinasLakas vaccination sites have been launched nationwide, in areas such as markets, schools, workplaces, health facilities, terminals/transport hubs, places of worship, and mobile vaccination sites. All vaccines being freely given in the country have been rigorously studied and deemed safe

and effective by experts. Only a small percentage of doses administered had reactions, most of which were mild and resolved spontaneously.

Staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccines including boosters will enable us to enjoy tremendous benefits. As more and more Filipinos complete their primary doses and their booster shots, the more the country can ease its health requirements, live and work free from worry of alert level restrictions, resume face-to-face learning in schools, and avoid the expenses associated with COVID-19 hospitalization and its complications.

Key sectors of our society will be able to reap their own benefits as well. Keeping the number of COVID-19 cases low and manageable will unburden the country's healthcare facilities and healthcare workers. Government spending can be redirected towards other social services and priorities. The national and local government will be able to fulfill their mandate and highlight their success in ensuring the protection of the people.

With COVID-19 cases under control, the country will be able to keep the economy open and allow it to further generate income and drive progress and prosperity. Schools can remain open, and thus can maximize our children's literacy and educational outcomes. Tourism will remain open and busy, generating jobs and supporting businesses.

An SWS survey conducted in December 2021 indicated that 80% of fully vaccinated Filipinos are willing to get a booster dose. To further drive accurate information for the public for the "home-liners," the DoH made available a chatbot powered by artificial intelligence (AI). Called KIRA or "Katuwang na Impormasyon para sa Responsableng Aksyon," it can be found on the DoH Facebook page, Viber, and KontraCOVID PH web app.

KIRA can be used to self-check if one is at risk of COVID-19; it can also answer commonly asked questions. The chatbot, a partnership between startup AI4GOV and the DoH Health Promotions Bureau under OIC-Undersecretary Dr. Beverly Lorraine C. Ho, was one of the winners at the inaugural World Health Organization Western Pacific Innovation Challenge.

The KIRA chatbot initiative is gaining momentum with 33.5 million interactions, and 1.2 million users who have inquiries related to COVID-19. With this digital tool, people can get answers and combat fake information and misinformation.

Eligible Filipinos are strongly urged to stay up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines series and booster shots, so that together we can enjoy the benefits of continued recovery from the pandemic.

TEODORO B. PADILLA is the executive director of the Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP), which represents the biopharmaceutical medicines and vaccines industry in the country. Its members are at the forefront of research and development efforts for COVID-19 and other diseases that affect Filipinos.



## MEDICINE CABINET TEODORO B. PADILLA

## SPOT PRICES

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2022

METAL	
PALLADIUM free \$/troy oz	2,022.10
PALLADIUM JMI base, \$/troy oz	2,042.00
PLATINUM free \$/troy oz	851.03
PLATINUM JMI base \$/troy oz	858.00
KRUGGERAND, fob \$/troy oz	1,710.00
IRIDIUM, whs rot, \$/troy oz	4,240.00
RHODIUM, whs rot, \$/troy oz	13,790.00
GRAINS (September 1, 2022)	
(FOB Bangkok basis at every Thursday)	
FRAGRANT (100%) 1 <sup>st</sup> Class, \$/ton	887.00
FRAGRANT (100%) 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class, \$/ton	860.00
RICE (5%) White Thai- \$/ton	428.00
RICE (10%) White Thai- \$/ton	427.00
RICE (15%) White Thai- \$/ton	422.00
RICE (25%) White Thai- \$/ton (Super)	422.00
BROKER RICE A-1 Super \$/ton	381.00
FOOD	
COCOA ICCO Dly (SDR/mt)	1,750.54
COCOA ICCO \$/mt	2,276.02
COFFEE ICA comp '2001 cts/lb	204.63
SUGAR ISA FOB Daily Price, Carib. port. cts/lb	17.88
SUGAR ISA 15-day ave.	17.86

## LIFFE COFFEE

New Robusta 10 MT - \$/ton

	High	Low	Sett	Psett
Sept.	2,207	2,185	2,212	2,220
Nov.	2,223	2,201	2,217	2,223
Jan.	2,215	2,195	2,209	2,215
Mar.	2,187	2,168	2,183	2,190

## LIFFE COCOA

(Ldn)-10 MT-E/ton

	High	Low	Sett	Psett
Sept.	1,808	1,792	1,803	1,804
Dec.	1,881	1,866	1,875	1,882
Mar.	1,853	1,839	1,850	1,852
May	1,838	1,822	1,835	1,834

## COCONUT

MANILA COPRA (based on 6% moisture)	
Peso/100kg	Buyer/Seller
Lag/Qzn/Luc 22	3,700.00/3,750.00
Philippine Coconut Oil - Crude	
CIF NY/NOLA	66.00
PALM OIL CIF NY/NOLA	69.00
COCONUT OIL (PHIL/IDN), \$ per ton,	
CIF Europe	
Aug./Sept.'22	0.00/1,360.00
Sept./Oct.'22	1,220.00/1,320.00
Oct./Nov.'22	1,225.00/1,315.00
Nov./Dec.'22	1,252.50/1,292.50

## LONDON METAL EXCHANGE

LME FINAL CLOSING PRICES, US\$/MT	
	3 MOS
ALUMINUM H.G.	2,285.50
ALUMINUM Alloy	1,760.00
COPPER	7,653.50
LEAD	1,875.50
NICKEL	21,458.00
TIN	21,625.00
ZINC	3,197.50

# Oil gains as OPEC+ agrees to small output cut

HOUSTON — Oil prices rose about 3% on Monday, as OPEC+ members agreed to a small production cut of 100,000 barrels per day (bpd) to bolster prices.

Brent crude futures for November delivery settled \$2.72 higher at \$95.74 a barrel, a 2.92% gain.

Prices had climbed nearly \$4 earlier in the session, but were tamed by comments from the White House that US President Joseph R. Biden was committed to taking all steps necessary to shore up energy supplies and lower prices.

US crude rose \$2 to \$88.85 per barrel, a 2.3% rise after a 0.3% gain in the previous session, in thin volumes during the US Labor Day holiday.

The 100,000 bpd reduction by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, a group

known as OPEC+, amounts to only 0.1% of global demand. The group also agreed they could meet any time to adjust production before the next scheduled meeting on Oct. 5.

Top OPEC producer Saudi Arabia last month flagged the possibility of output cuts to address what it sees as exaggerated oil price declines.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said that expectations of weaker global economic growth were behind a decision by Moscow and its OPEC allies to cut oil output.

Russian Energy Minister Nikolai Shulginov said the country would most likely reduce its oil production by around 2% this year, TASS news agency reported.

"The bigger picture is that OPEC+ is producing well below its output target and this

looks unlikely to change given that Angola and Nigeria, in particular, appear unable to return to pre-pandemic levels of production," Caroline Bain, chief commodities economist at Capital Economics, said.

Oil prices have fallen in the past three months from multi-year highs hit in March, pressured by concerns that interest rate increases and coronavirus curbs in parts of China could slow global economic growth and dent oil demand.

Lockdown measures in China's southern technology hub of Shenzhen eased on Monday as new infections showed signs of stabilizing though the city remains on high vigilance.

Meanwhile, talks to revive the West's 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, potentially providing a supply boost from Ira-

nian crude's returning to the market, have hit a new snag. The White House on Friday rejected Iran's call for a deal to be linked with closure of investigations by the United Nations nuclear watchdog, a Western diplomat said.

Iran's minister of petroleum said the global energy market needs an increase in supply of oil from Iran.

Use of oil in power generation is also expected to pick up, analysts said, as Russia's state-controlled Gazprom on Friday said it would stop pumping gas via the Nord Stream 1 pipeline due to a fault.

The International Energy Agency last month raised its oil demand forecast for the year, partly because it expects gas-to-oil switching in some countries due to record natural gas and electricity prices.

— Reuters

# Asian stocks rise on China's economic stimulus

HONG KONG — Asian shares rose on Tuesday morning after China pledged to make renewed efforts to boost its economy on Monday, while investors pinned hope on more clarity ahead of a number of central bank meetings.

MSCI's gauge of Asia-Pacific stocks outside Japan was up 0.47%, with China's benchmark CSI300 Index and Hang Seng Index opening up 0.2% each.

Chinese policy makers signalled a renewed sense of urgency on Monday for steps to shore up a flagging economy, saying this quarter was a critical time for policy action as evidence pointed to a further loss of economic momentum.

China also cut a foreign exchange reserves ratio to support the yuan — another signal authorities are uncomfortable with the currency's slide.

"Bulk commodities will be dependent on the impact of Chinese stimulus and the success of this will be reflected in the major miners,"



said John Milroy, an investment adviser at Ord Minnett.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 edged up 0.1% as investors await a Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) meeting scheduled later on Tuesday that is widely expected to result in a cash rate rise.

"The focus is on RBA today," said Mr. Milroy. "Like everyone we are expecting 0.5% cash rate rise. However also expecting and hoping we get some commentary that they are nearing the end of their rising cycle."

The European Central Bank will meet on Thursday to discuss rate actions, followed by a US Federal Reserve meeting on Sept. 21.

"There is a feeling that the next 75-bp (basis point) hike in September will see a deceleration afterwards," said Sean Darby, Hong Kong-based global head of strategy for Jefferies.

E-mini futures for the S&P 500 index rose 0.68% in the Asian morning session, indicating a rosy start for Wall Street on Tuesday. US

markets were shut on Monday for the Labor Day holiday.

Japan's Nikkei 225 slid 0.3%. European stock indexes fell on Monday, the euro dropped below 99 cents for the first time in twenty years and European gas prices surged after Russia said its main gas supply pipeline to Europe would stay shut.

Oil prices slipped early on Tuesday, paring the previous session's 3% gain, as a deal among members of the OPEC+ group to cut output by 100,000 barrels per day in October was seen as a largely symbolic move to stem the market's recent slide.

Brent crude futures fell 0.47% to \$95.29 a barrel at 0149 GMT. US crude futures however rose 2.44% to \$88.99 a barrel.

Spot gold rose 0.4% to \$1717.2 an ounce.

The dollar index inched down 0.2% after touching a 20-year peak in the previous session. — Reuters

# Knowledge platform Docquity raises \$44M to grow presence in SEA

DOQUITY, a medical education and knowledge-sharing platform for doctors, announced that it raised a total of \$44 million in its Series C financing round, led by existing investor Japan's Itochu Corp. with \$32 million.

This latest infusion, announced on Sept. 5, will be used to strengthen Docquity's presence in Southeast Asia (SEA), including the Philippines and Indonesia, and to expand in North Asia and the Middle East.

Other investors supporting this round included iGlobe Partners, Alkemi, Global Brain, KDV, and Infocom. Docquity has raised \$57.5 million to date.

Based in Singapore, the healthtech company is building an ecosystem that helps doctors collaborate with colleagues and learn from each other's real-world experiences, according to Indranil Roychowdhury, Docquity chief executive officer and co-founder.

"We hope to help bridge the knowledge and learning inequalities many healthcare professionals face, especially those in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas in an archipelago like the Philippines," he told *BusinessWorld* in a Sept. 5 e-mail.

Seven of 10 Filipino doctors across multiple medical specialties are already part of the more than 300,000-strong community, according to a statement. Verified members are able to access free, aggregated content that is downloadable and accessible offline.

New initiatives include cohort-based learning for doctors in partnership with universities and senior medical practitioners; a doctor-owned virtual clinic; and data analytics to gain a better understanding of what doctors need.

The company has partnered with more than 250 medical associations from more than six countries to develop the professional courses within its health tech platform, all of which can go towards fulfilling the compulsory continuing medical education credits of its doctor members.

"In the Philippines, we partnered with leading medical associations for modules that are aligned with the accreditation requirements of the country," Mr. Roychowdhury said. "We put these programs directly on the doctors' phones, so they can access courses and learn anytime, anywhere." — Patricia B. Mirasol

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