

# Marcos: ASEAN needs to press rich nations on climate pledges

PRESIDENT Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. called on his fellow Southeast Asian leaders to press rich nations to fulfill their climate commitments, noting that poorer countries have been dealing with disasters that threaten their food security.

The call to action must be made at the United Nations-led climate change conference in December, Mr. Marcos said during the plenary session of the ASEAN Summit in Jakarta.

“At the upcoming COP28 (in Dubai), ASEAN must call on developed countries to heighten the implementation of their commitments,” he said. “Their commitments include climate finance, technology development and transfer, and capacity building in order to drive ASEAN’s capabilities to prevent, mitigate, manage and adapt to the impacts of climate change.”

Mr. Marcos said his focus remains on encouraging international cooperation to make ASEAN climate-smart and disaster-ready.

Climate change is threatening Philippine agriculture, which must absorb damage from an average of 18-20 typhoons a year. Super Typhoon Doksuri and the southwest monsoon have caused P1.94 billion worth of agriculture damage, with rice accounting for P950 million of the total.

“In achieving food security, we must build on cooperation that will harness the transformative potential of our agricultural sector to ensure that food production is responsible and will be of benefit for future generations,” Mr. Marcos said.

Storms, flooding, and prolonged drought may result in

around \$124 billion in losses to the Philippine economy between 2022 and 2050, research firm GHD estimated last year.

Mr. Marcos, who is leading a shift towards green energy, has yet to declare a climate emergency, which would authorize the government to mobilize funds to step up climate mitigation efforts.

The House of Representative made such a declaration in 2019, but Greenpeace said last year that the National Government (NG) has yet to “follow through.”

Neither have the US or China made such declarations. The two countries account for 41.89% and 34.75% of world gross domestic product in nominal and purchasing power parity terms, respectively, in 2021.

Mr. Marcos also called on the region’s leaders to maximize the benefits from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and promote digital-economy cooperation.

Terry L. Ridon, a public investment analyst and convenor of think tank Infracatch, said the summit is an opportunity for Mr. Marcos to boost ties with non-traditional partners amid mounting economic challenges and in the face of an increasingly belligerent China, which has abandoned some of its commitments to the Philippines’ flagship infrastructure projects.

Mr. Marcos needs to seal partnerships in rice production as the Philippines deals with the commodity’s rising prices and prepares for a possible shortage during the worst of the El Niño, he said.

He said Manila can collaborate with Indonesia, which currently chairs the regional bloc, to ac-

celerate its shift to renewable energy.

“Indonesia and the Philippines should develop a joint nickel policy to help develop and protect this shared mineral resource amid technological developments in the renewables sector,” he said.

Mr. Marcos should also invite ASEAN conglomerates to join Public-Private Partnerships projects, including the rehabilitation of the Philippine capital’s main airport and the development of the Metro Manila busway.

“The summit can be a platform to call on other bilateral and multilateral partners to take another look at abandoned China projects,” he said, “and determine whether they can continue these projects as designed or proposed or (whether) they will require another round of design and planning.”

Transport officials have said the Export-Import Bank of China (China Eximbank) has yet to confirm whether it will approve a P142-billion loan for a railway to Bicol.

The Duterte government in February 2022 awarded to China Railway Design Corp. a contract to build the Philippine National Railways (PNR) South Long-Haul project.

Transportation Undersecretary Cesar B. Chavez said the Departments of Transportation and Finance met with Chinese Embassy officials in Manila earlier this year to discuss the loan but they “were given no clear direction” on the loan’s status.

He was speaking at a House appropriations committee hearing.

There have been calls to cancel infrastructure projects that China has promised to fund in light of its aggressive actions within the

Philippine exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea.

Citing the foreign-assisted projects listed in the 2024 Budget of Expenditures and Sources of Financing, Mr. Ridon said six major infrastructure projects are currently depending on Chinese loans, the most expensive of which is the PNR South Long Haul Project, with a price tag of P175.3 billion.

There are also several loan agreements for “flagship projects” as designated by the Department of Finance. They include the loan agreement for the New Centennial Water Source-Kaliwa Dam Project, the Chico River Pump Irrigation Project, which had been due for completion in 2022, Mr. Ridon said.

He also cited the P20-billion Safe Philippines project aimed at installing at least 12,000 closed-circuit television cameras in Metro Manila and Davao City.

Before the Department of Interior and Local Government canceled the project, China International Telecommunications and Construction Corp. had signed a loan contract with the government in 2018.

“Now is an opportune time for Congress to review upcoming and ongoing infrastructure projects that will be largely financed by Beijing,” Mr. Ridon said. “Let the deliberations on the national budget be a venue for our legislators to show that they will not allow Beijing to continue currying favor through funding infrastructure projects, while at the same time rapidly creeping into our territory and violently driving out our fisherfolk and our Coast Guard from our seas.” — **Kyle Aristophere T. Atienza**

## Poor power users warned of looming lifeline rate deadline

THE subsidized “lifeline rate” for low-income power customers will be available starting Jan. 1 only to users who register for the program, the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) said.

Potential lifeline rate participants must register to be recognized as qualified marginalized end-users (QMEs), it said.

“Starting 1 January 2024, only those who have approved applications shall be entitled to avail of the subsidy provided under the Lifeline Rate Program,” the ERC said in a joint advisory on Tuesday.

In June, the ERC, the Department of Energy (DoE) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), issued an advisory requiring all distribution utilities (DUs) to implement the revised lifeline rate rules.

The new rules disqualify customers living in condominiums, subdivisions, and those with net-metering services from availing of the lifeline rate.

“The DSWD, DoE, and ERC have observed a noticeable increase in the number of (QMEs) who have registered under the Lifeline Rate Program as of Aug. 25,” according to the advisory.

“In spite of the significant increase in the number of registrants, there remains a considerable number of QMEs who have yet to avail of the benefits of registering under the Lifeline Rate Program,” it added.

Eligible for lifeline rates are beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) and QME applicants who are not 4Ps beneficiaries but belong to a household of at least five members in which the combined monthly income is P12,030.

The agencies directed distribution utilities to “exert more aggressive promotion efforts to disseminate information” on the program and continue accepting and processing applications. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

## Tobacco, coffee, coconut output rise in 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter

TOBACCO, coffee, and coconut production rose in the second quarter, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), adding that sugarcane and abaca output dropped.

In a quarterly bulletin, the PSA said the output of dried tobacco leaf increased 1.9% to 37.05 thousand metric tons (MT).

Burley tobacco accounted for 43.8% of the total, followed by Virginia tobacco at 40.8% and native tobacco 15.4%.

The Ilocos Region was the leading tobacco producer with 24.62 thousand MT or 66.4% of the total.

“The area planted to all tobacco varieties from January to June 2023 increased to 27 thousand hectares or 0.7%,” the PSA said.

In the three months to June period, coffee production was 2.77 thousand MT, up 1.8%.

Robusta was the most produced type of coffee at 1.63 thousand MT or 58.7% of the total.

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao was the top coffee producer in the second quarter with 710.23 MT or 25.6% of the total.

The area planted to all types of coffee dipped 0.1% to 111.19 thousand hectares.

Output of coconut, including the husk, rose 1.5% to 3.41

million MT during the period. Davao Region was the top producer with 461.07 thousand MT or 13.5% of the total.

“The area planted to coconut from January to June 2023 was 3.62 million hectares, which indicates an increase of 0.6% from (a year earlier),” the PSA said.

On the other hand, production of sugarcane and abaca dropped in the second quarter.

The PSA said the sugarcane produced during the period declined 11.3% to 2.83 million MT.

“Centrifugal sugar accounted for 95.6% (of sugar production),” the PSA said.

Western Visayas produced the most sugarcane with 1.34 million MT or 47.2% of the total.

The sugarcane harvest area was 212.34 thousand hectares, down 12.6%.

Abaca production dropped 1.8% to 17.64 thousand MT.

Bicol Region was the top producer of abaca with 5.99 thousand MT or 33.9% of the total.

“From January to June 2023, area planted to abaca was 136.96 thousand hectares. This indicates an increase of 7.1% from the 127.82 thousand hectares area planted in the same period of 2022,” the PSA said. — **Sheldeen Joy Talavera**

## Australia sees PHL agri, resources, RE as priority areas for investment

THE Philippine agriculture and resources industries are considered by Australia to be the most attractive areas for investment, the Australian Embassy in the Philippines said on Tuesday.

At a briefing accompanying the release of a report, “Invested: Australia’s Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040,” Australia’s Special Envoy for Southeast Asia Nicholas Moore identified 10 priority industries for investment in the region.

The 10 industries are agriculture, resources, green energy transition, infrastructure, education and skills, visitor economy, healthcare, digital economy, professional and financial services and creative industries.

The embassy’s Deputy Head of Mission, Moya Collett cited agriculture and resources as the industries to focus on in the Philippines.

“All the ones mentioned have strong relevance in the Philippines. As you know, there’s a lot of potential to do more in agriculture and resources,” Ms. Collett said in response to a query about areas of focus for the Philippines.

She added, however, that there will also be significant interest in the Philippine green energy transition.

“Australia wants to be a clean energy superpower. We really want to export our clean energy to the world and invest more in green energy in the region and the Philippines absolutely should be part of that,” she said.

She noted the Philippine government’s openness to foreign investment in green forms of energy.

“The Philippines has recently opened up the sector to foreign investment, so that’s the key that makes it much easier for Australians to invest,” she said.

Ms. Collett described Philippine government policy on attracting investment as being on the right track.

“We really see that the current administration has actually done a lot. There are a lot of processes underway at the moment to open up the Philippines for greater foreign investment, for example, and to improve the ease of doing business and competition,” she said.

“I think the government in the Philippines is absolutely on the right track in terms of integrating the Philippines with the rest of the region and opening up to Australia. So, we want to take advantage of those opportunities,” she added.

Australian trade with Southeast Asia comprises 14% of its total trade over the past 20 years, according to Ms. Collett.

“While Australia’s trade with the region has grown over the past 20 years, the proportion of total trade has remained constant at 14%,” she said. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

## Validity extensions seen as workaround after TRO freezes license card supply contract

THE Land Transportation Office (LTO) said it might resort to extending the validity of official receipts (ORs) and certificates of registration (CRs), two key documents required to register for driver’s licenses.

The driver’s license supply contract is currently the subject of a temporary restraining order (TRO), preventing the issuance of plastic license cards.

In a statement on Tuesday, the LTO said it is considering the proposal to stamp ORs and CRs to extend their validity put forward by AGRY Party-list Representative Wilbert L. Lee.

“We’ll do everything we can in the event that this TRO on the distribution of license cards will not be lifted, Assistant Secretary for Land Transport Vigor D. Mendoza II said in a statement on Tuesday.

“All suggestions are being welcomed by the agency. As I’ve also said before, the LTO has been eyeing a shift to electronic driver’s licenses and of course, extending the validity of the existing licenses. This includes putting a stamp on drivers’ ORs and CRs,” he added.

The LTO is an arm of the Department of Transportation (DoTr), with Mr. Mendoza having been appointed chief of office in July.

“We will consult with the DoTr on what the best measure is that will not add to the burden on drivers and motorists,” he added.

Last month, the Quezon City Regional Trial Court Branch 215 issued the TRO

at the request of AllCard, Inc., which claimed that it had been disqualified from the auction despite being the low bidder for the contract.

Named respondents to the lawsuit were the LTO, the bids and awards committee of the DoTr, and rival bidder Banner Plasticard, Inc., which was awarded the P219.24-million contract to supply materials for 5.2 million driver’s licenses.

Mr. Mendoza said the LTO is optimistic that the TRO will be lifted, adding that resolving the license card backlog is an agency priority. The 20-day TRO is set to lapse on Sept. 6.

Mr. Mendoza added that the LTO could resolve the license plate backlog by next year.

The LTO has ordered 15 million metal license plates to address the current backlog of 13.2 million plates for motorcycles and about 179,000 for other vehicles.

“Delivery has already started,” on the plate orders, Mr. Mendoza said, adding that it will take time to address the motorcycle plate backlog.

“We are catching up since the delivery of plates is improving to the tune of 250,000 pairs every month for motor vehicles and 1 million every month for motorcycles,” Mr. Mendoza said.

“Our production capacity is also increasing at 32,000 per day or around 700,000 per month,” he added. — **Revin Mikhael D. Ochave**

## UAE tapped for possible investment in RE, skills dev’t

TRADE Secretary Alfredo E. Pascual met with his counterpart from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, to discuss possible investment in renewable energy (RE) and skills development, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) said in a statement.

Mr. Pascual met with the UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade in Jakarta on the sidelines of the 23<sup>rd</sup>

ASEAN Economic Community Council Meeting on Sunday.

“During the meeting, both sides acknowledged the need to further enhance PHL-UAE bilateral trade, investment, and economic cooperation,” the DTI said.

It added that both sides looked forward to the implementation of the Philippines-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement and the Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement.

In his speech at the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit 2023 on Monday, Mr. Pascual called on the ASEAN industry leaders to mobilize their intellectual capital resources to spark innovation and keep their economies competitive.

“From strengthening traditional factors of production, we need to galvanize intellectual capital and innovation to maintain and explore new comparative advantages in the world

market. Innovation is our catalyst for transformation,” he said.

Mr. Pascual said ASEAN needs to focus on governance frameworks for technology adoption, digital-based trade facilitation initiatives, smart agriculture and manufacturing, access to digital technology, cultural development and the acceleration of innovation in environmental sustainability. — **Justine Irish D. Tabile**

## Erramon Aboitiz appointed chairman of AIM board

UNIONBANK of the Philippines Chairman Erramon I. Aboitiz has been named chairman of the Asian Institute of Management (AIM) Board of Trustees, the Aboitiz Group said in a statement.

Mr. Aboitiz, whose term as AIM’s seventh chairman commenced on Sept. 1, succeeded Peter Garrucho, Jr., who was chairman beginning in 2017.

Mr. Aboitiz served as the president & CEO of Aboitiz Equity Ventures

between 2009 and 2019, and was CEO of Aboitiz Power Corp. in 2018.

In 2019, the Aboitiz Group, the Aboitiz Foundation, made a \$10-million donation to AIM to mark the Aboitiz group’s 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

The donation, lodged in a Commitment Fund, was designed to address regional gaps in data science and innovation, and led to the founding of the AIM Aboitiz School of Innovation, Technology, and Entrepreneurship.



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