

PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
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PRESS BRIEFING OF MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ
WITH DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ASSISTANT SECRETARY DANIEL ESPIRITU
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MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Magandang umaga, Malacañang Press Corps. Welcome sa ating pre-departure briefing ngayong araw, December 11.

Ngayong linggo, pupunta si Pangulong Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. sa Tokyo, Japan para makibahagi sa ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit. Taking place from the December 16 to 18, the Summit will conclude the year marking the 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Relations whose theme is “Golden Friendship, Golden Opportunities.”

Aside from the ASEAN-Japan Summit, President Marcos is also expected to meet the Japanese business leaders to affirm the partnerships between the Philippines and Japan.

Para bigyan pa tayo ng detalye sa gaganaping ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit, kasama natin ngayon si Department of Foreign Affairs Office of ASEAN Affairs Assistant Secretary Daniel R. Espiritu. Good morning, Assistant Secretary Espiritu.

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Good morning, Daphne, and thank you once again for giving us this opportunity to brief the Malacañang Corps. And good morning also to the corps, it's a pleasure again to join you. Nagiging ano na yata ito 'no, seasonal round because it seems that ASEAN has more summits than the United Nations and even APEC. So, I hope you're getting used to this. And in the course of our several briefings through the months and through the years, you'll get also used to and more familiar with the topics.

And as Daphne said, the President, it's true, the President is leaving on the 15th for Tokyo to attend the 50th anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Relations. Now, this is very important because Japan is one of the first dialogue partners of ASEAN, and it's one of the most dynamic. And its participation in ASEAN has covered not only political security matters such as defense and transnational crime and mutual legal assistance, but also mutual economic activities which all help in community building in ASEAN; and also cultural and people-to-people activities. It's a whole gamut of relations, and they were able to sustain and develop it through the years such that this year, they were declared comprehensive strategic partner of ASEAN.

And of the objectives of this summit is exactly to announce the come upons of Japan as a comprehensive strategic partner of ASEAN – a thing that was already confirmed during the last summit of ASEAN in Jakarta.

But, anyway, this time, the summit will focus on ASEAN-Japan Relations, of course. And let me just say that it will consist of several activities, the core point of which would be the summit itself on December 17. But before the summit, there is a co-creation of the economy and society forum which will be also held on the 16th. Now, the President will not attend; it's usually at the ministerial level but it will be attended by some of the most important businesses of Japan.

Now, while the President will be departing Manila on the 15th. His first official engagement may be a bilateral meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. But since the details of this are still being firmed up, I will not divulge yet the details.

Now, on the night of the 16th will be the first real ASEAN engagement of the President, and that will be the dinner hosted by Prime Minister Kishida at the State Guest House or the Akasaka Palace.

Now, the 17th, as I said, will be the main day of the summit. It will be a whole day affair. The opening session will start at 9:30, and then it will be followed by a session on the reviewing ASEAN-Japan Relations, as well as international and regional developments. So here, not only will they review the cooperation activities of ASEAN through the years, but also they will discuss South China Sea, East China Sea, Myanmar, North Korea and other international developments that have a bearing on ASEAN. Now, I will not give the details. Statements on this are still under negotiations, so let's just wait for the statements to finish. We cannot preempt; we cannot predict what the outcome will be at this point.

Now, the next session will include a working lunch during which they will be talking about people-to-people activities between ASEAN and Japan. They themed this, "Heart to Heart Partners Across Generations." But basically, it's student and youth exchange, art and cultural cooperation, and sports cooperation. Now, this is very important to us since the Philippines is one of the major beneficiaries of this youth and people-to-people exchange, and especially exchange of students. Yeah, you have to so-called the Genesis program, the JICA program and also the sports program. And in fact, the Philippines is one of the ... the Philippine youth is one of the largest bloc of participants in this Genesis program.

Now, in the afternoon, the last session would be on ASEAN-Japan Economic Partnership, and this is the in partners for co-creation of economy and society of the future. Medyo similar doon sa forum the day before 'no, but this time it's on the summit level. And what will they talk about? They will be talking about trade and investment, supply chain, connectivity and infrastructure, climate change, and food and energy security.

Now, the session will close at 2:10 P.M., but at night, at 6:10, the leaders will be attending a pre-gala commemorative lighting ceremony at Azabudai Hills. Now, right after this lighting ceremony, they're going to depart for Okura Hotel where the gala dinner will be held.

The next day, there is another event that is not exactly ASEAN but is quite participated in by most of the countries of ASEAN and other countries. It's the Asia Zero Emission Community, a separate regional organization composed of ASEAN, Japan and Australia. Now, this is, as the name of the community indicates, dedicated to lowering the emission of carbon gasses into the atmosphere towards supposedly zero net effect at the end. Now, this will run for only 45 minutes but the President will participate on this. And this is important for us because as one of the country's most vulnerable to a climate change, we are committed to the outcome of the last COP 28 meeting. And this will also be an opportunity for us to request for support for our bid to host the board of the loss and damage fund board.

Now, the next thing probably that we will have to take into consideration is the fact that there will also be business meetings, bilateral business meetings. This will be headed by the DTI. And one of this, on the 18th scheduled tentatively at 1:20 P.M. would be a roundtable meeting for a status report on the pledges and agreement signed during the February 2023 visit on the President and also the signing of the new business agreements. This is important because I remember during our last briefing, one of the questions posted here was what happened to the pledges before. So, this will be an opportunity for us to see what the progresses are. And mind you there are a lot here. I won't go into the details, ang daming businesses involved and they are all on a different levels of progress and development, let's just wait for this meeting to finish for us to have something more definitive.

And then, there is also an indicatively scheduled Kapihan with the Media at 2:40 PM. And then at 4:00 PM, they are scheduling an event at the Imperial Palace, which is an audience with the Japanese Emperor and the Japanese Empress. Of course, the President will be there, and then, after that, the President will be departing for the Philippines at 6:45 PM. I think I will end my briefing here. We will open ourselves to questions. Thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you, Assistant Secretary Espiritu. Mariz Umali-Tima.

UMALI-TIMA/GMA NEWS: Sir, you mentioned a while ago that this is going to be a whole gamut of discussions in the sessions. You mentioned about political, defense, strategic relations. How does the reciprocal access agreement factor into the sessions that will be attended by the President in this visit?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Mariz, the RAA is more or less a bilateral issue. So, it could definitely be part of the ASEAN agenda.

UMALI-TIMA/GMA NEWS: It will definitely be part?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Not will be part of the ASEAN agenda. But it could be, who knows, I cannot confirm this, but it could be a matter of bilateral discussions between the Philippines and Japan.

UMALI-TIMA/GMA NEWS: But how might the visit of President Marcos impact our strategic and geo-political challenges, especially with the very recent harassments that have happened over the weekend in the West Philippines Sea? Will there be any discussions on this matter?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: We will see, yeah probably in general, because definitely, they will be talking about international developments and regional developments, and among them are developments in the South China Sea and East China Sea. But, it will be discussed within the ASEAN context, we don't have details on that yet. It will depend on the developments during the negotiation of the statements and outcome statement and also it will depend on the dynamics of the meeting. That one, we cannot predict.

But as for specifications on the West Philippine Sea, I would like to point out that there will be a separate briefing this afternoon. So, I guess on bilateral matters with Japan on the West Philippine Sea, I guess it will be more appropriate to discuss that (interrupted)

UMALI-TIMA/GMA NEWS: I think, this is a perfect opportunity considering that there has just been a trilateral agreement that has been signed among the three nations, the Philippines, Japan, and the United States. And this visit is, I think a perfect opportunity for this issue to be discussed, right?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Well, that's right, in a sense, yes because the good thing about it, is that Japan has always been supportive of the Philippines in these issues and even in its interventions in ASEAN meetings has also been strongly supportive of the Philippines on the West Philippine issues and even the arbitral award.

CELERINA MONTE/NHK: Sir, regarding the—just to clarify the bilateral meeting between the President and the Prime Minister will be on the 15th, correct?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: There's one being scheduled on the 16th.

CELERINA MONTE/NHK: On the 16th. So what could be the possible agenda of their meeting?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Yeah, okay, Celerina, that one is still being finalized. So, I cannot able to details yet, it might be premature. But definitely on matters of bilateral common concern.

CELERINA MONTE/NHK: Because there was initial discussion previously by the Philippine government, the defense in particular, with their counterpart so on RAA. So, I am wondering if there will be a follow-through on that during that meeting?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: That one, I cannot give you yet. Well, the bilateral issues are not exactly within the purview of the Office of ASEAN Affairs. So I will leave that to the proper office in the DFA, and probably you can ask this afternoon during the briefing.

CELERINA MONTE/NHK: Sir, last. Regarding the supposedly joint act communiqué. So, will the President be pushing for the like what happened to the West Philippine Sea over the weekend, would there be a stronger statement regarding that?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay, the joint statement is not being negotiated by the leaders. It's being negotiated by the ambassadors of ASEAN in ASEAN in Jakarta. Now, as to the content of the negotiation, we cannot divulge it yet, it's still ongoing. By the way, there are two deliverables here. Two outcome documents for the summit, that's the joint vision statement of ASEAN and Japan and then the implementation plan for that joint statement. Now, the joint statement covers, of course, as I said a moment ago inter-gamut of relations between ASEAN and Japan. What we call the three pillars of ASEAN, are political-security matters, which include defense issues, transnational crime and etcetera., but also economic issues, trade and investment, socio-cultural issues, people-to-people exchange issues, climate change, and again, etcetera. I cannot give specifics, because they are still under negotiations. Thank you.

BALANCIO/DZMM: Sir, good morning. Will there be bilateral agreements expected to be signed?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: I cannot confirm that yet.

BALANCIO/DZMM: How about bilateral meetings with other leaders on the sidelines?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: There is nothing that has been indicated so far because this is going to be primarily an ASEAN thing. So, if ever there will be one, we will just see, if there will be side events.

BALANCIO/DZMM: Sir, na-observe ko lang, wala ng meeting with the Filipino community because he already did that when he first visited Tokyo.

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Yeah, there's no schedule yet. Sunud-sunod iyong mga mutual visits eh. Thank you.

HALILI/TV5: Sir, follow-up. You mentioned earlier that there will be business agreements that will be signed. May we know kung anu-ano itong mga businesses na inaasahan natin?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: I cannot yet able to give the details. Ginagawa pa itong mga details na ito because these were just added to the agenda of the President. But suffice it to say that, there will be and that they will be done during the business meetings and then, that again, as I said a moment ago, there will be a portion, the important portion of that business event would be the assessment of the progress of the previous ones. So, that there will be more perception of the complete outcomes of the previous agreements.

HALILI/TV5: And who will be part of the delegations, sir? Gaano kalaki?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay, this will be a lean and mean delegation, because we only have a short meeting with a limited agenda. So, aside from the President and the Speaker and of course, the First Lady, we have the Foreign Secretary, Secretary Pascual, Secretary Frederick Go, Secretary Cheloy Garafil and of course DFA officials, very few DFA officials and DTI officials.

OSEÑA-PAEZ: Alexis Romero, Philippine Star.

ALEXIS ROMERO/ PHILIPPINE STAR: Good morning, Asec. Just going back to the Reciprocal Access Agreement. So, what are the chances that it will be signed during the ... on the sidelines of the summit?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: None at all because it is not part of the agenda. And as for the bilateral meeting, it might be but I cannot confirm that one if whether that will be a part of the agenda.

ALEXIS ROMERO/ PHILIPPINE STAR: Kahit sa bilateral, no chances of it being signed?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: An RAA will require a long time to make, so I don't think it could be done in just one sitting.

ALEXIS ROMERO/ PHILIPPINE STAR: Okay. Thank you, Asec.

OSEÑA-PAEZ: Allan Francisco, PTV4

ALLAN FRANCISCO/ PTV4: Hi, sir. Hi, ma'am. Sir, how would you describe the relationship of ASEAN with Japan, or to be more specific, the relationship of Japan to the Philippines or with the Philippines?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay, between ASEAN and Japan, it's one of the most dynamic, as I said a moment ago. It's involved in practically every aspect of community building, from the political area, political diplomatic area to security areas. It's a supporter of the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific which is the ASEAN version of the Indo-Pacific concept, focusing not only on security but more on economics and climate action. And then, it's also very much embedded in the economic framework of ASEAN because we have this ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership; and we also have an FTA, an ASEAN FTA with Japan.

Now, as for the Philippines, I can say probably to a certain extent, we have a stronger relation with Japan than many, if not all, of the members of ASEAN. And this is even becoming more intensified in the last few years because of common security and economic concerns.

At the same time, we were able to maintain the high-level of people-to-people and social cultural exchange between us. As you well know, marami sa atin iyong mga ... sa mga

kabataan natin ang dumaan doon sa JICA program and now the Chinese program and other student exchange and other training programs.

OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you. Eden Santos, Net25.

EDEN SANTOS/ NET25: Good morning, sir. Regarding po doon sa climate change. Clarification lang, ang Pangulo po ba ay i-encourage ang Japan at Australia na mag-support po doon sa Loss and Damage Fund?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Well, yes, not only the two of them, but all of the participants of the meeting. ASEAN-10 plus Japan and Australia, and we're battling for the chance to host iyong board for the Loss and Damage Fund.

EDEN SANTOS/ NET25: So, mayroon po bang involve na mga pondo na hihilingin po ang Pilipinas para dagdagan iyong ... tama ba, one billion na pondo po?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: As for specifics like that, wala pa akong information. Thank you.

EDEN SANTOS/ NET25: So, papaano po iyong support na hihingiin ng Pangulo from Japan and other countries po?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: As I said, iyong because we are bidding for ... to be a host of headquarters of that program, so let just say na what I can divulge to you is only that aspect na hihingiin natin ang support nila on that. As to specifics, it's not part of what were shared with us. At you have to imagine that this is not exactly UN meeting, so I don't think it will dwell on all those technical specifics at this point.

Tingnan natin, if in the progress of the Asia Zero Emission sa community meeting kung may lalabas na mga ganoon because we understand that experts will also be there. Thank you.

EDEN SANTOS/ NET25: So, ito pong Japan trip naman ng Pangulo, hindi naman po masyadong magdudulot ng negative effect sa kanyang kalusugan since katatapos lang naman po niya sa COVID-19?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Siguro naman hindi because I believe that in the past two days, lumabas na si Presidente. In fact, he was with this gift-giving program sa Malacañang. And we hope that he will be already up and running, fully join the event.

OSEÑA-PAEZ: The President was at the Puso ng Pasko last night, and he attended it. Going back to the Loss and Damage Fund, just to add to the clarification that the Philippines is asking, has expressed interest to host the board in Manila which was on the speech of Secretary Yulo-Loyzaga, I believe on Saturday at the COP28, and also, for the Philippines to have a seat at the board.

Let's have Harley Valbuena, DZME.

HARLEY VALBUENAL/ DZME: Hi! Good morning po. Asec. you mentioned that transnational crimes will be part of the agenda. So, we all know that there a recent bombing sa MSU sa Marawi City, and the President pointed out that the foreign terrorists are behind it, and then IS claimed it already. So, will they discuss about the bombing incident, and the same time, will he push for the strengthening or enhancement of our transnational security to avoid this incident to happen in the future?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay, transnational crime and counter terrorism have always been part of ASEAN agenda, not only with Japan but with almost all of the major partners. So, nandidiyan, it's been a long standing affair, especially since 911. And the mechanisms of cooperation have already been in operation since then.

So, as for the intensification of that, probably, yes. But we leave that doon sa—because this a matter that will be handled even in more detailed by the experts on this, by what we call the sectoral bodies of ASEAN. May mga bodies tayo on counter terrorism 'no. And then, it will also definitely be in the Joint Vision Statement. Thank you.

OSEÑA-PAEZ: Alexis Romero, Philippine Star.

ALEXIS ROMERO/ PHILIPPINE STAR: Asec., regarding the business deals, do you have any figure how much iyong worth and, kahit roughly, how many business deals will be signed during the visit of the President?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Unfortunately, I don't have the details yet. Thank you. Probably, we can ask that sa DTI. But I think at this point, it's still a work in progress. So, it's in very fluid.

ALEXIS ROMERO/ PHILIPPINE STAR: But do you have any idea at least what sectors?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Well, kasama iyong creative economy sector because, as I said, a moment ago, there will be an event doon which will even include parang a fashion show involving Philippine fashion designers, using fabrics, a fusion of Filipino and Japanese fabrics.

ALEXIS ROMERO/ PHILIPPINE STAR: So, creative economy ...

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Yeah, creative economy and probably more on IT and etc. But as for others, I don't have a detail. The DTI would have more of that. Thank you.

ALEXIS ROMERO/ PHILIPPINE STAR: Thank you, Asec.

OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay, Alvin Baltazar.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/ RADYO PILIPINAS: Asec., good morning po. Asec., nabanggit ninyo kanina, magpa-follow up si Pangulo doon sa mga business arrangements na ginawa niya last February, iyong mga agreements. Kasama ba ritong ipa-follow up, Asec., iyong pagbabalik ng FX lalo na mas maigting iyon ating pamahalaan na magkaroon ng modernization sa transport natin?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: I'm sorry, I didn't see that detail doon sa briefing na ginawa sa amin. But it might be, I'm not sure. I cannot answer you on that one.

ALVIN BALTAZAR/ RADYO PILIPINAS: Ilang business meetings po ba ang expected na dadaluhan ni Pangulo?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Well, at least dalawa. But hindi pa firmed up lahat ito 'no; there just on the table.

OSEÑA-PAEZ: I think this concludes our press briefing this morning. Thank you so much Malacañang Press Corps and thank you, Asec. Espiritu

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Thank you, Daphne. And thanks to all of you again, hope to see you there.

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