

**PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
PRESIDENTIAL NEWS DESK**

**MEDIA INTERVIEW BY PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR. AFTER THE OATH
TAKING OF DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE SECRETARY RALPH G. RECTO AND
SECRETARY FREDERICK D. GO AS SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR
INVESTMENT AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

[Malacañan Palace | 12 January 2024]

Q: Hi, Mr. President! Everyone, magandang hapon po. Sir, why change horses in midstream? Ano po sa palagay ninyo ang ma-offer ni Secretary Recto sa table, sa pangalawang taon po ninyo sa pwesto bilang Pangulo ng bansa?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: We are not changing horses in midstream. We are continuing the policies that we had laid out from the beginning. It would be, it would be— I would think poor judgment on our part having seen the effects of the changes in policy, the changes in structure, as you would say to change them in the middle of our progress. And, we are making such good progress.

But, again, it was just time for Secretary Ben Diokno – he felt that it was time for him to return to his natural habitat, if you will, in the Banko Sentral and in the Monetary Board.

In terms of what Secretary Ralph has to offer, I think there is no need to enumerate that his experience as NEDA head, and his experience in the legislature. I really – what I said very very quickly in my statement, is that he has always been the lead of, shall we say, analyst when it comes to the budget when we were together in the Senate and I know that he's doing the same job in the House.

So, it is something that we know we have seen him perform, and it is something he has a true understanding of the economy; he has a true understanding of how our – the Philippine economy works. And, I think that is the quality that he will bring to this.

And we have so many new ideas and new commitments that we have taken on, so that for the improvement of the economy and I think that, now Secretary Ralph will be very important in coming up with these new ideas that we still need for the transformation of the Philippine economy.

So, the policies remain the same. The fiscal discipline will remain the same. However, we are, again, as I said, looking to see if there are any new ways to handle that and I still had hope for Secretary Ben Diokno to continue [unclear] – but I see that he has chosen now, as I said, to return to the BSP and the Monetary Board.

Q: Sir, last question. May dapat bang asahan, sir ang publiko na tax reform under the leadership of Secretary Recto sa Finance Department?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Well, I don't want to pre-empt the secretary in making any of these announcements. Let's allow him to – pumasok muna siya. Let him have a look, I know that he is fully cognizant of all of the different issues that are prevalent in the Department of Finance. So, let us allow him to make his analysis and we will leave it to him to make these announcements when the time comes.

Q: Thank you sir.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Thank you.

Q: Good afternoon, sir. President Marcos, sir, do you have a specific project or program in mind that you expect to achieve or implement faster and better with Secretary Recto in the DOF.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: It's... You have been reading our mind. We actually sat down just a few days ago and put me the list of priorities in terms of specific projects, in terms of the development of the proposals that were made during the trips that we made abroad. So, yes, there are very specific. There's not just one; there are several. And, in fact, I'm meeting with the economic team right after this to explain exactly what those are and how we intend to proceed.

Those projects will be prioritized in the sense that I have asked Secretary Deck Go, I have said that these are the areas that absolutely have to get done so that we can continue on this path that we have been on for the last year and a half in the improvement and the transformation of the economy.

Mahaba haba, it's not a small list either.

Q: All right, sir. And then, sir, mananatili po ba 'yung food security bilang top agenda ng Marcos administration without Secretary Go, along with the handling of inflationary pressures po?

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Well, they still... any economy or any economic manager in any country is now really focusing on the problems that inflation has brought. We began when we started out [unclear that we are worried about the perhaps [inaudible] debt-to-GDP ratio and that we will have to grow the economy out of that debt.

We are... have moved certainly in that direction and that is why with the new global economy we are now having to, not rethink, but we have to redesign many of what we have normally, what we normally had done, policies that we have done before the pandemic.

The pandemic is really the inflection point in the world economy and that is why we needed to adjust.

So, yes, food supply remains critical. These are the lessons learned from the pandemic economy that food supply must be guaranteed so that whatever happens—[unclear] God forbid that there will another pandemic or any such shock to the global economy—[inaudible] problems that brought about by supply chains problems, by supply problems, that food supply must first be guaranteed within the country.

So, and the large part also that the food commodities, agricultural commodities plays in our inflation picture. The contribution of agri commodities to the total inflation rate is still significant and that's why we have to assure our people that there will be a supply and therefore we will be able to hold prices at the level that is affordable by everyone.

Q: Thank you, sir. And, sir, if I may kay Senator Recto po. Okay, Senator Secretary Recto po. Sir, are we going to continue what Secretary Diokno started or should we expect reforms under your leadership in DOF po?

SECRETARY RECTO: Essentially, you have the National Development Plan to follow and the chief architect of that is the President. We have the macro-fiscal framework. There is a plan, there is a roadmap that essentially we will continue.

Q: Good afternoon, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Good afternoon.

Q: Good afternoon everyone. This question is for Secretary Recto. Sir, following your appointment po as Finance Secretary, what is your first order of the day po?

SECRETARY RECTO: Number one is to collect for next year, I think, Php4.3 trillion in taxes—Php3 trillion with the BIR, Php1 trillion with the BOC, and I think the treasury is about Php300 billion.

So it's all about fiscal sustainability and like I said, you have a National Development Plan to fund. Incidentally we will be borrowing Php2.7 trillion next year.

So every night, when I wake up in the morning, dapat ang nakolekto natin more or less Php20 billion to fund all the needs of our people and the requirements of government, and to make sure that money is spent wisely dahil we have to stretch every peso, including acting faster on investment, particularly the President has just signed the new PPP Law. That will free up government sources for social services, investments also in creating more jobs for our country.

Q: Sir, sorry, I had to ask this question. The President told us he doesn't want to pre-empt you. Sir, do you plan to impose new taxes po under your watch?

SECRETARY RECTO: There are already existing revenue measures that the House has passed and the President has certified as urgent. We will make sure that the Senate will be able to pass the same.

Q: Sir, lastly po. Will you be implementing changes such as the reshuffle among DOF officials?

SECRETARY RECTO: I don't expect to. You know when I entered NEDA I only brought one person with me. And that was during the height of the global financial crisis. I think we came out [inaudible] at that time.

Q: Thank you, sir.

Sir, last question for Secretary Go. Sir, being the Investment, sir and Economic Adviser, what steps are you taking to ensure that all investment pledges, sir, from the foreign trip of the President will come to reality? And how will you monitor po the benefits of all those investments?

SECRETARY GO: I think our goal to attract strategic investments into our country calls for number one, improving the Ease of Doing Business. Second would be reducing friction cost. And third, finding solutions to navigate the bureaucratic challenges that we face.

And we have to make a strong case to the world why they should invest here in the Philippines.

Q: Thank you, Secretaries. Thank you, Mr. President.

Q: Thank you very much, Secretary Go and Secretary Recto. And thank you very much Mr. President.

This concludes our press briefing. Maraming salamat, Malacañang Press Corps and have a good afternoon.

PRESIDENT MARCOS: Thank you very much.

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