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MALACAÑANG PRESS BRIEFING OF PALACE PRESS OFFICER AND UNDERSECRETARY ATTY. CLAIRE CASTRO
February 24, 2025 [11:09 A.M – 11:32 A.M.]

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Magandang umaga, Malacañang Press Corps. Welcome sa ating press briefing ngayong araw, February 25.

Makakasama natin ulit si Palace Press Officer at PCO Undersecretary Atty. Claire Castro. Good morning, Usec.

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Yes. Good morning, Asec. Dale, and good morning sa lahat po ng ating mga kaibigan dito sa media. Good morning.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Opo. We'll go straight, ma'am, to our first question from Maricel Halili, TV5.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Ma'am, magandang umaga po. Ma'am, today kinu-commemorate iyong EDSA anniversary, but then some are saying na bakit hindi siya na-declare as non-working holiday kagaya dati? May we know the wisdom of Malacañang bakit idiniretso from… since, I think, 2023 hindi na siya na-declare as non-working holiday?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Yes. As of now, February 25 is declared a special working day and I think it is the prerogative of the President. And when we say special working day, still there is encouragement to people to commemorate, to join any event and it will not hinder any activity to commemorate the EDSA People Power.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Isn't this an effort, ma'am, from Malacañang para kasi iyong mga critics sinasabi na gusto nang burahin iyong part na 'to ng history ng bansa?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Okay. Again, iyan na naman ay kanilang mga opinyon sa mga balak na tumuligsa sa Pangulo at sa pamahalaan. Unang-una, isipin po natin, mayroon po bang pinahinto ang Pangulo na anumang activity na patungkol dito sa commemoration ng EDSA People? Since the time po na siya ay naging pangulo, wala po tayong nadinig na anumang pagpapahinto ng anumang events 'no, any activities na maaaring mag-commemorate ng nasabing event and at the same time, pansinin po natin, papaano po mabubura ang history? History is history. So, hindi po kakayanin po lang ng Presidente na ito ay mabura sa ating history.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Pero what do you want to tell those universities and colleges na nag-decide to suspend their classes today to commemorate the EDSA anniversary?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: They are given the freedom to do that kaya po hindi natin sinasabing ang Pangulo ay humahadlang sa anumang balakin ng anumang organisasyon, unibersidad sa kanilang mga gagawing activities. So, kung balak po nila talaga na sila ay walang klase, it's up to them. Free po sila to do that.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: Related question. Sorry, Asec. Dale. Isn't this undermining the gains of the EDSA Revolution and diminishing its spirit and essence?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: No, I don't think so. We don't think so. Why? Sabi ko nga po kanina, if there is the intention to erase the memories of EDSA People Power, ibang klaseng pamamaraan ang gagawin. As a matter of fact, we declared it as special working day but it is considered just a regular working day. But, what's the purpose of special working day? It's to encourage people to join any event kung kanilang kailangang i-commemorate ang isang affair.

IVAN MAYRINA/GMA7: One final point on this issue. Having said all that, ano ho ang pahayag ng Malacañang sa araw na ito? The President normally releases statements to, you know, to communicate to the people, to commemorate whatever that particular holiday is all about. So, ano po ang pahayag ng Malacañang sa araw na ito?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: As of now, iyon pa lang po, dineclare lang po na ito ay special working day and we mean—and I think it means a lot to all the people – you are encouraged to go out, to do your activities, to commemorate the EDSA People Power.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Racquel Bayan, Radyo Pilipinas.

RACQUEL BAYAN/RADYO PILIPINAS: Usec., can we get Malacañang's reaction po on the exemption of Philippine security funding from the foreign aid freeze of US?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Of course natutuwa po tayo nagkaroon nga po ng direktiba si US President Trump na 90 days magkakaroon ng… ipi-freeze ang foreign aid. So, kung nagkaroon po tayo ng exemption at nagkaroon po tayo at ibibigay po at iri-release ang 500 million dollars foreign financing sa atin, ito po ay napakalaking bagay at nagpapasalamat po tayo sa suporta na iyan.

Tandaan po natin, ito po ay mula sa pamahalaan po ni dating Pangulo, ni US President Biden at ito pa rin po ay pinagtibay din po sa panahon po ni President Donald Trump. So, masarap po na makatanggap ng ganitong good news at ang suporta po ng US sa atin ay hindi po mapapasubali.

RACQUEL BAYAN/RADYO PILIPINAS: But, Usec., with or without po itong funding ng US to the Philippines, can we categorically say na on track pa rin po iyong AFP modernization natin?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Of course, hindi natin ito ibabalewala – napakaimportante po ng AFP modernization. But of course, with the additional help, mas malaki pong bagay ang maitutulong nito.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: Next question: Chona Yu, People's Journal.

CHONA YU/PEOPLE'S JOURNAL: Good morning, ma'am. Ma'am, doon sa impeachment kay Vice President Sara Duterte, can the President call for a special session even without the request ng senate?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Para pong–the way we see it, it would be an awkward position on the part of the President to voluntarily call for special session considering that there is this ongoing intrigue that the President is behind the impeachment proceedings. So, it is better for the senate to request the President considering that even the President made this pronouncement that if the senate will ask him to call for a special session, he will do so.

CHONA YU/PEOPLE'S JOURNAL: Pero, ma'am, iyong word na "forthwith," iyong immediate, isn't enough basis to call for a special session?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Okay. Marami pong mga iba-ibang klase ng opinion; but if you will look and read the provisions of the constitution, you will see po to forthwith proceed, right? Pero wala pong makikitang time element – is it to forthwith proceed even during recess? Because they can proceed definitely if there is session, there's no question about that. But to proceed during recess, grey area po iyan sa constitution.

So, they may forthwith proceed after the recess. Kapag may session po walang problema eh, they have to do. But during the recess, wala pong sinasabi ang konstitusyon na you have to call for a special session to proceed with the impeachment proceedings or with the impeachment trial. Wala po kasing ganoon nakasabi sa konstitusyon.

CHONA YU/PEOPLE'S JOURNAL: Last na lang, ma'am. If and when mayroong special session, is it legal to call—magkaroon ng impeachment trial—I mean, is it legal na magkaroon ng special session considering na the agenda is limited sa impeachment trial, hindi iyong sa legislation?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Mayroon din pong dalawang 'school of thoughts' diyan. Pero kung papansinin ninyo po ang Konstitusyon, the President may call special session anytime. So with that, hindi lang po ito limitado sa kung may urgency patungkol sa bill or legislation. But we believe it is also … it includes also the impeachment trial kasi it's anytime without any condition.

CHONA YU/PEOPLE'S JOURNAL: May request na ba ngayon, ma'am?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Wala pa po kaming natatanggap.

ANNA BAJO/GMA NEWS ONLINE: Good morning po, ma'am. Ma'am, may we get confirmation kung mayroon po tayong change of leadership sa PSC?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: As of now, wala pa. It's still under evaluation; wala pa pong nangyayaring pagtatanggal, transition, transfer of position – wala pa po.

ANNA BAJO/GMA NEWS ONLINE: So, si Sir Morales pa rin po iyong ating PSC Chief, ma'am?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Yes, opo.

ANNA BAJO/GMA NEWS ONLINE: How about po kay—my rumors po kasi na papalitan din po si Secretary Ivan Uy. May we get Palace—

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: The President is still evaluating if there's a need for a change of leaders in each department. So, wala pa po tayo; under evaluation pa po lahat!

ALVIN BALTAZAR/RADYO PILIPINAS: Usec., magandang umaga po. Sa pagkakabanggit ninyo doon sa huling sinagot ninyo doon sa tanong, apparently parang hindi lang ang DICT ang ini-evaluate. Mayroon pa po bang ibang department?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Pagdating po kasi kay Sir Ivan, wala pa rin po kaning nari-receive na information. So, kung mayroon man pong magiging balasahan, lahat po siguro kami rito ay under evaluation.

ASEC. DE VERA: Thank you, Usec. Eden Santos, Net 25.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Good morning po, ma'am. Sabi ninyo po kahapon ba iyon, noong unang harap ninyo sa MPC, na lalabanan po natin ang fake news. Sa post po ni former Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile, binabanggit niya iyong mga fake news, iyong mga kinakalat lalo na sa socmed, ano po. Hanggang saan po ba you will make "patol" doon sa mga fake news na sinasabi ninyo na ibinabato po ng mga kalaban ng administrasyon? At sa tingin ninyo po ba, ang Pangulong Marcos ang nauna sa pagsisimula po ng mga negative campaign kaya naman dumami iyong mga parang, in a way, sinasagot lang din po ng mga opposition, kung opposition man na matatawag iyong grupo po ng mga kalaban sa pulitika?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Unang-una po—Thank you, nice question. Unang-una po, ang sasagutin lang natin ay iyong mga intriga na may sense. Kung wala namang meaning, walang sense, hindi po natin ito sasagutin, okay. At patungkol po kung sa nauna ang Pangulo sa pagbabatikos, it's just part of the campaign propaganda and wala naman po siyang pinatungkulan kung sino – marami pong kandidato. Ang nagtataka lang po ulit tayo kung bakit nag-aray, hindi naman sila iyong pinatutungkulan, kumbaga ano ito, *"Bato, bato sa langit, tamaan ay huwag magalit*." Bakit may nagalit? May tinamaan ba?

So, kapag sinabi natin kasi—ito, we know kapag sinabi nating nag-deliver ng suka, bumili lang ng suka, hindi naman ito literally na suka. I mean, ano lang ito eh, idiom. It's just an idiom na sinabi na when we say, "nag-deliver ng suka" it means baguhan, wala pang alam masyado sa pulitika o sa proseso, sa trabaho. Kung kayo ang tatanungin ko, maski naman kayo siguro alam ninyo, maraming kandidato na hindi alam ang trabaho ng pagiging senador. Kung tinamaan sila at tumatakbo sila at alam nating wala silang alam, eh iyon na lang siguro *"ouch!"* and at the same time, dapat hindi nga sila tumakbo kasi hindi puwedeng gawing magpaka-apprentice sa pagiging senador.

Nakita natin siguro kung anong naging klase ngayon ang … papaano ang nangyayari minsan sa mga hearing, especially kung hindi nila alam ang procedure sa senado. Isang kawalan, sayang ang oras, kawalan ito sa pondo ng bayan. So, sana lang, ang request natin, doon sa mga tatakbo, siguraduhin ninyo naman po kapag nanalo kayo ay may alam na kayo. Iyon lang po.

EDEN SANTOS/NET25: Other issue lang po. Iyong study po na ginawa ng Philippine Institute for Development Studies o iyong PIDS, sabi po Philippines lags behind ASEAN neighbors in transport infrastructure. Sa tingin ninyo po ba itong mga existing na mga transportation na infra projects at saka iyong mga programs ng mga concerned government agencies are not enough, hindi po nakakatulong para mas lalo pang mapaayos iyong ating transportation system dito sa Pilipinas?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Well, in general, ang gobyerno ay hindi naman kikilos nang kulang-kulang. May mga pagkakataon siguro may mga factors na may nadi-delay, but definitely we will do our best para gampanan lahat ang ating trabaho at kung ano ang naipangako natin sa taumbayan.

JEAN MANGALUZ/PHILSTAR: Good morning. I'd like to follow up on Ma'am Eden's question. Former Senate President Tito Sotto said that he would push for a bill banning fake news. So, what's the Palace's position on this especially since there's a new PCO Secretary?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Siguro naman kahit po hindi Palasyo ang tanungin natin, gugustuhin po talaga natin na ma-ban ang fake news. And personally, when I was one of the resource persons dito sa TriCom, I even suggested for a registration of all content creators to avoid this kind of fake news.

JEAN MANGALUZ/PHILSTAR: How will you balance that na baka ma-impede on, you know, the freedom of expression, the freedom of the press?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Okay. We have to define first that there will be a law if they will make such law, they have to define what's fake news and what's the limitation, how they can gauge that those statements will be considered as fake news.

So as of now, wala pa po tayong definite na definition ng fake news specially nasa social media tayo, digital tayo eh. So, we have to study that, especially mga lawmakers, they have to study that.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: Good afternoon, ma'am. Ma'am, mag-follow up lang ako regarding po doon sa na-mention nilang evaluation ng mga Cabinet members. Kailan po nag-initiate si President noong evaluation na iyon and kailan natin expected matapos?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: As of now, ang pagkakasabi po sa atin ay nag-e-evaluate pa. So, kung kailan matatapos, hindi natin din alam kung magkakaroon talaga ng revamp. So, we have to just wait and see. Hindi pa po natin alam kung ano po iyong mangyayari as of now.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: Pero nanggaling po iyong evaluation na iyon kay Pangulo or parang mayroon pong..?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: I-evaluate pa lang po. I-evaluate! Siguro lahat po ngayon kasi everytime kailangan namang mag-evaluate ng Pangulo eh kung ang kaniyang secretaries, Cabinet members are doing well for the government, for the people. So, kapag nakita po ng Pangulo na "Oops, mukhang hindi ito makakatulong" eh 'di we have to find a new leader and it's for the people. Pero as of now, wala pa po talaga!

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: Pero related po ba ito dahil midterm na ni Pangulo or ginagawa niya ito regularly every year?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Kapag lang po siguro may nakitang dapat na palitan or may mga nag-resign. May mga nagri-resign, we cannot do anything about that.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: Tapos, last question na lang po. Regarding po doon sa USAID, na-assess na po ba ng government iyong total impact kasi previously na-mention ng NEDA na parang iyong regarding lang sa mga initiatives at projects nila iyong kaya nilang bigyan ng opinion. Iyong pagdating po sa buong government, mayroon po ba tayong parang assessment na noong impact ng suspension ng USAID?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Wala pa po tayong anumang reaksiyon patungkol diyan pero the mere fact po na na-exempt po tayo at tayo po ay kumbaga hindi mapi-freeze iyong foreign aids sa atin – iyon po, napakalaki na pong epekto noon para sa bansa natin iyong mga tulong na ito.

SAM MEDENILLA/BUSINESSMIRROR: Thank you po.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Hi, ma'am. Ma'am, follow up lang doon sa evaluation. So, can we say na iyong mga recent changes sa Cabinet ng Pangulo ay a result of that evaluation?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Okay. May mga Cabinet members po kasi na nagri-resign. So, ang Pangulo po naman ay hindi naman po makakatanggi kung talaga pong gusto na ng isang Cabinet member o secretary na mag-resign. Like po Secretary Cesar Chavez, voluntary po iyong resignation niya, so wala po tayong magagawa kung hindi talaga maghanap ng kaniyang kapalit. So, ganoon lang po iyong nangyayari pero sabi nga po natin, as of now, kung ini-evaluate pa ang kung sino ang papalitan or kung may papalitan wala pa po tayong nadidinig. Nag-e-evaluate pa lang po; it's just normal for the President.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Speaking po ng changes sa PCO, what other changes can we expect pagdating po sa leadership ng PCO. Nabanggit po kahapon si Transportation Secretary Vince Dizon asked iyong mga usecs to submit courtesy resignation. Mayroon na po bang ganoong klaseng order si Secretary Jay Ruiz?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: As of now, wala pa po tayong natanggap but nagkaroon na po ng meeting at sinabi niya po talaga na magkakaroon ng pagbabago at maaaring may ma-retain, maaaring may mawala. So, hintayin po natin kung ano iyong magiging order ni Sec. Jay Ruiz.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Thank you po.

MELVIN GASCON/INQUIRER: Good morning, ma'am.

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Yes, good morning po.

MELVIN GASCON/INQUIRER: Since you mentioned po si former Secretary Chavez. He issued a statement saying na one of the reasons that he resigned is '*to his estimation he fell short of what was expected of him.'* Question ko po is, what will Secretary Jay Ruiz do differently para po ma-compensate kung anuman po iyong pagkukulang na nakita ni Secretary Chavez.

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Actually, I think it's Secretary Jay Ruiz who should be answering this. But I believe that we will be proactive in performance. We will do the best we can to impart the truth, to tell to the people what the programs will be of the President for the interest of the people. But I think it is better be answered by Secretary Jay Ruiz.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Good morning, ma'am.

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Good morning po.

TUESDAY NIU/DZBB: Naobserbahan po namin na three years ang Marcos administration so far pero four na po iyong secretaries natin na umupo sa Presidential Communications Office. Ano po kaya ang hinahanap ni Presidente na lider ng PCO at hindi nasa-satisfy iyong kaniyang requirements para doon sa position kung mayroon man siyang gusto talagang standard para sa PCO?

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Hindi ko po masasabing hindi naman nasa-satisfy ang Pangulo sa mga napili niyang liderato, mga leaders. Most probably, actually I cannot speak for other Cabinet members or other secretaries na nag-lead ng PCO. Maybe sa sarili nila, katulad ng sabi ninyo nga po [na sinabi] ni Secretary Cesar Chavez, feeling niya na hindi niya nagampanang mabuti or may kakulangan. But as far as the President is concerned we believe na he is not

complaining, it's more on the people and the leaders who resigned maybe thinking that they could not do properly, completely the task given to them.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: I think we don't have any more questions, Usec.

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Okay.

PCO ASEC. DE VERA: That wraps up our briefing for this morning. Maraming salamat, Malacañang Press Corps. Maraming salamat, Usec. Castro, and magandang umaga po.

PCO USEC. ATTY. CASTRO: Thank you. As promised ha.

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