

INTERVIEW WITH MR. ENRICO MARIANO
Commercial Attaché of the Embassy of the Philippines
Bangkok, Thailand
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In 2016, Thailand ranked as our 6th largest trading partner, it was our 7th largest export market and our 4th largest import market.

The bulk of our two-way trade is in cars, car parts and electronics. In terms of investments, Philippine presence in Thailand are mostly into consumer goods. These are familiar names such as San Miguel, URC, Oishi using the brand name Rinbee and UNILAB.

In the Philippines, Thai investments are into construction materials, energy and agro-processing. These are the familiar names -- Siam Cement Group, PTT, CP group and Indorama.

The total trade between the Philippines and Thailand was above US\$8 billion dollars in 2016. The Philippine trade and investment center in Bangkok is the frontline office of the DTI here in Thailand.

The DTI places this Philippine Trade and Investment Centers in key economic hubs around the world. So we treat Thailand, we recognized Thailand, as one of those economic hubs.

What we do in the Philippine Trade and Investment Centers are to promote trade and investments. It takes a big team to facilitate investments. For us here abroad, what we do is we seek companies who may be interested and we whet their appetite, we whet their interest into the opportunities in the Philippines.

From there, we pass this interest to PEZA and to the BOI. And it takes a few months, a few weeks to arrange the visits of these companies.

There's a big worry on the processes, how long they'd take in realizing investments but what we know is that when there's really a market for these companies, they will persevere to come to our country.

The highlight of the business program of this official visit is the CEO Roundtable. In the CEO Roundtable we were able to gather the top business groups here in Thailand, namely The Federation of Thai Industries, the Thai Chamber of Commerce and the Thai Bankers Association. These are the top

organizations here in Thailand, and we are ready to communicate with them that the Philippines is on its way for steady growth. What we will tell them is that the focus of this administration is “Build. Build. Build” and you create two signals when you say that.

First, are the attendant opportunities in the infrastructure build up itself, the second signal is that manufacturing in agriculture will have better or higher productivity in the medium or the long term.

What we’re aiming for— what we call the golden age of infrastructure, we are looking for companies who will—who can invest infrastructure and bring their own project financing. In addition, we would like to tap on the strength of Thailand in industries such as petrochemicals and in high tech manufacturing.

The biggest trading relationship that we have with Thailand is in the auto industry. We supply a lot of car parts to Thailand and they supply a lot of cars that go to our roads. They are the largest supplier of automobiles and automotive parts to the Philippines. In fact, the supply to the Philippines is almost equal to that coming straight from Japan and from Indonesia.

So with the DTI, we are focusing on the manufacturing resurgence program and the cars program, so that we could participate in this very productive, very competitive industry in Thailand as well as trying to create our own vehicles.

The Thai conglomerates are capable of investing in a broad range of sectors. These are petrochemicals, energy, infrastructure and plastics. So what we would like to promote with the Thai investors is not really just in infrastructure but all these industrial inputs that would help us be more productive as we export to the global market.

Regarding opportunities in the Thai consumer market, we have to note that the Thais are a snacking culture. They love to eat at different times of the day. What we see as an opportunity are exports or establishment of firms here in Thailand on cakes, pastries and other snacks.

For example, we have the company “Potato Corner” who is now growing here in Thailand. This is a snack category that is very specific and it’s unique. So what we are looking at here in Thailand are all these unique concepts, the Thais are very interested in new varied things that they can eat for snacking in the mornings, snacking in the noon time, snacking in the afternoon.

You can see from the streets and in the malls that they have a lot of available choices for themselves. So they are spoiled for choice and that is an opportunity for us because of all these little segments that we can come into.

In this visit of the President to Thailand, in addition to developing and strengthening diplomatic relations, we're also strengthening trade and investment relations, we will have one clear message for the Thai business community that the Philippines is poised for rapid and sustained growth. We look forward to great interest from the Thais to set up shop in the Philippines.

Thank you.

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