

**PRESIDENT FERDINAND ROMUALDEZ MARCOS JR.'s
MALACAÑANG PRESS BRIEFING**

Malacañan Palace Grounds
January 12, 2024

[00:00:00]

Our newly-appointed officers and their families and our friends from the press, ladies and gentlemen.

It is with great pleasure that I announce two extremely important appointments that will impact the economic landscape of what we are aspiring for Bagong Pilipinas.

So let me, first of all, since it's a new position introduce Secretary Frederick D. Go, who has been appointed [applause] as Special Assistant to the President for Investment and Economic Affairs; and a gentleman that I do not think needs introduction as he has been in public life since we were very young congressmen together, Secretary Ralph Recto, for the Department of Finance. [applause]

As I think even a very perfunctory research will immediately show, both Secretary Go and Secretary Recto are distinguished leaders whose expertise, vision and dedication will undoubtedly contribute to the prosperity of our country.

But, before I proceed any further, let me explain where we are now on the road to recovery and transformation, in moving past the damages of pandemic towards the progress that awaits us as reward for our toils.

Economic growth in the third quarter of 2023 is at 5.9 percent, surpassing expectations and silencing some of the doomsayers, who were saying that we could not surpass the growth rate and the economic performance of our neighboring countries and other countries around the world.

Inflation has retreated to within BSP's two to four percent target in December, providing much needed relief to our consumers. Joblessness has gone to its lowest level in 18 years as economic expansion has harnessed the talents of the upskilled, the newly skilled and the reskilled amongst our workforce.

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Meanwhile, the fiscal deficit and public debt are waning to within our targets at a faster-than-expected pace. While the future looks bright, dark clouds still gather on the horizon, unleashing headwinds that will temper, maybe even damage or trample our optimistic outlook.

Abroad, escalating geopolitical tensions could dampen global trade, tighten global financing, as well as trigger fuel and food shocks that could tow inflation back up. And that is why we are watching it very, very closely and have some very well thought-out options should that occur.

Here at home, as we have been warning, there is the distinct possibility of the beginnings of El Niño starting now and extending until the end of the first quarter or perhaps even extending into the second quarter.

So, whatever harm it can cause, we have to cushion the impact with timely and targeted interventions so that food prices will not surge as a result of farm outputs falling short.

The challenge before all of us then is not just to grow the economy but to make sure that such growth is felt by our people, of all parts of society. The dividends of economic growth must not just manifest in raised family incomes, but in the improvement in our infrastructure, in our healthcare systems, our educational systems.

So, in these endeavors, we depend upon the sound advice of our new Secretary of Investment and Economic Affairs in the person of Mr. Frederick D. Go.

Secretary Go brings a wealth of experience that he has gained for more than three decades in the private sector. I have long used his very sterling advice even before the election and his capabilities given that he has held positions in our country's biggest corporations.

If there is one thing about... We call him, we refer to him... You will now become Sec. Deck. If there is one thing that is admirable about our new secretary, Secretary Go, is that despite him being comfortable in his own life, he knows he can still make a difference to our country.

I trust that his fruitful years across many ventures have sharpened his acumen for the next big opportunity. He will be at the forefront when we take that leap towards economic growth.

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He has a vision of innovation and Secretary Go will help us create an environment that will not just draw in investments but realize them, ushering in an era of unprecedented growth across industries.

As the SAPIEA --- it is apparently what your office is going to be referred to—he will ensure the effective integration and implementation of various investment and economic policies of the government.

Joining him in our economic team is the new Secretary of Finance, Mr. Ralph Recto. But before I go on to talk about Secretary Ralph, the reason that Deck Go was chosen for this position is that all of you who have been travelling with me have heard from me often that we are not satisfied just with the signing and the presentation of MOUs and LOIs.

And in our discussion, I always say we have to make this real. And because many of these investments are going to be fully in the private sector, they can be PPPs, they can be joint ventures, Maharlika Investment Fund might also be involved. So, his expertise lies exactly there in creating an environment that is interchangeable between government and the private sector so as to be able to make these investments real, to make them profitable and to make them be felt in the everyday lives of ordinary Filipinos.

And I have great confidence in his abilities in that regard simply by looking at his record and seeing the great strides that he has made with all of the different private sector groups that he has been involved with.

Now Secretary Recto, whose name and face is familiar to all of us, he has already had a remarkable career in public service, having excelled in various roles within the government.

He will be a major player on how we stay on the path of growth, meet and even surpass our medium-term fiscal targets and achieve our developmental targets. He will promote not just ease in paying taxes, but also in efficiently and effectively spending those collections, because the citizen's reward for tax compliance should be better and more responsive public services.

He will continue to help devise strategies that will tame inflation through a basket of responses, ranging from plugging supply gaps to injecting non-monetary measures so that prices will be stable.

I am certain that he will be championing reforms, leverage his influence in both houses of Congress into passing bills that accelerate growth, draw in investments and create better jobs while raising funds that will be invested back for human and physical capital formation.

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Many of the measures that make tax regimes more efficient, easy to administer and comply with and equitable are in the advanced stages in both houses of Congress, the proverbial low-hanging fruits, which can be picked by the towering stature of these two gentlemen here.

I also have tasked him to be at the forefront of our anti-smuggling drive, pursue tax cheats, starting with the habitual ones who have raised tax evasion not just into an art but into a business.

And when the seductive call of populism beckons, I am sure that Secretary Recto will counsel us on the merits of fiscal discipline, to remind us of the price tag of dreams, and to stick to the kind of stewardship that bequeaths no huge generational debt for our children.

Secretary Ralph and I both entered the House of Representatives in 1992. He beat me by a few months at being the Benjamin of the House in 1992. After 15 years, we reunited in the Senate, still displaying his vintage virtue of being fastidious with the examination of appropriations of the national budget, of revenue and economic numbers.

Ask any senator who has worked with him and I will be the first one to attest to this, we will tell you that his plenary interpellation or interrogation, borders on pure detail --- he enters in to the detail and it is a brave Senator or Congressman now who will rise to interpolate Senator now Secretary Ralph Recto, because you do not rise unless you are very well-prepared because he is always very well-prepared.

His work in the legislature is done in a manner that does not generate heat but light. He finds a way through the problems that we see, not to show off or not to cause problems, but to make bills better and to make the function of government more efficient and more equitable.

We have always suspected that he sleeps under his pillow with the General Appropriations Act under his pillow, and treats the Tax Code as leisurely reading and his copy of the Budget of Expenditures and Sources of Financing is probably the most dog-eared book in his house. And any new Finance Secretary stands on the mighty shoulder of his predecessors. And Secretary Recto is no exception.

And we cannot finish this event here this afternoon without a very heartfelt and warm wishes and gratitude to Secretary Ben Diokno for the services that he has given to the Department of Finance in his time as Department of Finance.

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As you may remember he was the governor of the BSP when I first came into office and he was due to retire middle of last year, but I think we all ganged up

on him and asked him to please continue as Department of Finance simply because we had to get the economy, we had to get our policies on to the right track and he has done a splendid job as Secretary. And during his watch when pandemic's lingering effects congealed with new crises which would have created a perfect storm had they not been defused.

Being one of our country's pillars of economic management, we shall continue to rely on your expertise and exuberance as a member now of the Monetary Board.

Maraming, maraming salamat from a grateful nation, Secretary Ben Diokno.
[applause]

The original plan actually was for us to --- I asked Secretary Ben Diokno if he would like to join the Maharlika Investment Fund and the management of that, and to also serve as a liaison between the private sector --- in that capacity in the Maharlika Fund as liaison between and the private sector and the fund.

But he begged off saying that the investment fund, sovereign fund is not what he feels is a specialty of his. So he will return to his purely financial duties now in the Monetary Board.

Once again, I cannot thank Secretary Ben Diokno enough for setting the economy on to the right path; he has guided, he has put the essentials into place, he has made the structural changes that we need. And therefore, these economic figures, the results that we are getting a lot of that can certainly be attributable to the work that he did as Department of Finance Secretary.

And what makes me happier is that this changing of the guards, in the government's most important outpost, is between Batangueños, scions of illustrious Filipinos, patriots and professionals like their grandfathers.

And I have saved the best for last. I would like to welcome back to Malacañang, the talented and elegant Vilma, who has --- you know why I say that she has returned to Malacañang? If you remember si Ate Vi ay siyang gumaganap kay Imee sa mga sine. Iyong una iyong "Iginuhit ng Langit — Iyong "Iginuhit ng Tadhana" and the next one was "Ipinagbuklod ng Langit". And I still remember the time that I really became friends with her was when they were shooting here in the Palace for the 1968, preparing for the elections of 1969. So, welcome back to the Palace.

It took me a longtime to get Secretary Ralph to say yes, but I was told it was still shorter than the time for Vilma to say yes to Ralph almost 40 years ago.
[laughter] Kaya, sinuswerte pa rin itong ating kaibigan na si Secretary Ralph.

My fellow Filipinos, these two gentlemen embody the values of competence, integrity and a deep sense of responsibility that we look for in our government leaders. Together, they will form part of a dynamic team committed to steering our economic policies towards inclusivity and progress.

We will work towards creating an environment that encourages investment, stimulates economic opportunities, and uplifts the lives of every Filipino citizen. I thus call upon everyone to support our new Secretaries as they assume these critical roles in the government.

Let us join hands and build a future where economic prosperity shared by all, where opportunities abound, and where the Philippines stands tall on the global stage.

Thank you very much and good afternoon.

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