

**JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE**

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**PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR.:**

media; ladies and gentlemen. Good evening.

To our friends in the

It is my distinct honor and pleasure to once again thank His Excellency President Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Head of State of the Republic of Singapore, for accepting my invitation to visit the Philippines. In this regard, I am pleased to inform all of you --- the results of our successful meeting with the President, that we just had in our bilateral meeting.

We had very open, frank and wide-ranging and I think it's safe to say that we literally went beyond the agenda that was laid out before us and covered so many subjects and I think had we not been signaled by our protocol officers, we could have gone on for a very long time.

But that is indicative of the state of Philippines-Singapore bilateral cooperation.

The State Visit was undertaken at a most opportune time, as this year marks the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our countries' diplomatic relations and comes upon the heels of several high-level visits, in which both sides have undertaken since the year has begun.

Our bilateral relations have come a long way and have undergone immense transformation since they were established over five decades ago. Our meeting today was an opportunity to reaffirm and review our bonds of friendship and see how we can build upon them further.

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The ties that bind us go beyond geography and are based on our strong people-to-people connection. This has given rise to the strong, multi-faceted relationship, which we enjoy today.

As we have discussed before, Singapore continues to be an essential trade and investment partner of the Philippines, with Singapore businesses venturing into a wide sector of industries in the Philippines ranging from the hospital industry to the renewable energy sector.

In this spirit, we have just witnessed the exchange of the Memorandum of Understanding for Collaboration on Carbon Credits Under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement between the Department of Environment and Natural Resources of the Philippines and the Ministry of Trade and Industry of the Republic of Singapore.

Hopefully, with this memorandum, we will be able to incentivize both industries and individuals to actively work to reduce their carbon footprint, while allowing the government to mobilize financial resources to boost fiscal space.

We also witnessed today the exchange of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Recruitment of Filipino Healthcare Workers. Our Ministries have worked hard on this MOU in order to ensure that a balance is achieved between the needs of the healthcare sector of both countries as well as the need for personal development and growth of our healthcare workers.

Through this MOU, we express our confidence in Singapore's legal and judicial system, which will ensure that the rights, welfare and well-being of our kababayan OFWs will be protected as they pursue their careers in Singapore.

In addition to the MOU stated above, another MOU on Health Cooperation is presently being negotiated by our Health Ministries so that when the contracts of our OFWs are nearing completion, they will be able to reintegrate into the Philippine economy with ease.

There will also be the planned signing of MOUs by Philippine local government units and their Singapore private sector partners, a collaboration of Philippine national government agency and the Singaporean private sector and a business-to-business agreement.

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Aside from bilateral issues, we also discussed regional issues of mutual interest. As geographical neighbors in Southeast Asia, the South China Sea / West Philippine Sea holds great importance to both our countries.

So, we look forward to the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to maintain and to promote peace, security, and stability in the region as well as our strong support for the peaceful resolution of any such disputes.

Furthermore, as fellow founding member states of ASEAN, the Philippines and Singapore have discussed and shared our concerns on developments in Myanmar, which had undoubtedly affected both Singaporeans and Filipinos alike. We have continued to speak on this in all the ASEAN fora and we have all come to the consensus that a peaceful solution, as prescribed under ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus, is more urgent now than ever before.

To this end, I thank President Tharman and his wife, Mrs. Jane Ittogi for taking the time to come to the Philippines and wish to express my heartfelt appreciation for this meaningful and timely visit.

Thank you very much. [applause]

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**PRESIDENT THARMAN SHANMUGARATNAM:** President Marcos Jr., ladies and gentlemen, members of the media. Good evening.

Let me say from my heart a big thank you to President Marcos Jr., for your warm hospitality, for the generosity with which you have given me your views in the course of our warm bilateral discussions and for the spirit which you conveyed. The spirit with which we should embark on the strengthening of the relationship between our two countries.

We are on a good track, and we have agreed all through the agreements that we were signing and exchanging today, as well as through some of the existing work that's going on between our two countries, including in defense cooperation. We've agreed that we should strengthen this relationship, broaden it and make it a forward-looking relationship.

My visit comes at a time when Singapore and the Philippines are commemorating our 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations. And it follows on President Marcos Jr.'s recent visit to Singapore just in May this year.

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We reaffirm the warm and long-standing relationship between Singapore and the Philippines. It's a relationship that brings mutual benefits. We are natural partners. We are natural partners and what we are doing together brings benefit for both of us for today as well as for tomorrow. And I'm heartened to see how far the relationship is progressing and each time we meet. In fact, since the last time President Marcos Jr. came to Singapore just a few months ago, we've already made significant progress on several fronts, including on the MOUs that we have just signed today.

They are basically testament also to the way Singapore looks at the Philippines. We see ourselves as a partner in Philippines' development in all aspects --- economic development, sustainability, inclusive growth. We see yourself as a partner for the long term. We would like to participate in Philippines' development, both through our companies investing in the Philippines. We'd like to share our experience where relevant and we would also like to learn from the Philippines on how you tackle a range of complex challenges, including on the environment.

We are very different countries, of course; vastly different in land and population size. I think you've got some superior talent in sports that we can also learn from; but we are different countries that can learn from each other. Essentially, though, we share the same aspirations. We also have the same aspirations. Our people want to see their lives improve. They'd like to be able to deal with the cost of living. They'd like good healthcare, good education and fulfilling lives. Wherever we go in the region, people want fulfilling lives and that's why we can work together through our governments, with each other, through our corporates, as well as through philanthropic agencies. I note that Temasek Foundation and one of our hospitals, Singapore's KK Women and Children's Hospital, are working well with Taguig City towards an MOU on assistance on maternal and child healthcare, for instance.

And as close neighbors, we've always supported each other, particularly in times of need. The Singapore Red Cross engaged in significant public fundraising when Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines a decade ago --- that's just one example. There are other examples, including the disaster relief work done by Humanity Matters, another Singapore based humanitarian organization that worked together with the municipal authorities, NGOs, and local communities in various provinces like Cagayan, Mindanao, Isabela and Batangas after various disasters in recent years.

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Another important area is the conservation of biodiversity. We didn't talk so much about this three decades ago. Now, President Marcos Jr. and I agree that it is central to cooperation between our countries.

Biodiversity is part of the natural wealth of the Philippines and the region. Preserving it is an important priority for us wherever we are. I happen to be the patron of Mandai Nature, which is a conservation arm of Singapore's Mandai Wildlife Group, and I recently visited a breeding program at the Mandai Wildlife for the Philippines' national bird, the Philippine eagle. Beautiful bird, but critically endangered. It's an example of what we need to do to collaborate together, in this instance, preserving a very important bird species. And we can work together to take advantage of resources and expertise on both sides to be able to keep that part of biodiversity and many other parts of biodiversity alive.

Singapore believes firmly in the Philippines' economic potential. Our companies are keen to invest in the Philippines. In fact, we are one of the top foreign investors in the Philippines in a range of industries. Transport and logistics, real estate and hospitality, telecommunications, utilities and now increasingly, the whole sphere of renewable energy.

So, I look forward to some of the companies meeting us later at the State Banquet that President Marcos Jr. is hosting. But there's a much larger group of companies besides those that are present today who are very keen to explore opportunities in the Philippines. And I understand too, that as far as infrastructure cooperation is concerned, Singapore-based Infrastructure Asia is working towards an MOU with the Cebu Provincial Government that would help address Cebu's infrastructural needs, particularly with regard to clean water supply that can serve many municipalities and waste-to-energy facilities.

We are also very keen to work on some other new areas of collaboration. President Marcos Jr. spoke about carbon credits collaboration. It's an extremely important initiative between our two countries, and we are looking forward to the conclusion; besides the MOU that has been signed today, we're looking forward to the conclusion of the legally binding Implementation Agreement aligned with Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. In fact, there are companies that are already lining up their projects to be able to take advantage of this Implementation Agreement on carbon credits.

One of them in practice, Keppel Corporation in Singapore and the Keppel Group, which together with GenZero is working with the Ayala Group, I believe in South Luzon, on a project that involves early retirement of coal plants that would earn transition credits. It's a good example of how we get

going, get creative, make use of different forms of finance in order to provide streams of finance that make it possible for conservation to take place, for the retirement of polluting industries. But at the same time, to generate growth and jobs; it has to go together.

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Another area that President Marcos Jr. and I discussed was the ASEAN Power Grid, a key regional initiative. The Lao PDR, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore Power Integration Project illustrates its feasibility --- the feasibility for cross-border electricity trade.

And the Philippines is working to establish the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines Power Integration Project. Once we link both those Power Integration Projects together, we would have established the foundations for an ASEAN Power Grid. Some more work to be done with subsea cables and so on. But it's a very important start getting these two Power Integration Projects off the ground, operational and being able to link them together. It will benefit all of ASEAN and will benefit each country individually by providing for more energy resilience and making economically viable the renewable energy projects that each of the ASEAN countries, like the Philippines, is able to embark on. Economic viability will require scale and the whole ASEAN market offers the scale that's needed through the ASEAN Power Grid.

We also discussed the Philippines' efforts to drive digital transformation in the public service. Both sides are in discussion on a program to strengthen digital leadership skills in the Philippines civil service. And President Marcos Jr. and I agreed that we should get this going later this year. We've set a deadline for our officials to meet. It's a project that is a priority for the Philippine civil service and we are very keen to play our role; in our case, we will be using the National University of Singapore as the training partners.

On people-to-people relations, President Marcos Jr. has just spoken about it; we really appreciate in Singapore the invaluable contributions of Filipinos working in Singapore in a range of professions, and especially the healthcare workers and frontline personnel who stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Singaporeans during our fight against Covid-19. Going forward, they are an invaluable part of our workforce. And I am glad that the MOU we signed together today will be able to expand that relationship.

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The liberalization of the Singapore-Philippines Air Services Agreement announced in May this year should spur greater tourism, but also greater trade and investment. Because that's a very important basis for business

people, including our SMEs, to take an interest in different parts of the Philippines and find it very convenient to flip between Singapore and the Philippines.

The recent Philippines and Singapore Friendship Week which we held in July is the latest step in our expanding partnership. In fact, Singapore was the first Asian country to partner the Philippines in this initiative involving many stakeholders in both countries.

So once again, thank you, President Marcos Jr., for your hospitality, your openness in the ideas which you are bringing to our relationship and which we are taking forward. I'm looking forward to the rest of my visit; I'm here for three days essentially and I'm looking forward to each component of the visit including what we are going to learn about healthcare, sustainability. I'm visiting some of your research institutions as well to look at new rice grains, (inaudible) rice species --- all important issues for the future, both for the Philippines as well as for Singapore. So, thank you very much.

And I should just conclude by noting as President Marcos Jr. has done, that the South China Sea is an extremely important issue. Singapore's position of course is well-known; we've consistently upheld the rights of all states to freedom of navigation and overflight and strongly supported the peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, or UNCLOS. That's fundamental. UNCLOS has to be the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas are carried out.

So, thank you once again, President Marcos Jr., and I look forward to our State Banquet later and to interacting with some of the business people but I'm also looking forward to the meetings I'm having over the next two days.

Thank you. [applause]

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**BAGONG PILIPINAS**

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