

KAPIHAN WITH THE MEDIA IN LAOS

Vientiane, Lao PDR

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MS. KATRINA DOMINGO: From ABS-CBN. Sir, you gave strongly worded statements throughout the conference. But the biggest criticism against ASEAN is that it's just a big talk shop. What did the leaders agree upon to make sure that your interventions would actually be translated into concrete actions that our countrymen can feel at sea?

PRESIDENT FERDINAND R. MARCOS JR.: Well, first of all, I don't agree that this is just a talk shop. But even if it were, I'd rather be talking than watching conflict.

So, if the talking is keeping conflict away, then ASEAN will have achieved at least one of its most important purposes. But I think what is important is that we are able to, once again, make our position very clear on different issues.

Of course, South China Sea was a big part of that. And we, once again, as I have always strived to do, made our position clear, the Philippines' position clear, on how we see our sovereignty, our territory, our sovereign rights, and how we are – must be allowed to exercise them.

So, again, it is important for the Philippines, for example, to be able to explain to Member States and the other leaders who have come to join us the situation as we face it. Because understandably they do not live with this – they do not live with this situation day to day. And it is important to make them aware that it is getting better, it's getting worse, it's about the same, we are finding ways, and to see, to show that and to... It is...

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It is always very useful because at some point, there are many offers of help. And they say if that is the problem, maybe we could do this, maybe we could — maybe our country can send vessels, maybe we can have joint operations,

maybe we can have discussions, maybe I can serve as an interlocutor. All of these offers, which would not come if we did not make our position clear and explained to them what the present situation is, how the situations have evolved.

I'm not talking only about South China here – South China Sea here. I'm talking about climate change, I'm talking about renewables, I'm talking about the development of gender equality, et cetera. All of these different— very important issues need to be discussed and need to be ventilated so that everyone knows what everyone else is doing, how everyone feels, and how we can bring it all together to make it a cohesive effort that will make true changes.

MS. DOMINGO: Sir, just a follow-up question. What were the concrete commitments given by ASEAN Nations for the Philippines to be able to carry out its duties and protect its rights and interests in the South China Sea?

PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: Well, they... As I said, these offers of joint exercises, of continued discussions on to how we can keep the South China Sea a peaceful and prosperous area of commerce, to maintain the peace, to maintain the freedom of navigation. So, these are things that perhaps might not be expressed in open session but are expressed on the sideline.

Much of the work actually that gets done here is in the sidelines where you talk to one leader or a group, a small group over a cup of coffee. I mean, it's not like we organize a meeting.

We just say, "maybe we can pull you over..." And they say, "maybe we can help here." Or why are you doing that? We don't think that's the best idea.

Whatever. But it's all helpful.

MS. DOMINGO: Sir, last. Which countries explicitly expressed interest in...

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PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: Ah no, no. You have to keep — these are private conversations. And I would not like to put them in a spot by talking about the specifics of what we had discussed. Only to say that they...

For the most part, our neighbors and all interested parties — which include the EU, certainly the United States — have all come to talk to us and say there is much that we can still do. And let's explore this or let's explore that.

MS. DOMINGO: At least half of ASEAN?

PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: Oh, more than half.

MS. DOMINGO: More than half. Thank you.

MR. IVAN MAYRINA: Sir, my question is about the home front. Ito ho ang unang biyahe ninyo that you did not designate the Vice President as the caretaker. How should we read into this, Mr. President?

PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: Oh, because she's not part of the administration anymore. She's still in government but she left the administration.

So, she's not part of the administration anymore. So, she's not — she's not part of the — really — the day-to-day running of what we are doing. So, it would be unfair to ask her to now — to impose that duty on her since she's — that's not part of her work now.

MR. MAYRINA: Should this not be construed as a complete falling out or maybe a sign of distrust on your part towards her?

PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: No. It's a very practical reason, actually. That's how I came to that conclusion. If you notice the membership of the executive committee are all part of — now they're all members of the Cabinet up to now. So, that would seem to be the obvious way to handle it.

MR. MAYRINA: Sir, ang sinabi po niya hindi raw kayo friends. How would you describe your relationship with the Vice President now?

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PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: That's a good question. I don't know anymore. I'm not quite sure I understand. I'm a little dismayed to hear that she doesn't

think that we are friends. I always thought that we were. But maybe I was deceived.

MS. ANNA FELICIA BAJO: Good afternoon, sir. Sir, can we just get your reaction on the allegation of Senator Bato Dela Rosa that Malacañang allegedly tapped a certain Mary Ann Maslog in an effort to link former President Duterte — ?

PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: Who's Mary Ann Maslog?

MS. BAJO: Allegedly, she was tapped by Malacañang to link PRRD — former PRRD, Senator Bong Go and Police Major General Caramat to POGO-related crimes?

PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: No, I don't know anything about that. I don't know who this person is.

MS. BAJO: Sir, in relation to POGO, sir, there's an information that Alice Guo is being implicated by the — is being implicated by a Chinese spy named She Zhijiang, who's currently detained in Thailand. What's your reaction to this, sir?

PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: Well, you know, as this process has been going on, more and more people are coming out of the woodwork to help us in our investigations. And this is just, I think, another one of those.

This is just a natural evolution of the hearings that are being conducted in the House. And I suppose the case buildup because cases will be filed — have been filed and will be filed against them.

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It's just the natural process. And we're... Of course, this helps the effort if people are willing to testify or are willing to provide information that will lead us to the truth. And that is what we are after.

MS. BAJO: Sir, ano na lang po 'yung recent efforts natin to address espionage, sir, sa Philippines?

PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: Well, maybe we shouldn't talk about what we are doing to address espionage. That would be sort of — that would be counterproductive.

REPORTER: Hi, Sir. China's actions in the South China Sea have been escalating but ASEAN Nations, say for Vietnam, have been deafeningly silent if not neutral for the matter. What novel strategies can ASEAN adopt in order to prevent further Chinese aggression on the South China Sea? What was the intention of raising maritime tensions at the ASEAN-China Summit and countries usually take it off in other forums like the EAS or the ARF?

PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: Well, we take every opportunity that we can, again, to make the Philippine position clear.

Our intent really is at this point, what we are doing is trying to manage the situation. You know, all of us who have been working on this problem for a while, have come to the conclusion — there is no silver bullet here that will solve the problems immediately. So, we have to just manage it so that there is no conflict, that we do not — it does not erupt into a hotter confrontation than it already is.

So, what we — in the Philippines' approach to maintaining and to protecting our sovereignty is to keep a presence. Basta't mayroon tayong barko doon, mayroon tayong mangingisda, mayroon tayong presence doon sa bawat lugar. Ngayon, kung mayroong mga mangyayari na ini-intimidate iyong ating mga fishermen o hinaharang iyong ating mga barko, iyong mga Coast Guard, we will just have to deal with it.

But, nonetheless, whatever happens, we will maintain that presence. Because it is important to show to the world and our people that we are in the business of protecting our sovereignty. We are in the business of maintaining our — of protecting our territorial imperatives. We are insisting on exercising our sovereign rights.

REPORTER: Sir, it was the Philippines that first proposed a creation of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. When we couldn't get that, the Philippines pushed for the adoption of a Declaration of Conduct of 2002 and,

you know, we're hosting the ASEAN in 2026. Will we push for the conclusion of the COC?

PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: Every single day we push for the conclusion of COC because then that will provide the basis that will... I'm sure that will come when the time... If and when we have that COC, then it will, it will lay down the rules for everyone to follow and it will stabilize the situation. That's why it is so important.

That's why I don't want to make it a small matter — that we push, we really push. In fact, in almost every one of my interventions here at this ASEAN Summit, we've mentioned that and say that the solution for now to this is — well, no, not for now — the solution in the end will be to have a COC.

And we are always pushing for it to — we're always pushing for... We have to accelerate the negotiations. We have to define our terms already as quickly as possible so we can talk about the issues. That's a very important part of our argument.

REPORTER: Sir, last question sorry, sir. So, with that in mind, how do you think the ASEAN should accelerate those talks? You've pushed it in your interventions, how do you think the other ASEAN Member countries could accelerate it?

PRESIDENT MARCOS JR.: I think the onus is now on China to accelerate those talks. ASEAN has been waiting for a long time.

All right. Okay. Maraming salamat. Thank you.

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BAGONG PILIPINAS