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PRESS BRIEFING OF MS. DAPHNE OSEÑA-PAEZ
WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY DANIEL R. ESPIRITU
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MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Magandang umaga, Malacañang Press Corps, and welcome sa ating pre-departure briefing ngayong Biyernes, October 4.

President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. is set to participate next week in the 44th and 45th Association of Southeast Asian Nations Summit and related Summits in Lao People’s Democratic Republic with the theme, “ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience.” This year’s summits underscore the importance of connectivity and resilience in facing challenges in the region.

President Marcos is expected to attend several meetings during the summit and will also meet with the Filipino community in Laos.

And to give us more details about the upcoming summit, we have with us today Department of Foreign Affairs – Office of ASEAN Affairs Assistant Secretary Daniel R. Espiritu. Good morning, Assistant Secretary Espiritu.

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Hi. Good morning, Daphne. It’s always a pleasure to be with you and, again, with the Malacañang Press Corps within the context of another round of ASEAN Summit. Yeah, good morning. Thank you.

Okay, as mentioned by Daphne, let me brief you on the President’s participation in the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits.

Now, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. will participate in the back-to-back 44th and 45th ASEAN and Related Summit in Vientiane, Lao People’s Democratic Republic on October 8 to 11, 2024. He will be joined there by the other leaders of the ASEAN member states, as well as the leaders or representatives of the ASEAN external partners.

Now this is at the invitation of the Prime Minister of the Lao PDR, Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone. And this year’s ASEAN Chair’s theme would be ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience.

The summit will serve as a platform for the leaders to exchange views on key regional and international issues beyond consensus on matters of common concern and provide policy directions for the ASEAN community for the years to come.

Okay, the President is expected to attend 16 leaders-led engagements on a span of three days, from October 9 to October 11. On the first day—well, before the first day of the summit, on the eve of the summit, there will be a Filipino community event at the Wanda Hotel in Vientiane. It’s in the late afternoon, at around 7:30 P.M. Of course, the Filipino community will be there and as of now, we were informed that at least 400 members of the community will attend the event.

Now, on the first day of the summit, right after the opening, the 44th ASEAN Summit will start with its plenary session. It will be followed by the 45th ASEAN Summit Retreat Session during which they will be discussing regional and international issues, usually geopolitical issues.

In the afternoon, there will be three interfaces with sectoral bodies of ASEAN. The first one will be with the ASEAN Interparliamentary Assembly; the second one will be with the representatives of business or the ASEAN Business Advisory Council; and the third one will be an interface with ASEAN youth.

Now, at the IPA or Interparliamentary Assembly interface, the President will be joined by the heads of government of ASEAN, and on the other side will be the representatives of the ASEAN Interparliamentary Assembly. Now, the Philippines in that meeting on the parliamentary side will be represented by Speaker Romualdez and Congresswoman Glona Labadlabad of Zamboanga.

At the interface of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council, the President will be joined by Acting Secretary of Trade Aldeguer-Roque. And on the other side, the Philippine business will be represented by Joey Conception, George Barcelon and Michael Tan. Now, this Business Advisory Council is actually a council composed of the members of the Chambers of Commerce of the ASEAN economies.

Now, at the leaders' interface with the representative of ASEAN youth, the President on one side will be joining the other heads of government of ASEAN, and he will be accompanied by Secretary Rex Gatchalian. The Philippine youth will be represented by Ymari Kristia Pascua and Dr. Alfredo Sablay.

Now, on the second day, October 10, first day, this will be the day of ASEAN Plus One Summits – that is the summit with the external partners of ASEAN. So, the first one, in the morning will be the 27th ASEAN-China Summit. It will be followed by the ASEAN-Republic of Korea Summit, then the ASEAN-Japan Summit, and then after that by the ASEAN Plus Three Summit which will be the meeting of the ASEAN heads of government with the heads of government of China, Japan and Korea altogether.

Now, in the afternoon, there will be an ASEAN-Australia Summit to be followed by an ASEAN-India Summit, and the last summit meeting in the afternoon will be the ASEAN-Canada Special Summit; now, this time focusing on enhancing connectivity and resilience in ASEAN.

But before the day ends, there's one more very important event – this is the signing by the foreign minister of Luxemburg of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in ASEAN. So, it will be the last country which will be acceding to the TAC. And just for us to remember, TAC is one of the principal agreements in ASEAN which promotes the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law.

Now before the day ends, the Lao PDR, the Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, will be hosting a gala dinner for the heads of states and other delegations of ASEAN.

Now, on the last day, on October 11, and that will be Friday, the last ASEAN Plus One Summit will be held and that will be the one between ASEAN and United States, to be followed by the East Asia Summit which is a meeting between the ASEAN member states, all ten ASEAN member states, together with Timor Leste as an observer, with eight external partners – most of them, the ones they met in the previous day.

Now, East Asia Summit is very important because it's the highest-level strategic dialogue in Southeast Asia. It will be followed by an ASEAN-UN Summit. And before the summit ends, before inter summit ends, there will be a second Asia Zero Emission Community Leaders' Meeting which will also be held in Vientiane. Now, strictly speaking, this is not an ASEAN event but it will be a sideline event.

If you remember, last December, we held the first Asia Zero Emission Community Leaders' Meeting in Tokyo, so this is the follow-up meeting to that conference. Now, the primary aim of this Community Leaders' Meeting would be the decarbonization of ASEAN economies as well as green economy.

Now, in these engagements, the Philippines will continue to uphold and promote Philippine interests in ASEAN. We will highlight our advocacies in connectivity and resilience especially in strengthening the digital economy, supporting MSMEs, the promotion of renewable energy development, and addressing the impacts of climate change among others.

Furthermore, the President will continue to defend the Philippine sovereignty and sovereign rights and jurisdiction in accordance with international law including the 1982 UNCLOS and the 2016 arbitral award.

The leaders are also expected to discuss various international issues that impact the region and beyond and this include the situation in Myanmar, Ukraine, the Korean Peninsula, Gaza and other geopolitical challenges affecting the Indo-Pacific Region.

To date, there are 82 outcome documents – a little less than what we had last year and a little less than what we had in Phnom Penh. There's so many of them so I will only mention the main ones: the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on the Development and Strategic Plans to Implement the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 which is the post 2025 ASEAN vision; then the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Promoting the ASEAN Outlook in the Indo-Pacific for a Future-ready ASEAN; the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Strengthening Regional Biosafety and Biosecurity; and, the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Enhanced Cooperation Against Illicit Drug Trafficking and Precursor Chemicals.

There're also possible bilateral meetings between the President and the other heads of state at the sidelines of the meetings. So far, the ones being confirmed are the ones with Canada, New Zealand, Vietnam and Japan.

The 44th and 45th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits will conclude on 11 October 2024 with the handover ceremony of the ASEAN chairmanship from the Lao PDR to Malaysia. And we also expect that at that handover, Malaysia will be unveiling its theme for next year.

So, I think I will stop at that point and open ourselves to questions.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you, Assistant Secretary Espiritu. Okay, let's start with Maricel Halili, TV5.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Hi, sir, magandang umaga po. Sir, do we expect all heads of state to be present during the ASEAN Summit particularly Chinese President Xi Jinping and Joe Biden?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay. So far, the information is that Blinken will represent Biden and then Xi Jinping will not be there instead there will be Li Qiang, the Prime Minister. So, but the others,

they indicated that they will be there. Of course, we can never conclusively say that they will be there until the zero hour. Thank you.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: And, sir, doon sa bilateral meeting, do we also have a pending arrangement with China to talk about the...?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: So far, there's nothing on the table. But we're not precluding that. Yeah, thank you.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Okay. But, do we expect the issue on West Philippine Sea to be discussed during the ASEAN Summit?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Of course, definitely. The President always champions that issue, yeah, in all of the summits from the very start.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: And, ano po iyong inaasahan natin na bibigyang-diin ni Presidente during the summit particularly on the South China Sea issue?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Yeah. Of course, the recent developments but I won't go into the details of that.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you. Pia Gutierrez, ABS-CBN.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Good morning, sir. Sir, can you explain bakit po sabay iyong 44th and 45th ASEAN Summit?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay. It has been the tradition of ASEAN to have two summits every year 'no but it doesn't have to be at the same time. Like last year, magkahiwalay – one in the middle of the year for Indonesia and the one at the end of the year. So, it's a prerogative actually to conjoin them at any point in time. Usually, near the end of the year. So, if you will remember even in Phnom Penh, pinag-isa lang – and it's always an option, yeah.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, do we also expect the conclusion of a code of conduct to be front and center during the discussions at the China-ASEAN Summit po?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Well, the desire to conclude that as soon as possible is always there. In fact, during the last summit and in the subsequent meetings, there has been this thrust to possibly conclude it in three years as a part of the initiative of Indonesia and the other members. But, of course, it's not conclusive either 'no. We've been working on the COC for the past 20 years, so let's see.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Racquel Bayan, Radyo Pilipinas.

RACQUEL BAYAN/RADYO PILIPINAS: Sir, good morning. How many Filipinos are there or living or working in Lao and what are their profile po?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Oh, many of them are working in professional capacities. Now, I don't have a breakdown right now but most of them are in professional capacities and also in the hospitality business. So, I think those are the most important sectors there yet.

RACQUEL BAYAN/RADYO PILIPINAS: Sir, is there any particular ASEAN document or ASEAN agenda that the Philippines is eyeing to be signed or approved next week?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Alam mo, kasi iyong mga agenda and the documents are consensual documents, so most of the documents are in cooperation with all of the nine other members of ASEAN. But, definitely, our interests are in all of those documents.

RACQUEL BAYAN/RADYO PILIPINAS: Sir, iyong binabanggit ninyo na lang po kanina na Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, can you expound on that?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay. It's one of the seminal agreements of ASEAN and one of the most important. Now, it was first signed in 1975 but the most important thing about that, medyo mahaba iyong ano, iyong document – but the most important thing about that is that it commits the parties to it to the peaceful settlement of disputes under international law.

So, you know, it was concluded in the middle of the cold war 'no. So, noong araw na iyon noong 1970's, in a sense that was part of the height of the cold war 'no. So, Vietnam war was still ongoing and, well, winding down but still ongoing and so iyong violent conflicts among nations and including in the revolutionary movements within countries were still raging noong time na iyon. So, it was very important that for ASEAN to cooperate with each other to make sure that even among themselves, whatever differences they may have will be settled through peaceful means. And in a sense, it succeeded because ever since then up to now as we all know, wala pang shooting war within ASEAN.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Harley Valbuena, DZME.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Hi, good morning, sir. Sir, the ASEAN leaders, are they expected to issue a joint stand or a statement on the conflict in Gaza, between Israel and Palestine given that a lot of ASEAN countries are affected by the subsequent events of this tension?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Yeah, definitely actually kasama iyan sa nini-negotiate ngayon but I won't give you the details kasi fluid pa eh, nini-negotiate pa iyong text. But it has always been there and even in the [unclear] of ASEAN kasama iyan sa Foreign Ministers Meeting and even on the Special Summits starting I think from the one in Riyadh last year iyong sa ASEAN GCC. So, pinag-uusapan na iyan. In fact, that's one of the most important topics in ASEAN. Yeah, thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Celerina Monte, NHK

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Hi, Celerina.

CELERINA MONTE/NHK: Good morning, sir. Regarding the bilateral talks between the President and the new Prime Minister of Japan, may we know the possible agenda?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay. Of course, this is their first meeting definitely the President will be congratulating him on his assumption as Prime Minister but they would be discussing other issues of mutual concern of course trade and investment cooperation and defense cooperation. I won't go into detail again because...well, but you're familiar with most of them. Thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: JP Soriano, GMA. Microphone, please. Thank you.

JP SORIANO/GMA: Hi, Asec.

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Hi, JP.

JP SORIANO/GMA: Hi, Daphne. Sir, overall ASEAN has never really strongly opposed the extensive harassment and aggression by the China Coast Guard in the West Philippine Sea despite consistently speaking out against the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. ASEAN has failed to show similar resistance towards China's actions. How will they upcoming ASEAN Summit differ from past meetings in terms of reaching out or reaching a unified decision to reject China's aggression?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay. First of all, in spite of that the ASEAN member states have always been committed to the peaceful settlement of disputes in the South China Sea especially within the ambit of UNCLOS. But the thing about it that I think we should not only look at ASEAN but also the external partners, it's also a platform for the external partners to express their support to us on the issue and most of our major external partners did so I think we have to look at it that. And it's still a fluid situation.

Many things are developing in the waters not only in the Philippines but also with the other claimant states so let's see. Yeah. Thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Pia Gutierrez, ABS-CBN.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, do we also expect the President to bring up the issue of human trafficking in Laos and other ASEAN states like Myanmar and Cambodia during the summit?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay. I want to go into details but it's part of that. Human trafficking is a common concern within ASEAN because it now impacts not only in the Philippines but on many of its members 'no. In fact, some of them dinadala din sa Philippines 'no – some people of other nationalities and it's happening in mainland Southeast Asia and may counterparts iyong POGO in other ASEAN member states and so we are actually actively cooperating on that. In fact, most of those documents which are centering on human trafficking are actually also centering on that. Thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. I think, last question.

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: In fact, right now we have an active cooperation including in the rescue of the victims of these scam schemes. Thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. Celerina Monte, again.

CELERINA MONTE/NHK: Sir, sorry just for the record. What are we going to push in the joint communiqué or joint statement specially on the South China Sea?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: As you very well know throughout all the summits and even the Foreign Ministers Meetings, we pushed for all issues within the inter gamut of political security, economic and sociocultural cooperation including sa climate action and biodiversity management.

So, again I won't go into details kasi ang dami talaga 'no. So, the document is always long, ang daming elements but we're pushing for everything from political, economic to sociocultural details.

But definitely if you're asking on the South China Sea which is your main focus of interest, nandoon iyon. It's...it could be...I won't go again into details, it's too fluid, nini-negotiate pa ngayon.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Thank you. Anne Soberano, Bombo Radyo.

ANNE SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Hi, sir. Good morning.

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Hi. Good morning.

ANNE SOBERANO/BOMBO RADYO: Sir, what can we expect during the meeting with business leaders with President Marcos in Laos? May mga foreign investors po ba ang nagpahayag na mag-invest dito sa Pilipinas?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Okay. One very important sideline event of the ASEAN Summit is the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit which will also be held almost all throughout the three days that the leaders will be there. And it will be organized by the ASEAN Business Advisory Council which I said a moment ago is composed of the Chambers of Commerce led by the Chambers of Commerce of the ASEAN member states.

Now, this will be an excellent opportunity to promote cooperation in ASEAN and for us to get markets for trade and also for investment in the Philippines.

Now, but aside from that, the President is also expected to meet with the TikTok regional director of Southeast Asia. He will be meeting with the TikTok creators and sellers. Again, they will meet also at [unclear]. Then, there's also a business meeting scheduled with Sierra Public Company and with Capital A. So, as for the details I leave that to DTI because they are the lead on this one but there are meetings like these.

And we don't know, fluid naman palagi ang situation sometimes opportunities arise kapag nandoon na sila but always may business angle iyong lahat ng ASEAN meetings because as we very well realized, there are three pillars in ASEAN and the second most important community pillar is the economic community pillar – so, it covers all areas of economic cooperation and they are concrete. The very participation of the Chambers of Commerce of ASEAN and representatives of business partners is a testament to their commitment to actual concrete deals. Thank you.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. We close with Harley Valbuena, DZME.

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Hi, Harley, again.

HARLEY VALBUENA/DZME: Sir, a documentary video was recently floated wherein Alice Guo was implicated as a Chinese spy. So, is it possible that we can raise the espionage issue with China in the ASEAN Summit?

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: I cannot comment on that. Medyo labas sa ano ko iyon jurisdiction.

MS. OSEÑA-PAEZ: Okay. On that note I think this ends our predeparture briefing with the DFA. Thank you again, Assistant Secretary Espiritu. And thank you, Malacañang Press Corps.

DFA ASEC. ESPIRITU: Thank you so much, Daphne. Thank you, everybody.

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