

Presidential Communications Operations Office

News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING OF PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON

SECRETARY HARRY ROQUE

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SWEEDEN VELADO/PTV4: Good morning, Malacañang Press Corps. Welcome to the Palace Press Briefing of Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque. Good morning, sir.

SEC. ROQUE: Hi, good morning.

Let me begin by clarifying that as of yesterday, the Executive Secretary was asked whether or not Rappler can cover Malacañang. The answer given by the Executive Secretary is ‘yes, because they have a pending appeal.’ But after the Court of Appeals decides, and if the decision of the SEC is sustained, Rappler would have to transfer to FOCAP. But for now the decision is while pending appeal, Rappler can cover Malacañang. But you will understand that if the order is sustained, we do not allow FOCAP actually into the Malacañang Press Corps.

Good news – 2017 Philippine tourism arrivals - Indeed, it’s more fun in the Philippines. The number of international tourist arrivals for 2017 has reached an all-time high at 6,620,908 or an 11% growth from 2016’s arrival of 5,967,005. The 6.6 million tourism milestone is a parlayed growth in the country’s tourism industry. We expect this to further improve with the Department of Tourism’s agenda to promote new and underrated destinations through an expanded marketing plan, better human resource capacity and service standards.

Another good news – The Department of Agrarian Reform distributed CLOAs to 113 farmers from the Province of Tarlac ‘no - Now these farmers have received their certificate of land ownership. Among the recipients are: farmer-beneficiaries from the municipalities of Anao, Moncada, San Manuel, Victoria, San Jose, Tarlac City, Capas and Concepcion. Under the continuing Agrarian Reform Program of the Duterte administration, immediate implementation of the Department’s mandate to acquire and distribute lands is prioritized. Proper implementation of post distribution services is also ensured for the continued support and assistance to farmer-beneficiaries.

Last piece of good news for the day – Consumer Outlook of the Philippines under the leadership of President Duterte remains upbeat, and this is according to the most recent report of BMI Research, the research unit of the Fitch Group Company. The sustained positive outlook is driven by our strong economic performance and rapidly rising income brought by record-breaking remittances from OFWs among others. Data from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas show, overseas Filipino remittances for 2017 posting an all-time high of 28.1 billion dollars, rising by 4.3% over the 26.9 US billion dollars registered in 2016.

The Duterte administration will continue its efforts to sustain the country's growth and consumer confidence through its Build, Build, Build program which will boost infrastructure investment and generate more jobs for all Filipinos.

The BSP's Consumer Expectation Survey for Q4, 2017, 4th Quarter, on the other hand revealed consumer sustained optimism for the 1st Quarter of 2018 as confidence index showed only a slight decline to 17.5% from 17.8% in the 4th Quarter survey. In the 4th Quarter survey of 2017, the overall consumer confidence decreased slight—well, the overall CI decreased slightly to 9.5% from 10.2% in the 3rd Quarter, which means that optimists continued to outnumber the pessimists, but the margin for the 4th Quarter was slightly lower relative to that of the 3rd Quarter.

Okay, questions...

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: Sir, the decision by the OES that we can cover Malacañang, how does this affect the order earlier barring me from covering Malacañang events?

SEC. ROQUE: I do not know about the order barring you. I have to clarify that... the Executive Secretary just issued a verbal statement, that pending appeal, you will be able to cover here in Malacañang. And having said that, the worst case scenario even if you're barred, is you can cover the press briefings because we're televised live.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: So, I can cover the press briefings but not any events in Malacañang Palace. What's the basis for this order?

SEC. ROQUE: As far as I know, and don't get this wrong again... you are still allowed until the appeal is resolved by the Court of Appeals.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: But earlier sir—

SEC. ROQUE: If it is sustained, then you will have to move to FOCAP, which is the media group for foreign correspondents. Because the decision of the SEC is that, you are foreign control. But while the appeal is pending, you're welcome to cover Malacañang – unless of course, there's disorderly behavior.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: So sir—because I was just told earlier before entering NEB, that I can only cover NEB events, but not Malacañang events. Meaning, I can't cover the President's speeches...

SEC. ROQUE: Ah, I see... I do not know about that. But all I know is that, when the Executive Secretary was asked, we will continue to allow you to cover in the Malacañang Press Corps, pending your appeal.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: Does that mean that that order from the PSG no longer stands?

SEC. ROQUE: I do not know, because I'm telling you – that's what Executive Secretary said yesterday. So just inform them, that you have appending appeal and you're not yet a member of the FOCAP.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: Will the OES inform the PSG of this?

SEC. ROQUE: I do not know. Maybe you should make representations... for the OES to inform the PSG.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: But it's an OES order that I can't cover. So, wouldn't they want to enforce that decision?

SEC. ROQUE: I don't think so... I do not think so. The Executive Secretary yesterday clarified that pending appeal, you can cover.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: May we just know more about this order to the PSG? Who issued it?

SEC. ROQUE: I suggest you ask for yourself. Because I—

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: We did sir, and they did not want to respond.

SEC. ROQUE: I went downstairs to pick you up in case there's a misunderstanding that I will not allow you to cover my press briefing. I went downstairs to pick you up, to assure you that for now you can cover my press briefings. But that's the extent of what I can do as Spokesperson. At least, I can influence who will cover my press briefings and you're still welcome to cover my press briefings.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: Sir, can you find out sir who ordered the PSG?

SEC. ROQUE: I do not know. I think that's asking too much already 'no. I was willing to pick you up downstairs to bring you here in case you were not allowed. I will probably pick you up from the gate in time from press coverage—I mean, press briefings if you are barred. But that's the full extent of what I can do, because I'm only... I'm able to control this press briefing.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: What do you think this PSG order says about Malacañang's commitment to press freedom?

SEC. ROQUE: There's no denial of press freedom. We're televised.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: I'm just being barred from covering Malacañang events?

SEC. ROQUE: No, you're not being barred because—

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: On no basis...

SEC. ROQUE: —you're... number one, you're here asking questions.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: But I cannot enter Malacañang to cover the President's events later.

SEC. ROQUE: Well, I do not know about that. That's absolute Presidential Security Guard—or Security Group discretion. But I do not know if there is such an order.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: Am I a security threat?

SEC. ROQUE: I do not know... What I'm telling you is, I do not know about the orders that PSG may have given, because I'm not connected with PSG. All I am confirming is you're welcome to cover my press briefings.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: Would it be the policy of Malacañang to bar reporters who publish unsavory reports from Malacañang?

SEC. ROQUE: No. No, I don't think the issue is unsavory reporting. The issue is fake news, and pending legislation on who will be penalized for fake news. Please understand that you're dealing with institutions that want also to promote the truth.

PIA RANADA/RAPPLER: Sir the Senate hearing just confirmed all of our documents, the authenticity of our documents and yet Malacañang calls it fake news. And Bong Go himself, said in his opening statement that his office endorsed the complaint to DND, and yet you call it fake news. May we know if it's the policy of this administration to call every single report it finds negative, despite vetted documents as fake news?

SEC. ROQUE: Well I—we still maintain its fake news. Because witnesses already clarified under oath that Bong Go did not intervene at any time – and that what was your conclusion in this press briefing.

PIA/RAPPLER: But sir, they also confirmed the authenticity of the documents, which showed his involvement.

SEC. ROQUE: There is no involvement there.

PIA/RAPPLER: His office... is implicated.

SEC. ROQUE: I am not here to argue, but I'm here to give you the Palace position. You can argue all you want, but the documents proved that there was a complaint, it was referred for attention by the PMS and that's the full extent of what you claimed to be intervention.

Your question to me was: What do you do about the policy of a Secretary intervening in favor of a contract?

PIA/RAPPLER: Yes, sir, because it was—

SEC. ROQUE: That was it. Your intervention contemplates favoring one company over another. But it was very clear in the Palace hearing that there was a complaint, it was referred to the line agency because that is what we do, that's not intervention to favor a company.

PIA/RAPPLER: So, sir, back to my question. Would it be the policy of Malacañang—

SEC. ROQUE: Your question is—You make conclusions without facts.

I'm sorry. You are resorting to editorializing stories when in the first place you should be sticking it out to facts.

What did former FOIC Mercado said, 'at no point did SAP Go intervene in the contract' and yet you are still insisting that there was intervention on the basis of documents. The document did not emanate from Bong Go, even the note says, it did not emanate from Bong Go.

PIA/RAPPLER: But sir, the documents confirmed that his officer arranged the meeting?

SEC. ROQUE: The document confirmed that they acted upon a complaint. Do you want—with a minute, do you really want government to ignore official communication sent to it? Yes or no? My time to ask the questions. Did you want government to ignore that document?

PIA/RAPPLER: We are only trying to report the facts of the intervention.

SEC. ROQUE: Yeah, but the thing is, you already editorializing, you are already making the judgment that we were—or at least that SAP Go was intervening in behalf of a company. It was clear from the testimony, there was this communication which had to be referred and you already called that intervention.

You know, your story failed when the most interested party in this controversy former FOIC Mercado belied your claim of intervention. That is why Malacañang said fake news. And we leave it to the people to judge who was telling the truth.

Let's leave that point already, because I can argue until kingdom come and we would still have the same conclusion - fake news from Rappler.

ROSE NOVENARIO/HATAW: Sir, good morning, sir. Sir, sa speech po kagabi ni Presidente, kinonfirm po niya na iyong paghahangad po ng Norwegian Ambassador na ituloy po iyong peace talks at sabi po ng Presidente eh kokonsultalhin muna niya iyong military.

Sir, sa nangyari pong pag-a-ambush ng NPA sa Antipolo City sa Special Action Force troopers, sa palagay po ba ninyo, o may pag-asa po ba kayang mabuhay muli iyong peace talks?

SEC. ROQUE: Ngayon po malabo. Ayan na naman nga po eh, habang sila ay nagsasabi na nais nilang ipagpatuloy ang usaping kapayapaan, eh patuloy po ang paggamit nila ng dahas.

So sa akin po bagama't ninanais natin ang kapayapaan, wala po atang katuturan na makipag-usap ng kapayapaan kung sila po talaga ay hindi interested sa tunay na kapayapaan.

ROSE/HATAW: Follow up, sir. Sir, halimbawa kung ano, iba po iyong panukala po ng military, halimbawa lang po, mananatili po kaya iyong ganyang paninindigan ninyo. Halimbawa po irekomenda rin ng military na bigyan po ng another chance iyong peace talks?

SEC. ROQUE: Ang Presidente po nakikinig naman sa militar. So kung magre-recommend po ang militar na ituloy, tingin ko naman ay pakikikingan din iyan ng ating Presidente. Pero wala pong ganiyang rekomendasyon sa ngayon po.

ROSE/HATAW: Sa ngayon po, okay.

SEC. ROQUE: Sa ngayon po.

LIELA SALAVERRIA/PDI: Sir for the record, what are the grounds that Malacañang can cite to bar an accredited reporter from covering the events of the President?

SEC. ROQUE: Let me be very clear 'no. Number one, the accreditation is not a license to practice your profession, everyone can report on what is going on in Malacañang and that is why we televise our press briefings.

In fact, my trend has been once a week, I go out of town for my press briefings because I believe that the rest of the country should be able to participate in these briefings and Malacañang reporters are allowed to send in their questions.

There is absolutely no impingement of press freedom when I go out of town and Malacañang Press can still send in their questions.

FOCAP is able to exercise freedom of the press, but they are not allowed to cover, because we don't allow foreigners, as a matter of course access on a regular—well at least, the foreign reporters 'no access... unimpeded access to the Palace.

So the accreditation really is for security purposes 'no. But no one is prevented from covering. You can cover, except that we are in the most secure premises in this country called Malacañang Palace and for good reasons.

So admission to it, is really not a matter of right. If need be, we will conduct our press briefings elsewhere if there are reasons for this, or need be, we will do it on remote basis. But we will never prevent any media organization from practicing their profession.

And that is our firm commitment. We will never curtail the exercise of freedom of the press except that, you have to understand, access to Palace is not part of freedom of the press. You can report through other means if need be, under extreme circumstances.

LIELA/PDI: Sir, my question is, iyong grounds for barring any reporter from covering... security lang iyong...?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi lang iyon. Because as a matter of course, we don't allow FOCAP to cover. We don't allow FOCAP into the Palace and to cover these press briefings. Hindi sila allowed na mag-cover, they don't have ready access to the Palace, they don't have accreditation.

Q: Per event basis, meron.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, oo. Per event basis, yes, when they are specifically invited. But they are not part of the Malacañang Press Corps.

Q: Sir, si Bombo?

SEC. ROQUE: Bombo is not MOPC.

JOSEPH/GMA7: Yeah, but she is not on the President.

SEC. ROQUE: Akala ko Bombo Radyo. [laughs] Hindi ba you are the one saying nga that the MOPC should not be allowed in, that's what I understand when I first came in, that's one of the things that MOPC—that Malacañang Press Corps insisted exclusivity in coverage.

Hindi ba kaya nga nabuwisit din kayo sa mga bloggers, minsan dahil inuunahan kayo. O di I had a meeting with the MPC officials at the beginning of my term.

LIELA/PDI: Sir, sorry ulit, ulitin ko lang. So security and what, sir, iyong reasons for?

SEC. ROQUE: Security and the fact that supposedly there is exclusive coverage only for members of the Malacañang Press Corps here; and that's something that you have been insisting.

LIELA/PDI: I don't know about that. Pero sir, so para lang malinaw, in case, just in case, anyone of us are barred from covering, iyon lang iyong—those are the only reasons we can expect to be given to us?

SEC. ROQUE: Plus the fact that iyon na nga 'no, foreign correspondents as a matter of course are not allowed to be part of the Malacañang Press Corps and not allowed to cover in the same manner that members of the Malacañang Press Corps are allowed.

LIELA/PDI: Sir, if an official dislikes you or doesn't want to see your face, hindi valid reason iyon?

SEC. ROQUE: Not valid reason. But in the case of Rappler, there was a decision that they are controlled by foreigners and that is why if the decision is upheld, they have to move to FOCAP.

They have the option, they can go FOCAP or they can get accreditation as bloggers. But for now, they stay because the appeal is pending.

LIELA/PDI: Sir, we just wanted to be clear on the ground—

SEC. ROQUE: Yes. It is not a ground because someone dislikes you, no! Rappler's case is different, there's an actual SEC decision saying that they are controlled by foreigners, di ba? So they are willing—I mean, we are able and willing to work with them as members of FOCAP if the decision is sustained by the Court of Appeals.

Do we allow FOCAP to attend Malacañang Press Corps?

REYMUND TINAZA/BOMBO RADYO: As far as the rules and the engagement, sir, sa press briefing, they are allowed to cover. But usually, they do not come here unless there is an interest for them. For example, the DFA and foreign visitors who are here at the press briefing; and inside, on a case to case or event-based coverage. So they would ask the MARO to be accredited for that specific event.

SEC. ROQUE: So if the decision of the SEC is upheld, that Rappler is controlled by foreigners, then they can cover as members of FOCAP. Whatever FOCAP can cover, Rappler can cover.

Again, a second alternative is for them to seek accreditation from Mocha Uson, but I don't think they would want that.

Q: [OFF MIC]

SEC. ROQUE: But those are the facts, and it's not because they are disliked. It's because the SEC said they are controlled by foreigners.

Q: Hi, sir. Good morning po uli. Sir, papaano po natin ire-reconcile iyong paninindigan ng Pangulo na sa atin iyong Philippine Rise, at the same time, may biro po siya na parang puwedeng maging probinsiya ng China iyong Pilipinas?

SEC. ROQUE: Ay, malinaw na malinaw naman po, hindi lang Benham Rise ang sinabi niyang atin. Sinabi niya pati ang West Philippine Sea na iyan ay atin iyan.

So iyong biro niya is, you know, it's just to emphasize na it's ours but we're one with China. Take it in that spirit. But he was very firm that we have title over the disputed area in West Philippine Sea, and we have rights in Benham – exclusive rights in Philippine Rise.

Let's not call it Benham, magagalit ang Presidente. Tinapon na niya iyong pangalan na binigay ng mga Amerikano.

Q: Sir, ano ba iyong binabanggit niya kagabi na for show lang?

SEC. ROQUE: Ang interpretasyon ko doon, dahil pareho naman tayong nandoon, is pakitang gilang lang naman iyon. You know, we are appealing to domestic constituents 'no. So siyempre ngayon, pinapakita talaga natin na walang dispute dito, hayaan ninyo na muna ang Philippine Rise para sa Pilipino.

Ganoon din ang ginagawa ng mga Tsino paminsan-minsan na pinahahatid ang mensahe dahil diyan sa mga disputed areas na sa kanila daw diumano iyon ‘no. Pero it’s really pakitang gilas. Pero the Philippine President was very clear: We will not give away even a single inch of territory.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, what is not being said is that when they do transfer to FOCAP, that means that Malacañang is going to revoke Rappler’s accreditation as a member of the MPC once it becomes final.

SEC. ROQUE: Because we have no choice. The SEC has ruled, they are controlled by foreigners. If upheld by the CA, it becomes final. So we cannot treat Rappler as a domestic mass media corporation because to do so would be to violate the Constitution. So as a foreign-controlled entity, they can certainly report under FOCAP. So we’re not even curtailing their freedom of the press because FOCAP, foreigners can report from the Filipino.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Sir, the President last night parang downplayed the Chinese naming of undersea features in the Philippine Rise. What does this mean for our objection to the Chinese names given to...?

SEC. ROQUE: We would still object to it. But as I said, the naming is independent from either claiming title or claiming rights on a certain area. It’s just a established procedure in a scientific body that gives preference, naming rights to countries that have discovered features. But even that, we have said, we will resort to giving them Philippine names in the same way that we have done away with the name given by the Americans to the area which is Benham Rise. It’s now known as Philippine Rise.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Sir, before we made the objection—does our objection have the President’s approval?

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, of course.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Kasi based on his statement last night parang sinasabi niya, of course they give Chinese names, alangan namang German.

SEC. ROQUE: Yeah, but I’ve said the same thing. I assure you, everything I say here is reflective of the President’s position. And we do so because we do a lot of work to make sure we’re in sync with the President’s position.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Sir, isa pa. Sinabi din po ni President that the military bases of China won’t used against us but against the US. Does this mean we will no longer protest their militarization of ...

SEC. ROQUE: We have protested, that’s what I have emphasized before. Shenanigans have claimed we have not protested. We have. And I’d like to underscore the fact then that when the President came into power, they already reclaimed and they were really going to be used for military purposes already. Stop looking at us, please.

We're trying to make do with the best options that we have. And right now, it's to acknowledge the fact that under the past administration, these islands were reclaimed and intended to be used for whatever purpose they are being used now; and yet, we have to move on. And the way forward, as the President has repeatedly said, is to prevent China from making further reclamations because they could very well do it if they wanted to.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Sir, but if there will be continued militarization activities in islands that China holds ...

SEC. ROQUE: The militarization may be between the United States and China. But because we have adopted an independent foreign policy, I suppose that will also be policy of neutrality, they can go to war, we will not be dragged into a war between them if need be. We will protect the national interest by being consistent with our obligation under the UN Charter. We will not resort to the use of force. We will not allow our territory to be used in a matter inconsistent with international law.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: But will we protest if they continue militarization?

SEC. ROQUE: We have protested.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Yes, sir. But if they continue, after we protested and they continue, will we protest again?

SEC. ROQUE: The thing is, I do not know if we have to protest on a daily basis, as I have said. But we have protested what we perceive as militarization. Constituting a threat to peace and security in the region, that has been protested.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/INQUIRER: Sir, when daw iyong protest and what has that protest—

SEC. ROQUE: You know, I should really give you the copies of the protest. The DFA just requested for the bilateral talks to conclude. Now that it's been concluded, I will request again. And remind me, please, Leila, text me so I can give you the specific instances when we protested. Okay?

Anyway, if they don't give it, file it under FOI.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, yesterday, si Presidente said – well, in jest – na China, okay lang naman na i-declare tayo na province.

SEC. ROQUE: Tinanong na kanina iyan.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Yeah, pero kapag may mga ganoon si Presidente, sir—

SEC. ROQUE: That's in jest because he started with a very serious tone, that we have title over West Philippine Sea and we have rights over Philippine Rise.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: But shouldn't he be more... a little more careful with pronouncements like that?

SEC. ROQUE: You know, the President is the President. And when he was serious at the beginning of the speech and when he was very clear, I think he can jest in a later part of the speech.

DEXTER GANIBE/DZMM: Sir, good morning. May binanggit si Pangulong Duterte noong pinag-uusapan iyong militarization sa South China Sea or sa West Philippine Sea. Basahin ko lang iyong transcript ng kaniyang speech, sabi niya, "Let us be clear on this: We are on good terms with America, special terms, military alliance that's why we cannot enter into another military alliance with other country."

And then sa mga sumunod na paragraph, sinabi niya, "Philippines is now veering towards China, but we maintain good relations. We have RP-US pact defense deal, we will honor it. And we will honor it, and I don't know when." Sabi niya, "But if we go to war, everything wilts, lalaya tayo. Lalaya ito lahat."

Ano bang pinapahiwatig niya, sir? Iyong RP-US military deal, lalayo tayo doon? Kasi may mga binabanggit na siya na parang—

SEC. ROQUE: I think the context is, we're in good terms with both the United States and China. So it is not to our national interest to go to war, which is what some people want 'no to assert what they perceived to be... our weak position on China, they want to assert our national sovereignty I guess through military means 'no.

But the President is saying, 'We don't have to do that. We are in good terms with the Americans. We're on excellent terms with the Chinese. If there's conflict between them, so be it. But we will not take part in it.

DEXTER GANIBE/DZMM: Oo pero parang binabanggit niya iyong ating military alliance doon sa US ang siyang—

SEC. ROQUE: Of course—

DEXTER/DZMM: Parang nakatali tayo doon para hindi tayo makapag—

SEC. ROQUE: The President has not taken steps to withdraw from existing military alliances with the United States and I can think of two, the Mutual Defense Pact, the Visiting Forces Agreement and the third one, the—what is the third one? The one that I also sued against it but it's still there, the—the third one is the MDF? No, no, no, that is Mutual Defense Treaty and the second one is the VFA. And the third one is the—

DEXTER/DZMM: EDCA?

SEC. ROQUE: And EDCA ‘no. And the EDCA according to the Supreme Court and the VFA anyway are based on the MDT – the Mutual Defense Treaty. But the Mutual Defense Treaty is, they are obligated to come to our assistance when we we’re attack by a foreign power—

DEXTER/DZMM: So parang hindi ba sa—

SEC. ROQUE: In... on the area or in the Pacific.

DEXTER/DZMM: Hindi ba niya pinapahiwatig sir na parang gustong kumalas doon sa mga treaties?

SEC. ROQUE: ‘Di ba he reiterated that we’re not withdrawing from any of this defense treaties with the United States. So the United States has no reason to be concerned that we will be in default of our treaty obligations. He has reiterated, we remain committed to these treaty obligations. At same time, as a matter of foreign policy, where in excellent friendly relations with China which has resulted in tangible results including terms of military assistance at the time when we needed the assistance.

DEXTER/DZMM: Thank you.

Q: Sir may pinatanong lang po, regarding po doon sa nais ipasarang mga island ni President. Kabilang daw po ba dito iyong sa Panglao?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi ko pa po naririnig iyan. Ang narinig ko lang is Boracay. Pero ang sinasabi nga niya iyong karanasan ng Boracay ay magsilbing mensahe rin sa ibang mga lokal na pamahalaan sa ibang mga isla na pangalagaan nila po ang kalikasan dito sa mga islang ito.

Q: Thank you sir.

BERNADETTE NICOLAS/BUSINESS MIRROR: Sir, Bernadette po from Business Mirror. Sir the President said last night and I quote, ‘And if you look at it very closely, it would appear that there’s really a divide, the great divide now ideological but we are all in the capitalists states where the war now is on trade not territory. That’s why I said, geopolitics is always changing.’ So by mentioning that war is now on trade, not territory, is the President saying that Philippines is no more concerned with trade?

SEC. ROQUE: The Philippines, the emphasis of the entire community of nations now is towards trade. So—that’s exactly what the President said. So I don’t know what’s the question is. [laughs]

BERNADETTE/BUSINESS MIRROR: Is the Philippines now more concerned with trade and not on territorial dispute?

SEC. ROQUE: We are—the whole nation not just the Philippines is concerned about uplifting the economic well being of its people through trade and investments. Of course territorial issues are still important. Of course, we will defend our territory; but in the formulation of foreign

policy, we always put as a corner stone the fact that we need to improve the economic life of our people rather than waging war over territories.

BERNADETTE/BUSINESS MIRROR: Sir another question po. On the appointment of—on the replacement of NEDA Directors. I wanna know what are the reasons behind it po, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: I have no idea, I'm sorry.

BERNADETTE/BUSINESS MIRROR: Okay.

SEC. ROQUE: But I did notice that there were quite a number of NEDA appointments announced today by my office.

BERNADETTE/BUSINESS MIRROR: And the promotion of Besmonte as the DTI Usec., replacing Theodoro Pasco and the appointment of DTI Asec., Pacheco. You don't know the reason behind it sir?

SEC. ROQUE: It's a presidential prerogative.

BERNADETTE/BUSINESS MIRROR: Okay, thank you sir.

REYMUND TINAZA/BOMBO RADYO: Hi sir. Sir, can you confirm the reported confirmation of Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister that the President already accepted the invitation or the Kuwaiti Emir already—or the President already accept that invitation of the Emir of Kuwait?

SEC. ROQUE: I have no information that the President has accepted the invitation. I know there's an invitation extended but I know ministerial talks are ongoing, ministerial talks have to do with bilateral agreement safeguarding the plight of our overseas workers in Kuwait.

But I do not have information if the invitation has been accepted and this is as of yesterday around 5:30 P.M., when I had a conversation with both Secretary Alan Cayetano and Secretary—the Secretary of Labor.

REYMUND TINAZA/BOMBO RADYO: So the conditions laid down by SFA Cayetano that the President will only go to Kuwait—

SEC. ROQUE: No, that's really a condition.

REYMUND/BOMBO RADYO: And that's—

SEC. ROQUE: Okay. The language used was they prefer that if there's a visit, there would be already a bilateral agreement in place. But that's not made into a condition. It's a preference.

REYMUND/BOMBO RADYO: Thank you sir.

VIVIENE GULLA/ABS-CBN: Secretary, the President yesterday said that the ban on the deployment to Kuwait continues and it will extend to other countries. What countries are you referring to?

SEC. ROQUE: Well he was referring to countries that would treat Filipinos without due regard to their humanity. But there's no specific country in mind yet.

VIVIENE GULLA/ABS-CBN: Sir, does the Palace support—or what does the Palace think of the suggestion from the Senate hearing yesterday that the government just shell out more money in order to buy the preferred supplier of the Navy, something which Lorenzana and Mercado support?

SEC. ROQUE: I know that Secretary Diokno has expressed the view that it cannot be done. No. It cannot be done. It's not so much na walang pera but it's the fact that there was a bidding conducted and there was a budget given and that if you were to increase the budget, you're in fact changing the nature of the contract and violating really the conditions of the bidding.

VIVIENE GULLA/ABS-CBN: So Malacañang position—

SEC. ROQUE: But of course anything, if approved by the President I understand it can be done; but Secretary Diokno has said that this is not pursuant to government rules and regulations on public bidding.

JOSEPH MORONG/GMA7: Sir, reaction lang iyong Senate has junked the ethics complaint against Senator De Lima?

SEC. ROQUE: I think it's because of lack of jurisdiction. The acts attributed were acts committed before her assumption of—into the office of a Senator of the Republic. She allegedly prevented Dayan from—it was lack of jurisdiction.

I only read those reports about it, I haven't read the decision of the Senate but it said it lack jurisdiction and I know that acts attributed must be acts committed when already in office as a Senator.

And so it's without prejudice too, according to the Senate, it was also without prejudice.

ACER PAROSHA/PNA: Sir, the President's ConCom convened its first session yesterday at the PICC. There were at least 19 members present. CJ Puno and SP Pimentel say that the vacant slot should be filled immediately. They want more representatives from the women sector and indigenous peoples, they also want to invite ordinary people and oppositors to join the meetings. Can we have your reaction sir?

SEC. ROQUE: What's the question?

ACER PAROSHA/PNA: That the vacant slot should be filled immediately because there are only 19 and—

SEC. ROQUE: Of course we would want it filled also as soon as possible because they have limited mandate. The recommendation was heard, but as I said appointment is the prerogative of the President.

ACER PAROSHA/PNA: Do you also agree sir that they should invite ordinary Filipino citizens?

SEC. ROQUE: Of course, that's part of their mandate.

ACER PAROSHA/PNA: And oppositors...

SEC. ROQUE: Of course they should be holding public hearings on proposed revisions to the Constitutions. I think they would do that as a matter of course.

ACER PAROSHA/PNA: Thank you sir.

SWEEDEN VELADO/PTV4: Alright, thank you very much Malacañang Press Corps. Thank you, Secretary Harry Roque.

SEC. ROQUE: See you. I will have press briefing in Iloilo and you're welcome to text your questions.

JOSEPH/GMA7: [Off mic]

SEC. ROQUE: Well hindi muna, nagagalit po iyan—anyway see you on Thursday on Iloilo.

SWEEDEN VELADO/PTV4: Thank you sir. Thank you, back to the main studio of PTV4 and Radyo Pilipinas.

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