

Presidential Communications Office

Presidential News Desk

PRE-DEPARTURE BRIEFING ON PRESIDENT RODRIGO ROA DUTERTE'S ATTENDANCE TO THE 32ND ASEAN SUMMIT IN SINGAPORE BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY MA. HELLEN DE LA VEGA, OFFICE OF ASEAN AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

[Malacañang Press Briefing Room | 20 April 2018]

OPENING STATEMENT:

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Good morning, friends from media. I'm here to brief you on our preparations for the 32nd ASEAN Summit.

So this will be held in Singapore on 27 to 28 April 2018 and there will be Preparatory Meetings at the Senior Officials and Ministers Level, which will be held from 25 to 27 April.

His Excellency President Rodrigo Roa Duterte will be attending the Summit at the invitation of Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. And among other activities, he will be joining the ASEAN leaders in two major engagements.

They will hold a working dinner on 27 April and the Leaders' Retreat the following day on 28 April.

The President will be joining other leaders of ASEAN member states in continuing the work of advancing community building and in living up to the shared commitment of maintaining and promoting the peace, security and stability of the region.

Singapore's chosen theme for its chairmanship of ASEAN is a resilient and innovative ASEAN. And this weaves well into our thematic priorities during our time as chair of ASEAN last year.

Thus, a focus for this year will be on ways to make use of innovation and technology to improve the lives of our people.

Singapore will be introducing initiatives along this line, including one that will move forward city development, sustainable urbanization and connectivity among ASEAN cities.

On the part of the Philippines, the President would address issues that are close to his heart, especially matters that affect the well-being of the peoples of our region.

He will work with other leaders in putting an imprint towards the realization of ASEAN Vision 2025 by identifying and prioritizing initiatives that will move forward action lines in the political, security, economic and socio-cultural communities, particularly on the deliverables of our chairmanship last year such as on the ASEAN consensus on the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers and the ASEAN declaration on the role of civil service as a catalyst to realize the ASEAN Vision 2025, and other declarations that focused on the overall health of the citizens of ASEAN.

The Summit in Singapore will also be an opportunity for leaders to address transnational and transboundary issues such as terrorism, violent extremism, trafficking in persons, illicit drugs and disaster management.

We can anticipate that the leaders will be tackling regional and global issues that impact on the peace and security of our region, as well as on current developments that now pose a challenge to economic integration and the promotion of a free, fair and rules-based trading regime.

So this ends my brief statement and I will now wish to entertain questions from the media. Thank you.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Q: Hi ma'am. Ma'am, aside from the ASEAN leaders, will there be other world leaders that would be attending the 32nd ASEAN Summit as well?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: No, Pia. The April Summit is usually something that is, if I may call it, like an in-house meeting only of ASEAN.

The first opportunity where we have other, for instance, leaders --- when we say leaders, world leaders, our dialogue partners --- will be in November. Just like our own experience here last year.

Then of course, sometime in August, I mean late of July and August, we have the annual meeting of the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN, together with the Foreign Ministers of the dialogue partners.

Q: Asec, will the President hold bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the Summit?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Yes, I think that work is being done and we're trying to figure out when this could possibly take place.

As a tradition usually --- also just like our experience last year, as chair, many of the counterparts from member states would like to call on the chair. So in this particular case, we would also wish to meet with the Singapore Prime Minister.

Q: How many leaders have expressed interest to meet with our President?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: As of now, I think that there is a request from two leaders. Yes.

Q: Can you reveal them or...?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: I'm sorry...

Q: ... you don't do it until...

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Yes, until we are confirmed. And we will... We can give you that maybe on the 26th.

Q: Pero `yung mga nirequest natin na ka-meeting aside from Singapore sino pa po? Meron pa bang iba?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Wala.

Q: Wala, so it's just the host?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Yes.

Q: Okay, thank you, ma'am.

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: As of now, okay, as of now.

Q: As of now. Okay thank you, Asec.

Q: Ma'am, good morning. Just one quick question. Ma'am 'yung question --- ay ma'am 'yung request natin to have a bilateral meeting with the chairman, what do we want to discuss with the ASEAN chair?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Well, of course we would like to find out I mean his thoughts and his sentiments about the chairmanship so we can also help, support Singapore.

Although we have already expressed our support for Singapore, we wanted of course that the chairmanship of Singapore will also be successful especially since the thematic priorities that Singapore has chosen is building upon our theme and thematic priorities during our chairmanship here.

Sinabi ko nga 'yung resiliency and innovation. Resiliency as many of you will recall, ASEAN resiliency is our thematic priority number 5 and innovation is our thematic priority number 4 during our chairmanship year.

Q: Ma'am, will there be any meeting with the Filipino community in Singapore?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Yes, I think work is being done on this particular activity. It's on a planning stage. I think it will be during the last day.

We have our officer from the bilateral office here. But I think sa ngayon 'yon pa lang ang masasabi namin.

Q: Ma'am, ilan po 'yung mga Filipino natin nasa Singapore?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: What numbers are we looking at right now? As of 2017, it's about two hundred --- 180,000.

Q: Okay, regarding po doon sa topics to be discussed by the President if he engages with the leaders. Is there a possibility that the South China Sea issue will be discussed?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Yes. Definitely the South China Sea is always a regular feature of our discussions. And one special --- if I could just mention is because come August, we will be taking the country coordinatorship of the dialogue with China.

So talagang kailangan din nating i-discuss 'yan. But if you're going --- unahan na kita Ace --- kung ang pag-uusapan natin doon is on the...

Q: *[inaudible]*

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: No, I was about to say on developments on the negotiations on the code of conduct, ang gusto ko lang sabihin is that we just concluded --- I mean we just had our first meeting at the working group level.

So there's really nothing much to say, parang isang organizational meeting of this first meeting that was held in Vietnam recently.

So what we can say at this stage is that ang so far na napag-usapan natin is that we will begin with the issues na mas madaling pag-usapan and then moving on to the more difficult ones.

Q: Like what po Asec. `yung madaling pag-usapan?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Hindi, ano ba `yung mahirap pag-usapan?

Q: `Yung mga --- siyempre `yung mga disputes, `yung sa sovereignty issues `yung mga ganun...

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Yes. So you know. So these things will take some time. And so I think what is important is that we put a premium on the positive momentum that we have now in the improvement of ASEAN-China relations and we will see where --- how we will progress in the next few years --- if I may say few years because sabi ko nga the country coordinatorship is about three years.

It's a rotational three years. So tatlong taon nating bubunuin `yung dialogue natin with China and the negotiations of the COC is just part and parcel of that dialogue.

Q: Thank you, Asec.

Q: Hi ma'am. Good morning po. Nagkaroon po ba ng prior engagement po si President Duterte with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to talk about suggestions para po sa pag-uusapan sa ASEAN Summit?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: I think that particular process is dealt with at the working level ito ngang tinatawagan nating mga Preparatory Meetings.

So we have the Senior Officials, we have the community of permanent representatives in Jakarta, and then of course the Foreign Ministers Meeting.

So sila `yung nagpe-prepare para sa pag-uusapan ng mga leaders.

Q: So expected po natin doon sa two primary events po sa ASEAN Summit, magbibigay po ng speech si Pangulong Duterte and saan po magfo-focus `yung speech niya po with the leaders?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Yes, as I mentioned earlier. The two important engagements will be the --- of course the working dinner and then the retreat.

So at the working dinner, it will focus on the ASEAN Community building efforts. And we expect that at that meeting, dito nila pag-uusapan `yung suporta nila dito sa tatlong outcome documents na pino-promote ng --- or that's being worked out by Singapore.

And this refers to this vision, ASEAN leaders vision on resiliency and innovation. The second is the --- a concept note on smart cities network. There will be about 26 cities, I think, pilot cities focused on smart and sustainable urban development.

And then the third one is of course one that's covering cyber security where member states will look at cyber attacks and how we can coordinate better our cyber policy and capacity-building measures.

Q: Ma'am good morning po. Ronron from Kyodo News. Ma'am, about the COC issue. Do you know when is the next meeting of the working group after the Da Nang meeting?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Because that will depend on the next host. And the next host will be China. That I can say for the next working group meeting.

Q: But no date yet? Like this May, wala pa?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Wala pa.

Q: But can we expect a report by that working group to the leaders next weekend? Or the leaders issuing another set of instructions for the working group to, you know, fast-track? Wala?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: No, no. I don't think... I don't think we expect some instructions because in the hierarchy of...

Well, the summit is the highest decision-making body in the ASEAN Summit. But all the work, you know that like --- this working group will have to report to the senior officials on DOC, the Declaration of Conduct of Parties and then from there, it will move to the foreign ministers.

So if ever, you can probably see this sometime in August during the Foreign Ministers' Meeting or in November.

Q: Yes, ma'am. The other day, Secretary Cayetano mentioned about the Philippine aspiration for these reclaimed features in the South China Sea to be rolled back to their natural state. I'm wondering if during these upcoming meetings, the Philippines will bring up this position? And will it be reflected probably in some documents or --- sariling ano lang natin 'yun, expression?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: As I said, at the moment, we're in that meeting of looking at the issues where we can find convergence, common convergence rather than the most complicated issues.

But of course, it will always be a goal of the Philippines to make sure that all issues are looked at or are covered by the COC.

But I would just like to highlight, Ron, that you know itong COC, it's not meant to resolve the territorial disputes.

It is really meant to manage the incidents, prevent incidents from happening that may escalate or create a certain situations that may further complicate peace and stability in the region.

Q: Hi, ma'am. Ma'am, has the President expressed his intention to personally meet with Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi following his controversial comments on the Rohingya issue?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Not that I know of. But I think that you can also expect that it's regular feature as well, that these leaders will be discussing developments there.

And I won't be surprised if Myanmar will offer to brief the leaders on developments in Rakhine.

Q: But as far as President Duterte expressing his intention to personally meet or give his apologies on these controversial comments. Meron na po bang ipinahayag ang Pangulo?

ASEC. DE LA VEGA: Alam ko, may ipinahayag na siya dati. Pero 'yung personally na i-approach niya si Daw Suu, I think that's something that we can leave up to him kasi you know I can't predict what the leaders will do there in Singapore, in Istana because the venue for the meeting will be in Istana. That is the working venue.

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