

Presidential Communications Operations Office

News and Information Bureau

PRESS BRIEFING OF PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON HARRY ROQUE

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PENG ALIÑO/RADYO PILIPINAS: Magandang umaga Pilipinas, welcome po sa ating press briefing with Secretary Harry Roque. Good morning, sir.

SEC. ROQUE: Good morning, Pilipinas. Good morning to the ladies and gentlemen of the Malacañang Press Corps.

Good news! Underspensing is now a thing of the past. The Department of Budget and Management reported that 98% or 606.33 billion out of 618 billion of the national government budget allocations were utilized by the government agencies in the first quarter of 2018. This year's utilization rate is higher than the 93% recorded in the same period of 2017, with 453.52 billion out of 485.72 billion released. The Department of Agriculture, Energy, Foreign Affairs, Interior and Local Government, Public Works and Highways, Trade and Industry were among those recorded to have 100% utilization rate for the period. Hindi na kinakailangan ng DAP.

The Philippines is ranked number 12 in the list of the most preferred investment destinations of Japanese companies according to the latest survey of the Japan External Trade Organization or JETRO. Japan was our largest trading partner in 2017, with approved foreign investments registering at 32 billion, an 18.2 increase from 2016. This reflects the confidence of the Japanese government and business in the economic policies and political stability under the leadership of PRRD.

Magandang balita po sa mga magsasaka sa bayan ng Libungan sa North Cotabato - through the Mindanao Sustainable Agrarian and Agricultural Development Project of the Department of Agrarian Reform, five people's organization were granted corn post-harvest facilities amounting to P1.5 million which will help more than 250 corn farmers on more on less 20,030 [2,030] hectares. President Duterte stressed the importance of providing continuous support services through the implementation of different programs and projects by different government agencies to Agrarian Reform beneficiaries to allow them to fully develop and utilize their lands for agricultural purposes.

Now, I confirm that the President met with the Ambassador of Kuwait to the Philippines, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Secretary Cimatú and Secretary Bello of Labor. They discussed recent events that transpired in Kuwait. They parted on positive note, emphasizing that while the Philippines will always exercise its obligation to protect its nationals abroad, they will do so in a manner respecting the sovereignty of Kuwait. We still expect the MOA providing the minimum terms and conditions of employment for our OFWs to be signed soon. As in fact, they're already talking about possible dates; and the possible date maybe after this year's Ramadan. So it was a

frank but very cordial discussion and I understand that after the meeting both parties reiterated their mutual support for each other and parted even closer as friends.

Questions?

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Hi, sir. Sir mayroon pong information coming from Kuwait na mayroon daw pong dinitain (detain) iyong Kuwaiti government na at least 4 Filipinos involved in the rescue of the OFWs there. Can you confirm, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi ko pa po mako-confirm ‘yan, because I have no personal information ‘no. Ang alam ko lang po, isa ito doon sa mga pag-uusapan at inaayos sa panig ngayon ng gobyerno ng Kuwait at ng Pilipinas.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: As far as doon sa protest note, sir, ng Kuwait, may napag-usapan po ba na ganoon sir doon sa meeting kagabi?

SEC. ROQUE: Lahat po ‘yan napag-usapan, at natapos po ang usapan na mas matindi ang pagkakaibigan ng bansang Kuwait at ng Pilipinas,

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: So exactly, sir, how did the government respond to the protest notes given by the Kuwaiti government, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Well ang naging resolution po, tanggapin po ng Kuwait government na talagang pangangalagaan natin ang ating mga mamamayan sa Kuwait dahil ito’y obligasyon natin bilang isang bansa, at tinatanggap din natin ang soberenya ng Kuwait na dapat ang magpatupad ng batas ng Kuwait ay mga taga-Kuwait. So, iyon po ang pinagtapusan ng pagpupulong.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: So, ano po ang gagawin ng Philippine government sir doon sa mga embassy officials who conducted the rescue mission? Sila po ba ay idi-discipline or wala pong gagawin ang government sa kanila, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Siguro po, si Secretary Alan Cayetano ang dapat sumagot niyan ‘no. Pero sa panig po ni Presidente, ang assessment po ng Presidente naayos po niya kung ano man ang naging kaunting gusot sa samahan ng Kuwait at ng Pilipinas kagabi.

NESTOR CORRALES/INQUIRER: Good morning, sir. You mentioned earlier in an interview that there were some misunderstandings during the meeting between President Duterte and the Kuwaiti government. Can you expound this, sir?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi naman ‘misunderstanding’ in the meeting. Siguro, misunderstanding doon sa mga pangyayari sa Kuwait. Pero ito po ay napag-usapan na nang malinaw, at kaya nga po nagkaintindihan na muli ang Kuwait at ang Pilipinas ‘no.

Ang masasabi ko lang, iba talaga ang style po ng ating Presidente pag nakikipag-usap sa ibang bayan – very personal, very friendly, and I think it is beneficial to the country. So iyong mga hindi pagkaintindihan siguro, eh alam ninyo na kung ano iyon ‘no, iyong pinoprotesta ng

Kuwait. Pero I think, naayos naman po ni Presidente iyong sigalot na ‘yan. Minor lang naman, na naayos niya.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Sir, how would you describe po the mood of the meeting with the President last night and the Ambassador?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, please understand that I wasn’t there but I did call three sources like you [laughs]. And iyon na nga, iba kasi iyong style ni Presidente eh, laid back eh. And maski ikaw ay galit na galit, madi-disarm ka sa style ni Presidente kasi parang barkadahan system siya ‘no. So, tinrato niya nang barkada iyong Kuwaiti Ambassador at siyempre eh magre-reciprocate naman iyong Kuwaiti Ambassador ‘no. So kung anuman iyong hindi napagkasunduan, eh naayos naman ‘no amongst friends ‘no. So kaya nga po, tuloy pa rin iyong signing ng ating MOA at tuloy pa rin iyong ating pagkakaibigan sa bansang Kuwait.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Na-mention po ba sir iyong lumabas na video noong pag-rescue doon sa OFW?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, I would be lying if I were to say ‘hindi’. DFA will never admit, but I would be lying. But as I said, the President has his style and I think his style worked. And whatever ill feelings may have resulted because of the leak of the video, naayos naman ng Presidente sa... tama lang namang pakikisama ‘yan ‘no. At siyempre, mas mapoprotektahan kasi natin iyong ating mga kababayan kung mabuti rin ang ating relasyon doon sa bansang Kuwait ‘no. So, naayos naman po.

ROSALIE COZ/UNTV: Sir, nabanggit ninyo po iyong maayos na pakikitungo ni Pangulong Duterte sa Kuwaiti Ambassador. Nag-apologize po ba ang Pangulo in behalf po ng mga Philippine Embassy officials?

SEC. ROQUE: I don’t think that was necessary at all or—number one, I do not know. Pero from what I know kasi and I’ve seen the President up close, eh iyong conduct niya kasi... iyong conduct niya can inspire friendship and confidence especially when you’re up close eh. So I think outside of apologies, his ‘style’ eventually led to the result that he wanted – that it was not too big deal as far as our bilateral relations are concerned.

ROSALIE COZ/UNTV: So nagbigay po ng assurance ang Pangulo na hindi na mangyayari iyong nangyari po sa—

SEC. ROQUE: Well ang sinabi po ay, “We will respect the sovereignty of Kuwait.” Kasi nga naman, tayo, advocate tayo ng independent foreign policy; ayaw natin naghihimasok ang ibang bansa sa ating bayan, respetuhin din natin ang soberenya ng ibang bayan.

ROSALIE/UNTV: So sir, nagbigay din po ba tayo ng—ngayon po sure po tayo na hindi hahantong sa pag-pull out ng Kuwaiti ambassador kasi parang mayroon pong mga official ng Kuwait na nananawagan na i-pull out ang ambassador?

SEC. ROQUE: Mukhang sure na po tayo na—dahil normal naman po ang relasyon natin eh walang ganoong mangyayari. And again it is because of the negotiating style of the President, the personalistic, warm, friendly negotiation style of the President.

LEILA SALAVERRIA/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Sir, just to clarify. Was the signing of the MOU ever in danger because of the operation in Kuwait?

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi naman po. I don't think it was ever in danger. I think both parties... both states have invested time, resources, effort and I think both are serious in signing this MOU. We can't deny, we have to provide the employment for our countrymen but I think the Kuwait side also has recognized that we also need—they also need the services of our countrymen. So it is in that mutual... sense of mutual need for each other that we negotiated that MOU.

LEILA/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Sir, will it still be the President who will sign the MOU? Pupunta pa rin siya sa Kuwait?

SEC. ROQUE: Well I understand naman kasi this is a ministerial document 'no. So it is really Secretary Cayetano who will sign.

LEILA/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: I mean, will he still go to Kuwait to witness the signing?

SEC. ROQUE: I'm not sure 'no about whether or not the President will still go. What I do know is he's really tired of travelling. He's really tired of travelling and he's trying to cut on the travels 'no. So I have heard that he really wants to cut on the travels 'no. So we'll see.

LEILA/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Okay, thank you.

AC NICHOLLS/CNN PHILS.: Sir, I just wanted to get a clearer picture of how things went down during the meeting. You said na parang iyong style nga niya barkadahan. So basically ano iyon nag-down—dinown play lang niya iyong nangyari na parang sinabi niya na it's not a big deal so there's no reason to make a big deal out of it, and maapektuhan pa iyong plans sa MOA?

SEC. ROQUE: It would be safe to say that 'no. Kasi you know, both sides could have made the issue bigger than it is. They could have used it to sour our diplomatic relations. They could have used it—either side could have used it to prevent the signing of an MOU. But neither side did. But ang sinasabi ko nga, it helped talaga na iyong many years of experience ni Presidente as a local government official probably work to our advantage; kasi kapag mayor ka talagang sanay ka rin diyan 'no na nag-a-arbitrate; sanay ka rin diyan na pinagkakasundo mo iyong mga nag-aaway away. So I think that worked to our advantage that the President already has that leadership ability 'no.

AC/CNN PHILS.: But there was no demand from the other side for an apology?

SEC. ROQUE: Wala naman yata. They parted... even as closer friends.

DJ: Hi sir, good morning. Sir, do you think the recent controversy, iyong rescue po, weakened the Philippines position with regard to the Memorandum of Understanding between Kuwait and Philippines?

SEC. ROQUE: If it did, then the MOA would not be signed. But I understand it will still be signed. So I don't see how our position was weakened. I cannot see also the President not insisting on his obligation to protect Filipino nationals. He may have a very friendly approach, a personalistic approach but he is also a man of political will. I think he made it very clear that he had no other option but to protect Filipino workers in Kuwait. So I think that was made very clear to the Kuwait side; but at the same time - because we also have this policy of independent foreign policy - he also recognize the right of sovereignty as far as Kuwait is concerned.

LEO PALO/DZME: Sir, may—kung hindi ako nagkakamali parang statement coming from DFA na nanawagan sa public doon sa paglalabas ng video. So ang tanong is: may marching order ba si Presidente sa DFA? Dahil nanggagaling naman sa kanila iyong video, so medyo irresponsible lang kasi.

SEC. ROQUE: Well ako I'm appealing lang 'no, bahala na si Secretary ano diyan, Cayetano kasi that's his department 'no. I don't want to comment on something that's sole prerogative of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs. But of course I call on everyone including the media, please remember our responsibility sometimes what we will broadcast may affect many of our nationals living abroad 'no. So iyon lang po ang pakiusap.

LEO/DZME: Noong nakita ni Presidente iyon, anong immediate reaction niya? Dahil—

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi ko po alam kasi hindi ko alam kung nakita niya. Oo, hindi ko po alam. I saw pictures of the meeting. I did not see a PowerPoint projector nor screen 'no. So—ang punto naman kasi doon is talaga namang nakiki-coordinate tayo with local authorities. Alam natin na ang mga Pilipino hindi pupuwedeng nagre-rescue on their own kasi bayan ng ibang tao iyon eh. So talagang sila ang soberenya roon, although mayroon tayong katungkulan na paglingkuran at pangalagaan iyong well-being ng ating mga kababayan. Dapat iyong lahat ng ginagawa natin coursed through local authorities, because that's out of deference to their sovereignty. So iyon naman talaga ang SOP.

So I understand naman na they did all the usual coordination, kaya lang hindi nakita iyong sa video... siguro 'no. But everything ended well. It was not a big hindrance 'no to the Philippine bilateral relations and it will not prevent the MOA from being signed.

LEO/DZME: Last na lang sir, tutuloy pa ba si Presidente sa Kuwait for—

SEC. ROQUE: Hindi ko po alam ngayon 'no, kasi nga po parang nagbabawas talaga ng biyahe ang Presidente.

PIA GUTIERREZ/ABS-CBN: Sir, on the part lang of the President. He as a leader has placed so much importance on independent foreign policy but as the same time is very much concerned

about OFW welfare. How is he taking this issue... these allegations of violations of sovereignty by embassy officials?

SEC. ROQUE: Well nakikita naman niya ang need to balance the two kaya nga kinakailangan talaga na palakasin pa iyong koordinasyon natin doon sa mga host states ng ating mga manggagawa. Kaya nga ang panimula niyan ay kasunduan sa panig ng Kuwait at ng Pilipinas.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL. STAR: Sir, knowing that this controversy stemmed from a viral video posted from—sa Viber ng reporters and some pro-administration, social bloggers. Is there a need to review the issuance of videos released of—videos by government agencies?

SEC. ROQUE: I will leave that to the concerned agency. If you are referring to the PCOO, I will ask Secretary Martin Andanar if he will have further guidance on this matter.

TINA MENDEZ/PHIL. STAR: Thank you sir.

ROSE NOVENARIO/HATAW: Hi sir, good morning. Sir, may—sa editorial po ng Philippine Daily Inquirer nabanggit po nila iyong—after—one day after po ng assumption ni Chief PNP Albayalde ay nagkaroon na naman ng isang one time big time anti-illegal drugs operations sa Bulacan na ikinasawi po ng labing apat katao at ikinasugat ng marami pang iba. Mayroon po bang mga paraan ang pamahalaan upang maiwasan itong mga drug-related killings, consider po na second year na po ito ng administrasyon?

SEC. ROQUE: Well sa akin po ibang klase po si General Albayalde ‘no. Kaya po siya pinili ni Presidente dahil siya ay kilala being istrikto at bagama’t paiigtingin pa niya itong war against drugs, sinabi rin niya, paiigtingin din niya iyong pagdidisiplina ng mga tao sa PNP ‘no. So hayaan na nating pakitaan tayo naman ng gilas ni General Albayalde kung anong gagawin niya doon sa mga umaabuso sa kapangyarihan kung mayroon man. Pero hindi po natin alam kung ano talagang nangyari dito sa insidente na sinasabi ninyo. So hindi po ako makapagkomento, hindi ko talaga alam kung anong nangyari diyan ‘no. Pero ang sinasabi ko po kung mayroong reklamo na mayroong excessive force used, sana po nagsasampa ng reklamo nang magkaroon ng imbestigasyon.

ROSE/HATAW: Sir, may plano po iyong administrasyon na palakasin iyong kanilang drug rehabilitation like the community drug rehab at saka iyong mga in-house facility pong drug rehabilitation para maiwasan po itong mga ganitong insidente?

SEC. ROQUE: Lahat po niyan ay underway ‘no. In fact, one time I had a judge as a visitor na humihingi ng funding support for the Nueva Ecija facility as a result of the rule of the Supreme Court na pupuwede ng mag-plea on possession para marami na lang ma-rehab rather than makulong ‘no. And the response was almost instant – the DOH made funds available. Although, initially, ang akala natin baka hindi magamit iyong Nueva Ecija facility dahil napakalaki, because of this policy of allowing plea bargaining on possession charges, eh mukhang mapupuno iyon ‘no. And we now have a mega facility being utilized for actual rehabilitation.

ROSALIE COZ/UNTV: Sir, regarding din po sa anti-drug war. Lumulutang na naman kasi iyong isyu na mayroon pong isang mambabatas sa European Union na pinari-review iyon pong pagbibigay ng GSP Plus status sa Pilipinas, in relation din po sa pagpapa-deport sa isa pong socialist parliament representative po ng EU.

SEC. ROQUE: Let me be clear on this: Of course, it's always their prerogative to review it. But the Philippine government's position on extra-legal killing I think has been made clear over and over again by the President himself. He stands by the police when they are in the discharge of their official functions; when they commit acts outside their official functions, he will order their arrest.

Now, on my part, although I should not really reveal this because this is not a presidential statement but my work as presidential adviser, I've actually coordinated with the police to document each of the killings that they have reported and actually make sure that there is no basis to prosecute our men in uniform in connection with any of these killings. We're half-way done.

So in a few months, I will have a file each for every killing that reported by the PNP indicating that there was no excessive use of force; and if there is a reason to file charges against the killers, then I will encourage the filing of charges para matapos na nga iyong pagpupula na walang ginagawa. Hindi naman po mabilis lang ito dahil isa-isang iniimbestigahan iyan. Pero noong panahon pa ni General Bato, nagkasundo na kami na gagawin na namin iyan. At ang sabi nga niya bago siya magbitiw, at finalow up (follow up) ko ulit nung siya ay nagbitiw na, more than half na ang nagawa nila.

And I think, General Albayalde will even be more cooperative in this regard because he really wants to promote discipline amongst the ranks of the PNP. He will hasten the process. So I foresee that in the next two or three months, we should be finished and we should come up with the report on how many should be charged if any.

So sa susunod na magreklamo sila, I will now be able to confidently say, "That's not true. We went through each and every case, and we can convincingly say that there was no excessive use of force in these instances." So iyon po ang response natin.

So iyong sinasabi rin po ni Senator Lacson, hindi po totoo ito na binabale-wala namin ang pagpupula. Siniseryoso rin po namin iyan, kaya lang hindi namin kinakailangan ibandera lahat ng ginagawa namin. Basta ako, alam ko ang ginagawa namin ang aming katungkulan ay okay na po iyon. Napakahirap po niyan, iniisa-isa na po namin iyan. Pero huwag po kayong mag-alala, darating sa punto na we will confidently say, "We have the data. We have the facts," and we are confidently able to say, "All the killings were done in a legal manner."

SHIELA FRIAS/IBC13: Sir, good morning. Pinapatanong lang po: With the barangay and SK polls just a few weeks away, the Comelec is hoping po that President will appoint two commissioners doon po sa vacant sa Comelec. Any plans po? And if ever, when po ito maa-appoint ni Pangulo?

SEC. ROQUE: He has appointed one ‘di ba. And—he has appointed one already.

SHIELA FRIAS/IBC13: May dalawa pa, sir. May dalawang kulang pa.

SEC. ROQUE: May dalawang kulang pa ba o isa?

SHIELA FRIAS/IBC13: Dalawa po.

SEC. ROQUE: Okay, anyway, it’s forthcoming. I already know the identities but our rule is unless the document is formally signed, we can’t divulge it.

SHIELA FRIAS/IBC13: Pero, sir, before po ba May 14, maipapasok ito? Kasi sabi po nila, it will be much easier daw po kapag complete iyong en banc.

SEC. ROQUE: Yes, mayroon na po. Mayroon na po. Tapos na po iyong screening procedure. It’s a matter of actually signing the paper.

SHIELA FRIAS/IBC13: Sir, follow up lang. Will the Palace declare May 14 as special non-working holiday?

SEC. ROQUE: I don’t want to preempt the President, but that would be logical.

PRINCE GOLEZ/PANAY NEWS: Sir, just your reaction. Sir, Senator Panfilo Lacson accused barangay officials in Boracay of involvement in extortion activities. He said that barangay officials are asking 400,000 in exchange for Boracay IDs.

SEC. ROQUE: I’m sure the DILG will look into this. Believe you me, Secretary Año will not tolerate this if this can be proven.

Now, teka muna ha, dadalawa lang iyong barangay sa Boracay ha. So dalawang babaeng barangay captain lang iyan, hindi as if ang dami nila ha. Unfair naman kung—anyway, tingnan natin kung totoo iyan ‘no, kasi dadalawa lang iyong barangay captain doon ... o tatlo? Two or three? Oo, tatlong barangay captain lang iyon ha.

PENG ALIÑO: But there are about how many barangay officials, not barangay captain maybe?

SEC. ROQUE: Ano naman ang mahihita nila kung residente sila roon, ‘di ba? Makakapasok at labas lang sila, eh ano? Pero madali po iyan maimbestigahan ni Sec. Año.

CHONA YU/RADYO INQUIRER:WS: Sir, two days na lang magsasara na ang Boracay. Iyon proclamation po ni Presidente na state of calamity sa Boracay, when is he going to—

SEC. ROQUE: Well, wala pa. Pero, come on, it’s just a matter of the President signing it. Okay? The people have been told, they know that there will be a closure; there will be a declaration of state natural calamity. It’s just a matter of the President signing the documents, and it can be signed any time now. Okay?

AC NICHOLLS/CNN PHIL: Sir, just a follow up. Kasi ‘di ba iyong funds kailangan munang ma-declare nga iyong state of calamity for the funds to be released and to be used. Paano iyon?

SEC. ROQUE: Walang problema po doon because the funds are there. So you just need the proclamation para magamit nga. So as soon as it is signed, you can use the funds.

Q: [OFF MIC] Available iyong funds?

SEC. ROQUE: Available naman ang funds ‘no. The President made sure na bago isasara iyan, lalung-lalo na iyong pantawid sa mga nagtatrabaho sa Boracay, ay naririyon.

CATHERINE VALENTE/MANILA TIMES: Sir, just the Palace’s reaction on the recent Pulse Asia Survey on urgent national concerns. It showed that increase in workers’ pay and control the inflation remain the top two national concerns of Filipinos. So what’s the government—

SEC. ROQUE: Pareho naman po ng concern iyan ng ating President ‘di ba? Mas komportableng buhay din ang gusto nating ibigay sa ating mga kababayan. So nagtutugma po ang kagustuhan ng ating mamamayan doon sa nais makamit ni Presidente Duterte.

NESTOR CORRALES/INQUIRER.NET: Sir, last na lang. May we have Malacañang’s comment on the findings of the Commission on Audit questioning the Presidential Legislative Liaison Office for spending over three million for consultants whose functions overlapped with the duties already being performed by regular employees?

SEC. ROQUE: Well, two points, I think this report came out as a result of a request of the COA for PLLO to comment. In other words, hindi pa iyan conclusion. Magkakaroon pa ng exit conference na tinatawag. So hindi pa iyan final conclusion ng COA. So it’s unfair to say that’s a final conclusion of COA.

Sa proseso po kasi, pasasagutin muna ang ahensiya. Ang nai-report po ay parang iyon na ang final conclusion – hindi naman po. So hayaan naman nating sumagot ang PLLO.

MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you so much, Secretary Harry Roque. And thank you, Malacañang Press Corps.

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