

Presidential Communications Operations Office
News and Information Bureau

**PRESS BRIEFING OF PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON AND
CHIEF PRESIDENTIAL LEGAL COUNSEL SECRETARY SALVADOR PANELO
MARCH 3, 2020 (12:38 – 1:05 P.M.)**

USEC. ROCKY IGNACIO: Good afternoon MPC, kasama na natin si Chief Presidential Legal Counsel and Presidential Spokesperson Salvador Panelo. Good afternoon, sir.

SEC. PANELO: Good afternoon, MPC. I'll share some happenings last night.

The first item on the agenda was about the efforts of various agencies to address EU's brought before it regarding the COVID-19. Updates relative were presented by Health Secretary Francisco Duque who initially reported that the Philippines does not have new positive case of COVID-19 in the last 4 weeks. This means that, as at present time the Philippines has 'zero' cases of persons suffering from the virus.

Secretary Duque then proceeded to that the World Health Organization has acknowledged our efforts in implementing necessary measures as we are among the 9 countries which have been able to contain the spread of the virus. Secretary Duque however added that the Philippines needs to be ready anytime for whatever possibility the virus may cause our country and our people.

Secretary Duque also summarized government response to COVID-19 as follows: incident management, planning and multi-sectoral coordination, surveillance and risk assessment, laboratory and diagnostic capacity, clinical best practice and management, successful repatriation of all 49 Filipinos from Wuhan, position resources such as personnel protective equipment, risk communication and community engagement; also imposition of travel ban on China, Hong Kong and Macao and selected areas in South Korea and operational logistics.

The Inter-Agency Task Force is currently holding its 9th meeting at the Department of Health to continue discussing the measures of the government concerning the virus.

Then after that, it was Secretary Meynard Guevarra who discussed the Bureau of Immigration's present situation in relation to the 'pastillas' bribery scheme. He told the Cabinet that he's already directed the NBI to investigate the corrupt practices in the airport terminals. The focus of which would be 2 main areas namely: human trafficking involving outbound passengers, mostly overseas workers; and, escort of facilitation services involving foreign nationals entering Philippine territory without proper or falsified documentation.

And then after that, was the report on the outlook and action plan of the government in preparation for summer. Secretary Roy Cimatu of the Environment and Natural Resources Department discussed the water supply outlook. Secretary Cimatu presented his recent inspection of the Angat Dam where he looked into the capabilities and limitations of the dam which

supplies more than 97% of the total water supply requirement of Metro Manila. Secretary Roy said—or rather assured the President that we will have enough water for the year.

For his part, Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi tackled the preparations of the government relative to the power sector for short term and long term outlook as well as the corrective policy issuances being undertaken by the Energy Department. Secretary Cusi likewise sought the approval of the issuance of a proposed executive order for the inclusion of nuclear power in the country's energy mix as the Philippines is expected to experience rapid growth in electricity and electricity demand; in which, 24/7 power is essential and necessary.

Thereafter, Bangko Sentral Governor Benjamin Diokno discussed the proposed legislative amendments to RA 9160 or the Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2001, AMLA and RA 9372 or the Human Security Act of 2007. The successful passage of key amendments to the AMLA and the Human Security Act according to Governor Diokno will compliment or boost our efforts towards an 'A' credit rating for the country.

And lastly, we tackled the Anti-Red Tape Authority issue where Director General Jeremiah Belgica informed the Cabinet of the National Effort for the Harmonization of Efficiency Measures of Interrelated Agencies Program as well as the endeavors which have been undertaken by ARTA to resolve red tape in the bureaucracy.

In the same meeting, Secretary of Interior and Local Government Eduardo Año was able to brief the President and the Cabinet regarding the hostage taking incident which took place yesterday in Greenhills.

I'm ready for your queries.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Hi sir, good afternoon. Sir, may we know what was the reaction of the President after the report of Secretary Año on the hostage taking incident yesterday at Greenhills?

SEC. PANELO: Well, he was happy that there was no casualty except for one, there is only one. And then he related what he did when he was Mayor.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: What's your assessment sir as a Malacañang official on how the local officials and the police handled the incident yesterday?

SEC. PANELO: Well, I understand there have been some criticisms and General Gamboa said it was tactical. In other words, apparently the main concern is the safety of the 30 hostages. And since they survived and they are alive, I think we should welcome that.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: But, do you think it's proper to give the hostage taker a time to rant before the media and say his—

SEC. PANELO: I do not know what transpired between the negotiator and the hostage taker. That could be one of the terms that they agreed upon for his surrender.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: So in general, you're satisfied with how they handled—

SEC. PANELO: For as long as people are alive, we welcome it.

MARICEL HALILI/TV5: Thank you, sir.

CHONA YU/RADIO INQUIRER: Sir, doon sa 'pastillas' scheme, na-discuss kagabi? Nabanggit din po ba kay Presidente iyong sinasangkot si dating Justice Secretary Aguirre?

SEC. PANELO: It was not mentioned there. Nothing was mentioned about him.

CHONA YU/RADIO INQUIRER: Iyong binabanggit sir ni Presidente na there's more or marami pang opisyal ang sisibakin?

SEC. PANELO: What was presented there was what they will do about it. How they will tackle, how there should be a separate room and for the Immigration officials to interview that the public can see. In other words, the Immigration official be transparent in any kind of investigation or interview that they will be conducting in reference to those coming in and going out.

In other words, there should be no secrecy in conversations between an Immigration official and a passenger.

CHONA YU/RADIO INQUIRER: Iyong mga sinibak, sir, sa puwesto dati, anong status ngayon? Kakasuhan na ba sila, will the government file charges na?

SEC. PANELO: The moment we see there is probable cause, they will be sued definitely.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: Sir, last time sabi ninyo idi-discuss sa Cabinet meeting iyong performance ni Commissioner Morente, na-discuss po ba kagabi?

SEC. PANELO: Commissioner Morente was there.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: And ano po ang sabi ni President?

SEC. PANELO: He presented—well apparently, he is giving Commissioner Morente a chance to do some innovations in the Immigration department.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: And then, sir, what did Commissioner Morente tell the President about the pastillas bribery scheme, nag-report din po ba siya kagabi?

SEC. PANELO: Well, he reported on what they intend to do about it. In other words they have—In fact, I think they are introducing an executive order, if I am not mistaken, to address certain issues that have been raised.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: Iyong EO na ito, sir, ano pong purpose and anong sabi po ni President Duterte, will he issue one?

SEC. PANELO: I think he is giving Commissioner Morente a chance.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: A chance to?

SEC. PANELO: To do something about the problem in the Immigration.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: Okay and how long is the chance that the President is giving?

SEC. PANELO: That depend, siguro. Let's see.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: Okay, sir. Pero iniimbestigahan din po ba si Commissioner Morente?

SEC. PANELO: Walang sinabi, but the tone there is apparently he is not involved; otherwise kung involved iyon, di tinanggal na iyon.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: So, he is excluded from the investigation of the NBI?

SEC. PANELO: The President as he already said in public, kilala niya and he believes in him.

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: But sir, is he excluded from the investigation?

SEC. PANELO: Let me make it very clear: there is nobody who is exempted from any investigation when there is a complaint of corruption. Regardless of who you are, if there is a complaint, you will be investigated.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: Secretary, regarding the inclusion of nuclear and energy mix. Did the President approved the proposed EO or did he agree with the Energy Secretary that there should be an EO including nuclear energy in the energy mix?

SEC. PANELO: If I am not mistaken, the proposed EO was approved.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: So, it was approved. Did you discuss the possible revival of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant?

SEC. PANELO: No, that was not touched.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: How about the building of new facilities, nuclear energy facilities?

SEC. PANELO: I don't remember that being discussed.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: So it's just the EO for now.

SEC. PANELO: Yes.

JULIE AURELIO/PDI: Sir, what are the parameters po of the EO? I'm assuming that there is a draft already or an idea presented to the President about the EO including the nuclear energy. What was the parameters of that proposal kung hindi po nabanggit iyong Bataan?

SEC. PANELO: I am not familiar with the proposal. But we will share it with you, as soon as it is.

JULIE AURELIO/PDI: What were the President's thoughts when he approved the EO?

SEC. PANELO: He was just listening, basta in-approve lang namin iyon.

GILLIAN CORTES/BUSINESS WORLD: Sir, good afternoon. It was mentioned about the water situation that the Environment Secretary said we have enough water until the end of this year. Are there any plans on how to deal with what's gonna happen next year and the coming years and if there is something that the government is doing about it right now?

SEC. PANELO: What I heard last night was they are assuring us that there will be no water problem. They are doing something about it.

GILLIAN CORTES/BUSINESS WORLD: No water problem for this year?

SEC. PANELO: Yes, for this year.

GILLIAN CORTES/BUSINESS WORLD: But for the next year and the coming years—

SEC. PANELO: That goes without saying, kung walang problema ngayon, di ibig sabihin, pati subsequent years, kasama iyan sa kanilang mga plano. Mayroon silang mga projects doon, may 2020, 2021 2022.

GILLIAN CORTES/BUSINESS WORLD: Have they mentioned about plans to create the Kaliwa Dam, iyong updates on Kaliwa Dam?

SEC. PANELO: Ang narinig ko kagabi, parang may groundbreaking sa isang Kaliwa Dam—dalawa yata iyon di ba? There are two, two Kaliwa Dams eh.

GILLIAN CORTES/BUSINESS WORLD: So, they are done already with the design phase of the—

SEC. PANELO: I think so, because may groundbreaking na this July, August eh.

TRICIAH TERADA/CNN PHILS: Hi sir, good afternoon. Sir, regarding the coup in Congress po. Iyong coup plot, talks about coup. Sir, what are the thoughts of Malacañang about this, is it

timely to be talking about this coup plot? Kasi di ba mine-mention po ng House, kaya hindi nila ma-tackle iyong ABS-CBN franchise, because there are lot of things happening like there is COVID and a lot of issues. Is it timely to even be tackling about this coup issue?

SEC. PANELO: You know the President, as he is wont, he does not really interfere with the intramurals inside Congress. I think whatever controversy it has now, it's being resolved. And I heard Speaker Alan saying that they will be tackling that franchise thing.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: Secretary, although you have somehow answered this already. Any statement on the changes in the leadership on the House, nagkaroon yata ng balasahan doon sa committees sa House, isa sa mga naalis si Congressman Ungab at ngayon sinasabi ng Hugpong, hindi nila gusto iyong pagkaalis kay Congressman Ungab sa appropriations committee. What is your take on this?

SEC. PANELO: The policy of the President he says, he [will] not interfere with the intramurals inside Congress.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: Don't you think, this is a crack doon sa allies nung Presidente, both of them are allies of the President and apparently there are intramurals?

SEC. PANELO: Even if they have intramurals there, if all of them are allies of the President, so there is no crack. There will be a crack if those fighting each other are saying that they are not for the President.

ACE ROMERO/PHIL. STAR: Itong rift na ito how would this affect the agenda, the development agenda of the administration, given that you need Congress to pass laws for your priority measures.

SEC. PANELO: I don't think there is a rift 'no, because I was listening to the Congressman being interviewed this morning, wala naman daw eh. Ang sabi ni Congressman—one Congressman was being interview he said, the removal of one congressman to that post was more of an issue of loss of confidence, because he made certain alignments that the Speaker didn't know. Parang iyon lang naman iyon.

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Okay. These developments in the House, how would this affect—

SEC. PANELO: I don't think it will affect the—

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: —the agenda, development?

SEC. PANELO: I don't think it will affect the legislative agenda, because all of them support the agenda of the President or most of them anyway.

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Thank you, Sec.

JULIE AURELIO/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Sir, last night House Speaker Alan Cayetano met with NP and according to—

SEC. PANELO: With whom?

JULIE AURELIO/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: To the Nacionalista Party and according to this story on Rappler he allegedly said, “We don’t really need to talk. Ang message ko lang sa kaniya – referring to Velasco – trabaho lang tayo. Huwag magsiraan, huwag tayong mag-intrigahan at huwag kang matatakot na hindi ka magiging Speaker kasi kung ‘yan talaga ang gusto ni Presidente and he’s the head of our coalition, mangyayari ‘yun ‘di ba? ‘Yun lang ‘yun.” And then he goes on, “I mean what more can I say except na pagdating ng araw at sabi ng Pangulo na time to change, eh ‘di change. Change court, change court.”

If we’re saying that the President does not interfere pero by the tone of Speaker Cayetano’s statements parang they’re still... you know, ‘gonna follow whatever the President says about what the House leadership should be.

SEC. PANELO: You’re forgetting that it was them who asked the President to intercede. Eh, sila naman ang humingi ‘di ba at that time? Ayaw niyang makialam. So, they are just being consistent kung ano napag-usapan nila. Because to their minds, it will be offensive when you ask somebody to broker for you and settle things between you and the other side and then tapos you will not honor it, eh ‘di parang binale-wala mo ‘yung hiningian mo ng tulong.

JULIE AURELIO/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Pero kasi parang ‘yung dating, sir is... may direct hand pa rin si Pangulo sa House leadership?

SEC. PANELO: Walang direct hand si Presidente diyan. Nakikita mo ‘yung nagkaroon ng change of leadership? Wala siyang kaalam-alam nagpalit na pala ng leadership sa Speakership.

JULIE AURELIO/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Sir, ‘pag—if the—what happened last July happens again that they seek the help of the President in resolving the issue?

SEC. PANELO: If what?

JULIE AURELIO/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: If—‘di ba nangyari last year they sought the help of the President in resolving the leadership issue. If it happens again na hingin nila ulit ‘yung advice or intervention ni Presidente, will he do it? Will he again broker another term sharing deal?

SEC. PANELO: Unang-una, hindi natin alam kung gagawin nila ‘yun; Pangalawa, hindi natin alam kung papayag si Presidente.

JULIE AURELIO/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Pero kasi may statement si Speaker Cayetano na he’s telling Velasco na magiging House Speaker ka if the President says so. So, they’re still ‘gonna defer whatever the President says.

SEC. PANELO: Ibig sabihin ni Speaker Alan eh may pinag-usapan na tayo ‘di ba? Humingi tayo ng tulong kay Presidente, inayos na nga tayong dalawa so, let’s honor it. Parang ganun ang sinasabi niya.

JULIE AURELIO/PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER: Thank you, sir.

IAN CRUZ/GMA 7: Sec, good afternoon po!

SEC. PANELO: Good afternoon.

IAN CRUZ/GMA 7: Nabanggit po ni Secretary Dominguez at may report na ukol dito na sinabi daw ng Pangulo, may order ang Pangulo na imbestigahan ‘yung influx ng ‘dirty money’ sa Philippines. ‘Yung nakakapasok po ano... sa bansa natin.

SEC. PANELO: Palagi naman ‘yang ano eh—yeah, I heard him say that. Iimbestigahan talaga ‘yun and Secretary Dominguez is the one investigating it.

IAN CRUZ/GMA 7: Sir, medyo malalaking pera ito ano... ‘yung mga nakakapasok. Parang sort of money laundering na po ito.

SEC. PANELO: Exactly! Kaya nga iimbestigahan eh. ‘Yun ang report, hindi natin alam kung totoo o hindi that’s why precisely magkakaroon ng probe.

IAN CRUZ/GMA 7: Sino po inatasan ng Pangulo doon? NBI din po ba mag-iimbestiga doon?

SEC. PANELO: Usually, it’s—initially, palagi ‘yung Department of Finance unless the Secretary asks the other agency, police agency to help in the investigation.

IAN CRUZ/GMA 7: Sir, sa ibang topic po. Sinabi po ni Senate President Sotto na... regarding doon sa resolution ng Senate sa VFA, nakausap na raw nila ang Executive Department and amenable naman daw ang Executive Department doon sa resolution nila.

SEC. PANELO: Ano ibig sabihin noon?

IAN CRUZ/GMA 7: ‘Di po ba may sinubmit po sila doon na resolution papunta po sa Supreme Court?

SEC. PANELO: Nag-file sila sa Supreme Court?

MPC: [OFF MIC] [UNCLEAR]

SEC. PANELO: Bakit Supreme Court? Anong kaugnayan ng Supreme Court?

MPC: [OFF MIC] [UNCLEAR]

SEC. PANELO: Parang wala ya—

MPC: [OFF MIC] [UNCLEAR]

SEC. PANELO: Huh?

MPC: [OFF MIC] [UNCLEAR]

ARIANNE MEREZ/ABS-CBN NEWS.COM: Para daw sir, they're going to the Supreme Court para daw ma-define at ma-categorize anong role ng Senate sa pag-a-abrogate ng mga treaties, executive agreements...

SEC. PANELO: Then we will let the Supreme Court decide on that kasi right now, there are conflicting legal opinions on so-called "legal experts". One saying that resolution would suffice; another one is saying, it will not. So, let's wait for the Supreme Court to resolve it. It's a legal issue, a constitutional issue at that.

IAN CRUZ/GMA 7: Sec., baka puwede po kayong mag-react doon sa SWS survey nung September 2019 - plus 33 po 'yung approval rating ni Vice President Robredo and 'yung last nilang nilabas for December 2019, naging plus 36 na po ito or mas mataas ng plus three no... Si Senator Sotto, from plus 61 to plus 62; Si Speaker Cayetano tumaas din po. Ano pong reaction ng Palasyo?

SEC. PANELO: O eh 'di ibig sabihin, ang pananaw ng mga natanungan nakita nila na nag-i-improve 'yung performance ng mga taong 'yun. Good for them.

IAN CRUZ/GMA 7: [OFF MIC] Thank you, sir.

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Secretary, balikan ko 'yung nuclear. So, ibig sabihin—ano na po 'yung position ng Philippines with regard to the use of nuclear power for its energy need?. Mayroon na ba tayong position to formally adopt 'yung nuclear...

SEC. PANELO: Wala akong... I'll ask Secretary Cusi.

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Kasi may implications 'yun 'di ba, Secretary? Mayroong certain bodies, they want to determine kung ano talaga 'yung stand Philippines regarding—So, wala pa, Secretary?

SEC. PANELO: Hindi ko alam ang position ni—but I'll ask him and then we'll issue a statement.

ACE ROMERO/PHILIPPINE STAR: Okay. Salamat po.

Q: Sir, follow-up lang. Bale 'yung EO po ba is in pre—

SEC. PANELO: 'Yung alin? 'Yung alin?

Q: ‘Yung EO. ‘Yung EO on nuclear energy is this in preparation for the implementation nung agreement with Russia?

SEC. PANELO: I’m not familiar with that.

GENALYN KABILING/MANILA BULLETIN: Sir, the President has appointed Dante Jimenez as the new ICAD co-chair. May we know the reason behind this appointment?

SEC. PANELO: I think Mr. Dante Jimenez will be having his presscon after me. You can ask him, I think he knows the reason why. I don’t know. The President didn’t tell and we did not discuss it.

GENALYN KABILING/MANILA BULLETIN: Sir, but—

SEC. PANELO: You ask him because he will be having his presscon, you’re all invited.

GENALYN KABILING/MANILA BULLETIN: Sir, what are the Palace’s expectations from the new ICAD co-chair? Do you think he will do a better job than the Vice President?

SEC. PANELO: I’m sure Mr. Dante Jimenez can respond to that.

GENALYN KABILING/MANILA BULLETIN: No, from the Palace, sir? Your expectation from the new—

SEC. PANELO: Wala. Because I haven’t talked to the President regarding the new appointment eh. I understand he’ll be having his presscon at 2 P.M.

VANZ FERNANDEZ/POLICE FILES: Good afternoon, sir!

SEC. PANELO: Good afternoon.

VANZ FERNANDEZ/POLICE FILES: Yes, sir. According to Senator Gordon, sinasabi niya na may mga ilang nakuha siyang impormasyon regarding this sa mga Chinese–Filipinos na gumagamit umano ng mga pangalan nitong mga deceased Filipinos na gumagamit ng pangalan bilang kanilang identity through local registry – civil registry. Any reaction on this?

SEC. PANELO: ‘Di ba sabi ko, we welcome that expose of Senator Gordon and if he can provide us with certain information or reports, we can do something about it.

USEC. ROCKY: Okay, thank you. No more, MPC? No more question? Thank you, Secretary Panelo.

SEC. PANELO: Thank you.

USEC. ROCKY: Thank you, MPC.

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