

PRESS BRIEFING BY
PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON

HARRY ROQUE JR.

[Malacañang Press Briefing Room, New Executive Building | 03 January 2018]

OPENING STATEMENT:

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Good morning and Happy New Year.

Let me begin by saying that we're very happy that the Filipinos were found to be the third happiest people on earth, according to that Gallup poll. And we hope to be the happiest people this coming year.

Let me begin with statement on the New Year's Eve fireworks-related injuries. As you know, it was a substantial drop. 70 percent plus lower than previous year. And we hope that in the coming years, there will be zero casualties in fact 'no. And we, of course, credit the dramatic decrease in injuries to the strict implementation of EO No. 28 'no.

And I think we proved to one and all that we can have a happy New Year without people losing their fingers and losing their eyesight 'no.

On Agaton, well, we have a briefing as of 9:00 and needless to say, national government through the NDRRMC continues to oversee relief and clearing operations in communities hit by typhoon Agaton.

It is notable that prior to the landfall of the tropical depression, thousands of families have preemptively evacuated and sought shelter in safe centers and nearby relatives.

While we received reports of two fatalities in Cebu, which is still being verified by the DILG, we're hoping that with the advisories and warnings provided that there would be no other reported casualties.

Now on TRAIN, of course you know that January 1 is the implementation of the TRAIN reform. Let me stress though that the implementation of TRAIN relates to the fact that those having an annual taxable income of P250,000 and below or at least P21,000 a month are now exempted from personal income tax. Thirteenth month pay and other bonuses amounting to P90,000 are likewise tax exempt.

However, as repeatedly mentioned by the Department of Finance and the Department of Trade and Industry, the imposition of excise taxes should not affect current prices now because they will actually be effective on ---

Well, for instance, on the fuel products, they are not to be imposed on old inventories. They are to be imposed on new deliveries 'no, still to be made. Meaning that inventories that already exist should not be subjected to the additional excise tax 'no.

We have also began implementing the P200 per month unconditional cash transfer amount as a measure of mitigating the effects of TRAIN, at least to the poorest of the poor in our communities 'no.

Now, the cash grant will be distributed between January to July 2018 and a technical working group is now being held in preparation for the timely release of this cash transfer 'no.

Now, the President would like to reiterate his prior instruction to the Cabinet to ignore any pleas to be made by any of his relatives in connection with any government transaction.

The President is renewing his call that any and all of his relatives are not authorized, okay, to approach anyone in government in connection with any government-related transaction full stop. That applies to his children, his siblings, his cousins, his uncles and aunts. No one in his family is authorized by him to have any financial interest in any government office, agency, or department.

Now, I also received a communication from the Red Crescent Movement of Qatar. They donated US\$280,000 to victims of typhoon Vinta. This was coursed through the Philippine National Red Cross.

Also, as of 7:00 this morning, I read a text instructing me to hold in abeyance announcement of who it is that the President will sack next. Of course, this is not the first time it has happened. When he announced that he will fire an entire commission, he did not mention which commission first and it took couple of days before I was authorized to make the announcement.

So although I was directed to announce as early as January 30, the instruction was to announce in our next press briefing, which is today. But of course, at the beginning of the day, I was asked to defer with the said announcement.

Questions?

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Rose Novenario (Hataw): Hi, good morning, sir. Sir, ano po 'yung dahilan bakit pinigil ni Presidente 'yung pag-aanunsyo niyo nung sisibakin na opisyal ng gobyerno?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: No reason cited other than please hold in abeyance the announcement.

Ms. Novenario: May nabanggit po kayo sa isang radio interview kaninang umaga na may koneksyon ito sa legislative franchise?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Hindi --- Well, it was legal basis, yes. This was not coming from the President but coming from PMS, this explanation. All that I received was to hold in abeyance. But when I inquired from PMS, what they said was they gave the President a copy of the legislative charter of the agency headed by the officer 'no. And the President was reviewing the legislative charter of that agency.

Ms. Novenario: Thank you, sir.

Henry Uri (DZRH): Happy New Year and...

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Happy New Year.

Mr. Uri: Good afternoon, Secretary. Masaya ang mga Pilipino kabilang ang Pilipinas sa pinakamasayang bansa sa buong daigdig. Pero sasaya ba kami sa MRT? Wala na ba kaming mararanasang pagtirik at aberya?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, ginagawa po ng lahat ng gobyerno 'no para mas mapabuti ang pagtakbo ng MRT. Ulitin ko, ang problema lang naman po 'yung MRT sa EDSA 'no.

Wala naman po tayong naririnig na problema doon sa ilang mga tren natin along Taft Avenue and doon po sa dalawa pang linya 'no --- sa Aurora Boulevard at tsaka doon sa connecting MRT with Taft Avenue 'no.

Mr. Uri: Ano po ang pinaka-huling direktiba ng Pangulo sa DOTr tungkol sa mabilis na pagsasaayos nito?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, gawin ang lahat ng kinakailangan. Ang huling deklarasyon po ng ating DOTr ay pinalitan na nila 'yung kanilang maintenance contractor 'no.

At ngayon po, ang nagpapakatako ng MRT na 'yan ay ang gobyerno mismo. Wala po muna silang contractor habang hindi pa naibabalik 'yung Sumitomo ata.

Mr. Uri: So walang posibilidad na maibalik ho 'yung Sumitomo?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, alam ko po patuloy ang pag-uusap nila 'no na maibalik ang Sumitomo. At kahit sino naman pong pumasok diyan, tingin ko Sumitomo will be the preferred maintenance at nagsalita na po ang DOTr nung nakaraan na nais nga nilang maibalik ang Sumitomo diyan.

Mr. Uri: Speaking of maintenance provider, how true is it na merong mga iba pang mga kumpanya, may iba pang mga foreign company na gustong makilahok at pumasok dito sa maintenance and operations nitong MRT?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Can you give me more data, more information on this?

Mr. Uri: Parang meron yatang --- may nabasa ako na Spanish, isang Spanish company or provided... provider company na gusto hong pumasok dito. Meron --- Nakarating na ho ba ito sa Palasyo? Anong estado na ho nito?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, I'm not sure 'no but I will inquire immediately after the President will already be in the Palace and I will inquire from him if he knows about a Spanish company that wants to enter as well 'no.

Mr. Uri: Thank you, sir.

Dexter Ganibe (DZMM): Secretary, good morning. Sec, follow up lang doon sa naunang tanong ni Rose Novenario. Sir, linawin lang natin. 'Yung i-aanunsyo niyo po ba ay nasibak na or sisibakin pa lang?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Wala pa. Wala pa 'no. I was tasked to announce that he was terminated.

Q: He?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Oops. [laughter] Kayo talaga ang galing niyo. Okay. But anyway, I didn't say anything about identity.

Mr. Ganibe: Terminated na po?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, no. But I do not know now because the instruction was completely not to announce anything. [laughs]

Mr. Ganibe: So ibig pong sabihin mananatili...

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: I do not know...

Mr. Ganibe: Hangga't hindi naaanunsyo 'yung kanyang...

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Hanggang hindi po naaanunsyo, hindi pa siya nasisibak.

Mr. Ganibe: Okay.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: I will concede this much na I know that there was a legal written document already being prepared. But I guess even that is held in abeyance.

Mr. Ganibe: So 'yung legislative franchises po kasama?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Hindi siya franchise, legislative charter of the agency.

Mr. Ganibe: Ah charter of the agency.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Oo.

Mr. Ganibe: Ibig sabihin?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: ‘Yung batas na bumuo ‘nung ahensiya eh...

Mr. Ganibe: Na lumilikha...

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Pinag-aaralan ni Presidente ngayon.

Mr. Ganibe: Ito po ba ay maglalagay sa alanganin kapag hindi nasibak at napalitan sa pwesto pagdating sa suplay ng kuryente sa bansa sa mga susunod na buwan?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Ah hindi naman po.

Mr. Ganibe: Hindi naman.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Eh kasi wala naman pong dapat sibakin doon sa sinasabi mong ahensiya, suspendido na po nga sila eh ‘no.

Ang problema anong gagawin pagkatapos ‘no, pero pinag-aaralan pa po ‘yan ng Office of the Executive Secretary.

If you’re referring to the ERC.

Mr. Ganibe: Yes, sir.

Ina Andolong (CNN Philippines): Hi sir, sir pero nabanggit ninyo ngayon lang, he was terminated. So ngayon it’s unclear for now if binawi ‘yon?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, I do not know because unless the document is signed anything can be changed ‘no. So...

Actually I want to come up with a policy now na when we announce there should be a written document.

But who am I ‘no? When I’m ordered to announce, I will announce. But since I was ordered not to announce anything, I’m not announcing anything.

Ms. Andolong: Sir, doon sa isang interview n’yo this morning, nabanggit ninyo, tungkol --- kasi many are --- some are suspecting that it might be a PCSO official because of the recent

controversy or issue na nalutang doon recently. But you mentioned that the President already talked to both officials involved?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: He knows about the issue. I have confirmed that he knows about the issue.

Ms. Andolong: And he believes the sides of bo --- he believes both?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: And what I said is he holds in high esteem both the GM of PCSO and Director Sandra Cam whom he recently appointed to the post.

Ms. Andolong: So hindi po manggagaling safe to say sa PCSO ang tatanggalin?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: I can make the confirmation that the official who I was tasked to announce and belatedly told to hold in abeyance is not from the PCSO.

Ayan malinaw na. Okay.

Ms. Andolong: Lastly na lang...

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Ay wala na. Wala na. Move on to another topic, please.

Ms. Andolong: Sir, hindi, hindi. Sir, sorry. Sir, hindi pa po ako tapos. Last na lang, doon sa announcement ninyo kanina 'yung reminder po ni Pangulo doon sa government officials not to consider any pleas from relatives. Does this, baka lang, has anything to do with the official to be fired? Hindi naman po siya involved sa ganun?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Wala naman po 'no. Although actually again in the spirit of transparency, this was also relayed to me on the 30th to be announced on our next press briefing 'no.

So kung natuloy 'yung press briefing last January 1, I would have said the same thing that the President is renewing his call to everyone in government that anyone who uses his name, be it relatives or friends, do not have any authority to use his name.

Ms. Andolong: Why the need to renew this, sir? Did he discover any or find out any high-ranking official using his position to accommodate relatives?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Unfortunately, between the 23rd and now, I haven't seen the President.

So this is something that was just relayed to me. But I'm seeing him this afternoon.

Ms. Andolong: Thank you, sir.

Vic Somintac (DZEC): Secretary, Happy New Year.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Happy New Year.

Ms. Somintac: Hindi kaya itong itatanong kong sisibakin? Sir, there was this complaint against Marina Administrator Marcial Quirico Amaro III by the agency's employees. Has the President seen the complaint? And if he has, has he given any directive or action on the complaint because based on the complaint, Mr. Amaro traveled more times than chairman Ridon of PCUP, 11 trips for Mr. Amaro in 2017 compared to 7 for chairman Ridon?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: What is your question?

Mr. Somintac: Nakita na ba ni Presidente 'yung reklamo ng mga empleyado?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Yes.

Mr. Somintac: May aksyon ba na ginawa ang Pangulo, any directives para ---?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: None so far.

That's the answer.

Mr. Somintac: So can you confirm?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Kayo ha process of elimination kayo ha. Akala mo hindi ko alam ha. Hello! In court, that would be leading Your Honor. [laughs]

Mr. Somintac: Pero pinaimbestigahan na ni Presidente?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: I think he is always looking, he always looks at all complaints received by the Office of the President.

Mr. Somintac: Sir, totoo ba noong ma-appoint daw itong si Mr. Amaro ang kanyang backer ay si Dennis Uy ng Phoenix Petroleum?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: I have no knowledge. But I confirm that that was in the letter of complaint.

Pia Ranada (Rappler): Sir, just a follow up. This official who will be sacked, is he being sacked because of corruption, conflict of interest or mga junkets na naman?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Like all presidential appointees, he's being sacked --- or I do not know if he's still going to be sacked --- because of loss of trust and confidence.

I repeat, presidential appointees serve at the pleasure of the President. The President does not even need to cite any good cause because that is a nature of a presidential appointment.

Ms. Ranada: Sir, loss of trust and confidence because of corruption, conflict of interest, any of those things? Or it's just plain loss of ...

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: The President is always guided by the Constitution 'no that government officials must serve the Republic, that they must lead modest lives, that they must comply with the laws against graft and corruption.

So he is just implementing all the public laws affecting public officials.

Ms. Ranada: Sir, next question, just on the use of Facebook by the Duterte campaign. I just want to get a statement from Malacañang. So is the Duterte administration now in power after elections continuing to use Facebook in a manner it had used during the campaign? Meaning funding trolls and maybe even skewing certain mga discourse online through fake accounts?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, number one, as I have mentioned in I think a printed statement 'no because this is our first press briefing, all the candidates utilized Facebook.

Ms. Ranada: No, sir. I'm asking about after elections.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, okay during the elections all the candidates utilized Facebook. We have today an Assistant Secretary for Social Media who as you know is Assistant Secretary Mocha Uson.

So we continue to utilize social media in promoting the accomplishments and the messages of the administration.

Obviously, we don't use it for partisan or political purposes because there's no elections until 2022.

Ms. Ranada: Sir, just to be clear about it, does the administration pay for trolls and fake news sites?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: No. Definitely not. If trolls are paid by government, they wouldn't have attacked me in the first place.

Ms. Ranada: Sir, how then do you explain the majority of --- a lot --- presence of a lot of accounts, fake news trolls who are very vocal supporters of the government but also very harsh attackers of the administration's critics?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: We find trolls of this nature also on the other side of the political fence defending the prior administration, attacking this administration.

Ms. Ranada: But this hasn't... This not have the blessing of the administration?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: I can assure you that there is no budgetary line item for payment of trolls in the social media as far as this administration is concerned.

And again I can only point to myself as living proof that there cannot be any official funding or even sanction on the activities of pro-Duterte trolls because as I said, had this been the case, then we would have prevented the vicious attacks against me.

Ms. Ranada: Sir, lastly, in a radio interview, you mentioned that the President will make trips to South Korea, Israel, and India. I believe the India visit will be an ASEAN Summit event. How about, sir, the visits to South Korea and Israel?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, I think these are planned visits. So far it's being discussed between the Department of Foreign Affairs and the countries that have invited the President.

It's not yet definite but I know that it has been mentioned 'no. And these visits of course will have very specific goals and part of a state visit or working visit is always to promote trade and investments as far as the Philippines is concerned.

Ms. Ranada: Can we just know what months these trips will happen?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: No months yet 'no. The only thing I know is that this January is the ASEAN-India Summit 'no. And I think it is on the 24th if I'm not mistaken.

Cedric Castillo (GMA-7): Happy New Year, sir.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Happy New Year.

Mr. Castillo: Sir, in anticipation of the possible negative effects of TRAIN or the tax reform law, may mga petitions na po na nagsu-surface or 'yung intention to petition particularly sir sa transport sector. May we get the Palace's reaction?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: What petition, please? Can you be more specific?

Mr. Castillo: 'Yung ire-raise to P12 'yung particularly sa jeep po 'yung pamasaha. How do we appease or how does the government plan to appease the public? Kasi may mga ganitong anticipation na masyado na magiging mataas 'yung presyo kung mapagbibigyan 'yung petition, sir?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: It's up to the administrative agencies concerned to rule on these petitions 'no. It's not the President himself that rules on these petitions. They would have to go to the LTFRB 'no if they want a petition.

Mr. Castillo: Ang sinasabi kasi sir, particularly ng mga drivers, is parang sila naman ‘yung on the receiving end nung adverse effect ng TRAIN, ng Tax Reform Law. Being citizens, parang hindi naman daw sila... medyo hindi fair.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: While I do not know about whether there is empirical evidence ‘no that majority of our jeepney drivers have this concern but what I can say is that the proceeds of TRAIN will go back to the people in terms of infrastructure, that is expected to have a stimulant effect on the economy, which will benefit everyone.

Mr. Castillo: Sir, your thoughts din po. Kasi may analysis na 6 million ‘yung mae-exempt mo from paying taxes but 80 million naman daw will bear the brunt or the negative effect nung --- anticipated negative effect ng Tax Reform law, sir.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, someone has to pay for Build, Build, Build that will produce positive effects for everyone and of course, it is done through taxes ‘no.

Taxation is one of the three inherent powers of the state and for as long as it is approved by the people’s representatives, which is Congress, is it acceptable in a democratic state.

Mr. Castillo: Sir, on another matter. Speaker Alvarez sir, said na one of the possible scenarios in 2019 may be no-el or no election if we can push through or if the government can push through with the federalism, sir. What is the Palace’s reaction on this?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Again, the President always looks to the Constitution as his guiding document. The Constitution sets the date for the next elections in 2019. So unless the Constitution is amended ahead of the 2019 elections, it will have to push through.

Mr. Castillo: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Ganibe: Sir, sabi ng House Speaker, possible ang no election 2019 pero ayon kay SP, Senate President, pwede rin naman daw ituloy kahit may mangyayaring transition kung sakali mang mai-push ‘yung federal system. Ano po ang pananaw ng Malacañang dito?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, the Chief Executive, the role of the President is to implement the Constitution and the law.

As I said, it is the Constitution that sets when the next election is. The law required of Congress for election purposes will only enable the spending of public funds in that regard ‘no.

So unless the Constitution is amended, which includes being ratified by the people prior to the date set in the Constitution, elections will have to push through.

Mr. Ganibe: Copy.

Pia Gutierrez (ABS-CBN): Sir, follow up lang po doon sa TRAIN. Meron pong call ang grupong Laban Konsumer for government to appoint a price czar to monitor the effect of or the impact of TRAIN across departments. Ano po ang masasabi niyo, sir? Sa palagay niyo, kailangan po ba ng isang price czar, sir?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Point well taken but I think that would be superfluous because we already have the Department of Trade and Industry performing their task.

Ms. Gutierrez: Thank you, sir.

Leila Salaverria (Philippine Daily Inquirer): Good morning, sir.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Yes, good morning.

Ms. Salaverria: On the entry of a third telco player, according to Secretary Andanar, it's... the role is always open to other foreign players. Given that the President specifically offered the slot to China, will it be acceptable to him if another foreign player gets the role?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Let me be clear on this 'no. The offer to China was made in a bilateral talk between the President and the Chinese Premier.

It appears to have been accepted because the Chinese government nominated China Telecoms 'no.

Now, we do not know if it will actually push through. As you know, the devil is always in the details.

Now, I'm sure that Chinese side has been informed that we will have to comply with the Constitutional provision that Chinese ownership would be limited to 40 percent 'no and that the Department of Information and Communication --- DICT has already said that they would want a Filipino consortium to own the 60 percent majority stake in this third telecoms 'no.

If for any reason this is not acceptable to China Telecoms, then we have no choice 'no. We gave China the option but if this is not acceptable to it, unfortunately we will have to look for other players because we will have to honor what the Constitution provides --- 60-40 in terms of owning a telecoms company.

But there are no indications that Chinese... China Telecom does not want to push through with the project. But unless it's actually up and going, I guess there is always a possibility that others may be involved if for any reason China Telecoms or China decides not to push through with their commitment 'no, to start a third telecoms company.

Ms. Salaverria: But are you saying that China already has an advantage or will the process be competitive?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: No, I mean, right now because it was offered and accepted, we will honor our word.

But as I said, if for any reason, China Telecoms or any company nominated by the Chinese government finds the 60-40 requirement in the Constitution to be unacceptable, then of course, that will give us now the option to offer it to other companies.

Ms. Salaverria: So parang China is the first option and only if they refuse to comply with the provisions ---

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: That's my understanding 'no because it was formally offered in a bilateral talk between the Chinese Premier and the Philippine President and they have since nominated China Telecoms.

Ms. Salaverria: So wala talagang competition, sir? Walang competitive bidding in a sense?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, as far as the 40 percent stake is concerned, they have to comply with the Philippine Constitution, they will have to partner with Filipino companies with an existing franchise because otherwise, they would have to go to Congress for another franchise.

Ms. Salaverria: But it will be China?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: So far, as far as I know, it has been offered to China. We don't know what the details are but the deadline is fast approaching. The President wants it up and about in the first quarter of this year.

Ms. Salaverria: Last na lang, sir. You mentioned in a radio interview that China wanted 100 percent ownership? Can you tell us about it?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, okay. No, they did not want it. I was just observing that in the past, and this is prior to my stint as Presidential Spokesperson.

One difficulty encountered by Chinese companies is they're not used to not owning an investment a hundred percent okay.

So I do not know if this is applicable to China Telecoms. I was not --- I did not say it in relation to China Telecoms but in general, I know as a private practitioner in the past that Chinese state-owned companies are always uncomfortable with not having 100 percent or majority stake. But as I said, that does not apply to China Telecom. I have no personal information that applies to China Telecoms.

Ace Romero (Philippine Star): Secretary, clarification. So there will only be a bidding for frequency kung hindi nagkasundo 'yung Philippines at China sa details, tama po ba?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Bidding for frequencies... Well, I do not --- See, it is the Filipino corporation that will be awarded the frequency and I know right now that there's some frequency that could be awarded to them through tender 'no.

So it's not as if we're offering the frequency to a Chinese corporation. We are offering the frequency to a Filipino corporation because it's a 60-40 enterprise.

Mr. Romero: So okay. Clarification. So if magkakaroon lamang ng openness sa ibang companies pag hindi nag-work out 'yung sa China, tama po?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Yes. If for any reason, China Telecoms or China itself decides not to push through with the third telecoms, of course, we have the option to offer it to other companies.

Mr. Romero: Thank you, Secretary.

Benjie Liwanag (DZBB): Happy New Year, sir.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Happy New Year, Benjie.

Mr. Liwanag: Sir, with regards with the ---

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Naliligaw ka Benjie ah.

Mr. Liwanag: Reliever. Alam niyo naman.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Okay.

Mr. Liwanag: Oo nga. With regards doon pa rin sa Philippine National Police. May sinabi po si Pangulo na may mga sisibakin siyang superintendents, which is a colonel. Can you have ---

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Malapit na po 'yan.

Mr. Liwanag: Can you give us an update?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Remember, over the break, no less than General Bato also made a similar statement that I have made.

This is really the officers --- We're just observing due process because they're not all presidential appointees 'no.

So we have to comply also with the PNP law. So we're in the process of completing with all requirements before we make the announcement of who they are.

Mr. Liwanag: Mauuna po kaya ito before 'yung presidential appointment?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: When I was tasked to make the announcement earlier, there was also a mention of this that it's going to come out soon. They're almost done and the President would want to announce it as soon as possible to send the message to the police that while the President stands by them when they are in the lawful discharge of their duties. When they are not, the President will be the first to discipline them.

Mr. Liwanag: So kailan po ito, Secretary?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: No timeframe was given but I was made to understand it will be very soon.

Mr. Liwanag: Okay, next Tuesday will be the Nazareno. Any updates on the security especially pagka Nazareno po meron tayong problema, nagtatanggal tayo ng linya ng komunikasyon, cell sites, and also security. Are there any threats coming from any group, Secretary?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, I don't think there's any extraordinary threat 'no. We will exercise the same kind of diligence that we have done in the past.

This is already the second Nazareno for this administration and we know how to maintain peace and order in the Nazareno festivities.

Mr. Liwanag: Thank you very much.

Celerina Monte (Manila Shimbun): Good morning, sir. Regarding the President's reminder doon sa mga relatives niya. So how would you reconcile like in the case of the son-in-law Atty. Manases Carpio kasi somewhat he was or he's the lawyer of like one of the companies dealing with the government. So paano po ise-separate 'yung ganun na hindi magkaron like ng influence peddling?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, I guess if he performs his duties pursuant to the rules of legal ethics, there should be no problems 'no.

But it's very clear in the rules of legal ethics that one should not take advantage also of any position 'no in the discharge of functions of a lawyer.

And the President trusts that Atty. Carpio is familiar with these canons of legal ethics.

Ms. Monte: Sir, on another issue. The Foreign Minister of Indonesia will be having her courtesy call with the President this afternoon. May we know what's the purpose of her visit and what could be the discussion during the courtesy call?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, I do know also only about the schedule and that's when I will see the President next, but I do not know the agenda. But the schedule described it as a courtesy call. So it's a courtesy call.

Ms. Andolong: Sir, ano na po ang expectations ng Malacañang about the implementation of the jeepney modernization program because previously President Duterte said he wanted na pagpasok ng January, phase out na ‘yung mga lumang jeep. Obviously it’s not happened.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, you know I think DOTr officials at least when I was still in Congress said that it cannot be done overnight ‘no and that’s why they have announced that 500 e-jeepneys will be made available immediately at the beginning of the year ‘no.

And I think there was also a pronouncement made by DOTr that roadworthy jeepneys can continue until if I’m not mistaken, there was a date set ‘no if I’m not mistaken 2020 ‘no which shows that it will have to be implemented in batches ‘no.

The President though is firm in his resolve to modernize our public utilities including the phase-out of the jeepneys. Obviously, it did not happen overnight but it will happen in the long run.

Ms. Andolong: Last, sir. As former... You were in Congress before. Sir, ano po ba ‘yung mga government agencies na may legislative mandates --- charters, I mean?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Halos lahat naman other than those na forming part of the existing departments.

Llanesca Panti (Manila Times): Good morning, sir. About ‘yung sa Marcoses po, sa compromise agreement. Even before Atty. Lozano submitted the proposal, the President already said that he is for entering a compromise agreement with the Marcoses regarding the ill-gotten wealth and other sequestered assets. Considering the President’s statements alone, is the Palace considering forming a legal team to study a possible compromise agreement or to hammer out a draft of such deal?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: The President’s statement actually was that he is for it but he needs a law to authorize him to enter into one.

So just to complete the Presidential position on the matter, while he’s for it, it appears that his hands are tied unless there is a law authorizing him to enter into such a compromise agreement.

Ms. Panti: Sir, follow up on the same issue. So as it is sir, there is no legal basis ---

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Correct. Because in fact ---

Ms. Panti: --- for us to enter a compromise agreement with the Marcoses?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Correct. Because we have criminal laws penalizing plunder and it will be contrary to law to enter into a compromise agreement ‘no. Except under exceptions already identified by the Supreme Court ‘no. But as far as the position of the President is concerned, he needs a law.

And in fact, Atty. Lozano also appended the draft law indicating that although the Marcoses have not given him any authority to submit the compromise agreement to Malacañang, he himself agrees with the position of the President that the law is indispensable.

Ms. Novenario: Good morning uli, sir. Sir, bago nag-Bagong taon, may Person of the Year Award si Presidente galing sa OCCR, isang NGO funded by American-Hungarian billionaire George Soros and at the same time po, parang nagkaroon po ng mga pahayag din si UN Special Rapporteur Agnes Callamard. Sa tingin po ba ninyo, may kaugnayan ito dahil may ulat po na si Agnes Callamard daw po ay isang Soros agent na nasabay po doon sa pagbibigay po ng Person of the Year Award ng OCCR na isang Soros-funded NGO rin po?

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: In the first place, we don't want to give any credence to that award because no one knows what that award is.

Have you heard of it prior to this year? We've never heard of it. It's not as if it has the status of the Nobel Prize.

So initially, our position is just to ignore it because anyone can come up with awards and I can come up with an award for Agnes Callamard if I wanted to but I don't have the time.

But anyway, as far as Agnes Callamard is concerned, I continue to await for her response.

Ms. Novenario: Okay. Kasi po last year may... sa speech po ni Presidente, may sinabi po siya na si George Soros daw po 'yung nagpopondo ng mga NGOs na umaatake sa kanyang administrasyon.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Well, I think it's --- it's a fact that the Open Society Institute does fund quite a number of NGOs 'no.

Is Agnes Callamard identified with the OSI? As a matter of fact, yes. I think Agnes Callamard will not deny it that she was appointed to her post largely also because of her connection with the Open Society Institute.

Q: [off mic]

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: Anong hindi pa sure? Ha? So that's just a fact.

Now, as to Agnes Callamard's statement that I erred in saying that the two Filipina rapporteurs were elected, I think the fact that they have to be appointed by the UN Human Rights Council constituting of at least 38 members, if I'm not mistaken, shows that there's a process by which a person is appointed and that includes the consent of the members of the UN Human Rights Council.

It's horse-trading at its best at the UN. But the process always begins with the state nominating anyone for any UN post. I will have more on this maybe tomorrow or next week.

Ms. Novenario: Thank you, sir.

PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESPERSON ROQUE: I will fully document my statement that they are partisan.

Thank you very much. Enjoy your lunch. Happy New Year!

--- END ---

Source: PCOO-PND (Presidential News Desk)