

Philippine national day

Partnership continues to mature

Manuel M. Lopez
AMBASSADOR OF THE PHILIPPINES

On the occasion of the 114th anniversary of the Proclamation of Philippine Independence, it is my honor to convey the warmest greetings of H.E. President Benigno S. Aquino III to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, to H.E. Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and to the people of Japan.



In September 2011 in Tokyo, President Aquino and Prime Minister Noda elevated our bilateral relations and charted the future of our strategic partnership with the signing of the Philippines-Japan Joint Statement on the Comprehensive Promotion of the Strategic Partnership between Neighboring Countries Connected by Special Bonds of Friendship.

In 2011, Japan remained the Philippines' top trading partner, top source of official development assistance, leading source of investments and tourism arrivals. With its considerable assistance to the Mindanao peace process, expanding disaster relief and maritime security cooperation, and increased interactions due to the Philippine-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, among other things, Japan is indeed truly one of the most valued partners of the Philippines.

Gaining ground

The Philippine government is committed to further improving its climate for business and foreign investments. President



Solidarity: Philippine President Benigno S. Aquino III (third from right) is briefed by Hiroshi Kameyama (third from left), mayor of Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, on the impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami during his visit to Japan in September 2011. MALACANANG PHOTO BUREAU

Aquino himself informed Prime Minister Noda last September in Tokyo that the Philippine business environment was "more open, fairer and freer."

President Aquino's staunch campaign on transparency, reform, and good governance on all fronts has been gaining ground. In fact, Moody's Invest-

mentors Service has recently raised its outlook for the Philippines to "positive" from "stable," citing continued improvement in the country's fiscal position.

In a statement, Moody's said, "The government of the Philippines has continued to demonstrate prudence in fiscal management, as characterized by low

budget deficits relative to its rating peers and a steadily declining level of debt relative to gross domestic product." Furthermore, the Philippine economy grew 6.4 percent in the first three months of 2012, its strongest quarterly pace in two years, powered by accelerated government spending, sustained private sector confidence and an exports rebound.

With these positive indicators, there are a myriad of opportunities for investments, including those being offered through public-private partnership (PPP) arrangements (in sectors such as railways, airports, energy, road networks, education, water and disaster management systems, etc.), semiconductors and electronics, business process outsourcing, small and medium-size enterprises and tourism.

With its well-educated, English-speaking workforce, the Philippines is experiencing growth in the robust outsourcing sector, helping boost local employment and providing a viable alternative to overseas employment. Philippine outsourcing grew by \$11 billion in 2011

Inspired by the past, moving forward to establish a future

Benigno S. Aquino III
PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES

It is my honor to greet my fellow Filipinos as we celebrate the 114th anniversary of the Proclamation of Philippine Independence.

Once again, the Filipino people are writing a significant chapter in our history. Like all turning points in this narrative, this chapter is an outcome of collective will, manifested by our desire to fulfill our country's great potential, as exhibited by the ability, creativity and fortitude of the Filipino. Our patriots embody these qualities in all of their undertakings, particularly in their greatest enterprise — the formation of the Republic of the Philippines. Today we also take inspirations from our countrymen who demonstrate passion, excellence and integrity in their chosen fields, thereby carrying this legacy of solidarity and nationhood from our forefathers. As we celebrate our independence, let it be our duty to reaffirm the values that have shaped and strengthened our nation, and to forge ahead in the fulfillment of the destiny envisioned by our heroes.

Let us uphold the spirit of hope and confidence that complements the momentum



of change in our time. May we also remain proud of our heritage and diversity, the foundations that distinguish our beloved Philippines. Inspired by the past we now commemorate, we move forward to establish a future that accords with our rightful place in the community of nations.



Sea paradise:The ocean surrounding the Philippines is home to a wide range of species and hosts major tourist destinations, such as El Nido beach in Palawan. PHILIPPINE EMBASSY



and is on track to hit \$25 billion by 2016.

Another opportunity for growth is tourism, especially with the relatively successful launch of the new "It's More Fun in the Philippines" campaign by

Philippine tourism officials this year. The inclusion of the Puerto Princesa Underground River as one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature will also help position the Philippines as a prime tourist destination for ecotourism, diving, golf, etc. Increased investments in tourism infrastructure and discussions on increasing airline flights between key Philippine and Japanese cities are ongoing and will definitely help spur tourism growth.

Japan is our third top source of foreign tourists. We hope to welcome more Japanese visitors. The Philippines offers great value as a tourism destination, retirement haven and even as a center for medical tourism. We also hope to encourage more Filipinos to visit and experience the beauty of Japan.

People-to-people bonds

Our people-to-people ties go back for centuries, and are integral to the advancement of our strategic partnership. Indeed, the Philippines and Japan have deep and extensive ties in the steady stream of people-to-people exchanges between both countries.

The vibrant Filipino community in Japan, and the growing number of Japanese living in the Philippines, as well as the exchanges of tourists and visitors, students, nurses and caregivers, long-term expatriate workers and managers, are generating deeper understanding and cultural appreciation between our two peoples.

We appreciate the numerous programs to promote cultural contacts and mutual understanding, especially among the youth, our next generation of leaders. We hope these initiatives strengthen "kizuna," the bonds of friendship between our two peoples.

At 56 years, Philippine-Japanese ties have matured well and have strengthened into a strategic partnership that can serve our mutual interests and collective aspirations in the so-called age of the Asia-Pacific century. Based on common adherence to democratic principles, respect for human rights and good neighborliness, the relationship has had a positive effect on regional peace and prosperity — and will continue this way far into the future.

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Philippine national day



Landmark: Known for its iconic shape, Mayon is an active volcano on the island of Luzon. PHILIPPINE EMBASSY

Encouraging people-to-people exchanges

Hajime Ishii
PRESIDENT, JAPAN-PHILIPPINES
PARLIAMENTARIANS' FRIENDSHIP
LEAGUE

It is with a sense of utmost privilege that I most warmly congratulate the people and government of the Republic of the Philippines on the celebration of the 114th anniversary of their nation's independence on June 12.

The Japanese people are grateful for the generous assistance by Filipino people extended to Japan on the occasion of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Such support is a testament to the deep bonds of friendship that have developed between our two peoples for more than half a century since the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1956. Our two peoples have engaged in close collaboration in various fields, including economic cooperation, disaster relief and management, development work, the Mindanao peace process, and cultural and youth exchanges, among others. Our people-to-people relations have grown deeper, with more than 220,000 Filipinos living in Japan and comprising the third biggest foreign population in our country, and Japanese nationals comprising the third biggest group of tourists in the Philippines every year.

When H.E. President Benigno Aquino III visited Japan in September 2011, he and Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda issued a joint statement declaring our bilateral relations a strategic partnership.

This stems from the fact that our two countries share such basic values as democracy, freedom and respect for human rights, strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region, and common aspirations for peace and stability as well as prosperity for our peoples and those of the rest of the world.

The Japan-Philippines Parliamentarians' Friendship League (JPPFL), one of the oldest and biggest parliamentarians' groups in Japan, visited Manila last May after a 10-year interval. It was truly a rewarding visit in which the 15 JPPFL members were able to pay a courtesy call on President Aquino and participate in a Joint General Meeting with the Philippines-Japan Parliamentary Association (PJPA). On this occasion, both sides were able to exchange views on a wide range of bilateral, regional and global issues and concerns.

On a bilateral level, both sides were able to take up such issues as the situation in the West Philippine Sea, the importance of securing cooperation between defense and maritime security authorities, trade and investment, the adoption of the Japanese terrestrial digital TV system, and the smooth sending and acceptance of nurses and caregivers. With both sides affirming the crucial role of the strategic partnership between the Philippines and Japan, our exchange of ideas indicated our common desire to bring about more meaningful change and a better life for our two peoples. In this regard, thus, it is an understatement to say that promoting mutual visits among parliamentarians is of great importance for



Main road: Named after former President Manuel Roxas, Roxas Boulevard runs along Manila Bay. PHILIPPINE EMBASSY

both nations. Not only does it facilitate continuing dialogue and deepening relations between our two nations' leaders, but it also encourages more people-to-people exchanges.

At this point, our two countries are focusing on a number of concerns. One of these is the improvement of the business environment in the Philippines to help make it more friendly to for-

ign investors, including the Japanese. This will certainly make for win-win relations between our two nations. Another matter has to do with finding a synergy between Japan's aging society and the Philippines' young and talented labor sector, including Filipino nurses and caregivers. Finally, concerns about regional security — including the sea lanes where goods and people

Assistance provided for Filipino seafarers

Over the years, around 700 Filipino seafarers have fallen prey to piracy on the high seas. These seafarers and their families who have suffered from psychological trauma need to be provided with psychosocial counseling so that they can go back to their seafaring job as soon as possible.

During the Philippine-Japan Tripartite Meeting on Seafarers' Development held at the MLIT Kasumigaseki Special Conference Room on Feb. 15, the All Japan Seamen's Union (JSU) responded to this need and committed to provide assistance to the Philippine government with 15 million pesos (about ¥27 million or \$345,000) per year for five years to address the escalating problem of piracy that is a threat to seafarers worldwide.



Conference: Filipino officials meet with Japanese shipowners during the Philippine-Japan Tripartite Meeting on Seafarers' Development in Tokyo on Feb. 15. PHILIPPINE EMBASSY

Earlier, the Philippine government, through the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), presented a set of proposals to address the welfare needs of Filipino seafarers and their families. The proposals included pre-departure counseling for seafarers, family counseling and specialized counseling and intervention for victims of traumatic experiences.

Philippine government officials, led by Philippine Ambassador to Japan Manuel M. Lopez, DOLE Secretary Rosalinda Dimapilis-Baldoz and Undersecretary Danilo P. Cruz, who headed the Philippine government delegation to the tripartite meeting, all expressed their appreciation to Yoji Fujisawa, president of the JSU for the assistance extended to Filipino seafarers.

Japanese shipowners continue to have full trust and confidence in the skills and competence of Filipino seafarers who constitute some 70 percent of all seafarers on board Japanese oceangoing vessels. Most of these Filipino seafarers are also members of the Associated Marine Officers and Seamen's Union of the Philippines (AMOSUP) headed by Conrado E. Oca.

should be able to pass freely — are high on our list. Our primary objective is to ensure the prosperity and stability of the region through freedom of navigation, mutual compliance with international law and the peaceful settlement of territorial disputes.

We are thus gratified by the very encouraging results of our recent visit to Manila and positive developments in other fronts. We certainly value our warm relations with the Philippines and hope to work more closely with our Philippine counterparts for a more effective response to the many issues and concerns facing our two nations. Together, we can help bring about more meaningful and positive change for our respective peoples.

On this note, I wish to reiterate to the Filipino people my admiration for their uninhibited passion for freedom and democracy, and my most heartfelt congratulations on their celebration of the 114th anniversary of their nation's independence!



A SALUTE TO FILIPINOS ON THE 114TH ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE

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- Philippine Airlines
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to the People
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