

Speech by CE at Reception in Celebration of 125th Anniversary of Proclamation of Philippine Independence (English only) (with video)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at the Reception in Celebration of 125th Anniversary of Proclamation of Philippine Independence today (June 9):

Honourable Speaker Romualdez (Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines, Mr Ferdinand Martin Romualdez), Consul-General Mr Raly Tejada (Consul-General of the Philippines in Hong Kong), Deputy Commissioner Pan Yundong (Deputy Commissioner of the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), members of the consular corps, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to join you this evening in celebrating the 125th anniversary of the Proclamation of Philippine Independence. On behalf of the Hong Kong SAR, I would like to start by extending my warmest congratulations to the people of the Philippines on this special occasion.

As we celebrate the National Day of the Philippines, we also recognise the friendship between China and the Philippines.

The relationship between our two countries was reaffirmed when His Excellency President Marcos Jr. of the Republic of the Philippines undertook a state visit to China in January this year. President Xi Jinping and President Marcos Jr. held a friendly and productive bilateral meeting in Beijing. The two sides issued a joint statement to further increase bilateral trade and co-operate in the key priority areas of agriculture, infrastructure, energy and people-to-people exchanges.

Hong Kong and the Philippines share a long history of close ties in many areas, particularly in trade and investment. In 2022, the trade in goods between the two places amounted to 16.4 billion US Dollars, making the Philippines our eleventh-largest trading partner in the world. The average growth rate was 4.6 per cent in the last five years.

Under the “one country, two systems” principle, Hong Kong is bestowed with the unique advantage of having the strong support of national strategies, while maintaining unparalleled connectivity with the world. Our status as a conduit for trade between the Philippines and Mainland China remains as solid as ever.

Last year, some 11 per cent of trade between the Philippines and Mainland China was routed through Hong Kong.

The full entry into force of the Free Trade Agreement between the ASEAN and Hong Kong, China, as well as the related Investment Agreement in 2021, represents a new chapter of our relations with the ASEAN economies, including the Philippines. I am confident that Hong Kong remains best-placed to serve the economic interests of the Philippines and ASEAN.

ASEAN countries are part of the world's largest free trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP. On this note, I congratulate the Philippines on the entry into force of the trade pact in your country last week. This will certainly provide a timely boost in driving the economic recovery of the region in the post-pandemic era.

On this note, Hong Kong's bid to join the RCEP would certainly add further impetus to the region. We have submitted our formal accession request last year, and we are much encouraged by the positive responses of quite a number of RCEP Members.

In particular, I am thankful to the Philippines for the support given to Hong Kong in the course of seeking accession to the RCEP as soon as possible.

We stand ready to engage in exploratory discussions with RCEP members, including the Philippines, with a view to deepening mutual understanding.

As the two places continue to strengthen our collaboration, I wish to express my gratitude to the Filipino community in Hong Kong, particularly the hundreds of thousands of Filipino domestic helpers here, for their great contribution to our society. Thank you sincerely.

We are thankful for their significant economic and social contributions over the years to the many families around Hong Kong, particularly in enabling many local women in families with children or the elderly to join our labour force. You have helped to build our city into the thriving metropolis that it is today, and we are proud to have you in our vibrant community.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to once again congratulate the people of the Philippines on the historic occasion of your 125th anniversary. Let us continue to work together to strengthen the bonds of friendship between our two places and build a brighter future for our peoples.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, please join me in a toast: To the People of the Republic of the Philippines. Cheers!