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Philippines–India: Making Impressive Strides in Strengthening Ties*

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The Philippines has emerged as a frontline service sector in business process outsourcing (BPO). With the rise of globalization, the BPO industry has emerged in recent years. It is a diversified industry that has become a role model for the Philippines. India cannot be ignored from the topic when it comes to outsourcing industry. It is now an important employment-generating sector in both countries that has been playing through waves of services sector.

This continuous friendship and technological exchange is not new between the two pre-dominantly English speaking countries in Asia. The Philippines established diplomatic relations with India in November 1949. In commemoration of the 60th anniversary of Philippines-India diplomatic relations, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo during her incumbency proclaimed the month of November as “Philippines-India Friendship Month” under the Proclamation No 1924 signed on October 23, 2009 in Malacañan Palace.

The amicable gesture cemented the 57-year old Treaty of Friendship signed in Manila on 11 July 1952 between the two democratic countries in Asia during the administrations of President Elpidio Quirino and Prime Minister

Jawaharlal Nehru, where its states that “*There shall be perpetual peace and everlasting amity between the Republic of the Philippines and the Republic of India and their peoples.*” Since then, we have had no less than thirty-four (34) bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding, several rounds of mutual visits by our highest leaders, and people exchanges that have enhanced ancient trade and cultural ties.

The Diplomatist deems that India plays an important part in the Philippine experience. The Philippines is Asia’s first democracy. India is the world’s largest democracy. Both are therefore the standard-bearers for freedom and democracy in the region. The Philippines and India are natural allies, not only because they have a shared history of being colonized by two

English-speaking nations, and therefore share that common language with aplomb, but both are Asian countries that are animated by vibrant democratic traditions based on republican ideals. Asia’s first democracy and Asia’s largest democracy are therefore surely headed for closer ties.

Forging defense relations and military exchange

Like almost all of the armed forces of many countries in the world, the Philippines and India have military components consisting of the

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army, navy, air force and various other inter-service institutions.

The defense relations of the two countries have been marked by frequent visits of Indian Navy and coast guard ships to the Philippines since 1998, and regularly since 2001. Furthermore, five Indian Navy ships, including a Frigate and two Destroyers visited Manila in 2004. Indian navy warships make port visits to Manila under the terms of the 2006 Philippines-India Defense Cooperation Agreement.

Since then, a delegation led by then Philippines Defense Intelligence Chief, Lt Gen Virgilio Totanes had visited India in January 2002. Subsequently, Gen Benjamin Defensor, then Commanding General of the Philippine Air Force and Lt Gen Dionisio Santiago, formerly the Commanding General of the Philippine Army, made separate visits to the subcontinent, that year.

On the other hand, officers of the Philippines armed forces are also being trained at various Indian military establishments. A highpoint of the defense ties was the official visit of Indian Army Chief, Gen NC Vij to Manila on October 2003 on the invitation of Lt Gen Gregorio Camiling, also a former Commanding General of the Philippine Army.

However, there is a big gap in many aspects between Philippines and Indian armed forces. The Philippines is an archipelagic country thriving to modernize its armed forces geared towards the development of ground, naval, and air defense capabilities. The Indian subcontinent armed with a large population maintains the third largest standing armed force in the world.

The advantage of India's having an indigenous defense industrial base is clearly apparent due to its cost effectiveness. The prices of weapon systems and allied support equipment, which are controlled by a few developed nations, have risen at rates much

faster than the prices of other commodities. However, India's defense industrial capacity essentially consists of the Ordnance Factories and the Defense Public Sector Undertakings functioning under the Department of Defense Productions and Supplies, Defense Research and Development Organization and, to an extent, select civilian public and private sector manufacturing establishments.

As part of the continuous defense diplomacy, both countries are sending their military students to their respective defense colleges to reinforce camaraderie and intellectual exchange through security and military scholarships.

Robust economic and technological cooperation

Since 2004 on the eighth meeting of the Philippines-India Joint Working Group in New Delhi, the two countries continuously held the bilateral process to review and assess the progress of trade, investments, economic, technical, scientific, and technological cooperation.

The establishment of a Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation is proposed by both Philippines and India to further strengthen and develop mutual assistance in various fields of cooperation. And that the proposed mechanism will be co-chaired by the two countries' Ministers of Foreign Affairs who will meet once in two years.

In 2011, with India's booming economy and increasing middle class ready to spend on tourism, the Philippines' flag carrier operated six flights a week from New Delhi to Manila and through Bangkok between the two capitals.

According to the Department of Tourism, visitor arrivals from India to the Philippines in February 2013 registered at 4,136 or 18 percent

higher than for the same period in 2012 at 3,491 tourists. According to sources from the Department of Foreign Affairs in New Delhi, other notable people-to-people exchanges between the two countries are seen in the huge number of Indian alumni from the Asian Institute of Management in Makati City, plus the constant number of Indian student pilots who are enrolled in Philippine flying schools and who receive and renew their respective commercial pilots' licenses from the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines.

Even Indians from the tribal Northeast States of India, such as Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram find affinity with the tribal groups in Northern Philippines such as those from Abra, Benguet, Kalinga, and Apayao in the Cordillera Autonomous Region (CAR), with whom there is some similarity.

Global power has simultaneously shifted and is shifting economically. Today a multipolar world exists. We see revitalized India and China with its inclusion in economic grouping like BRICS with Brazil, Russia and South Africa. The Philippines is part of the emerging markets called TIP with Turkey and Indonesia. These new Asian drivers of global change are becoming global players that can forcefully alter the relationship between the industrialized and the developing countries.

India and China are plausible Asian leaders in the so-called Asian century. These two competitive Asian countries when combined together in population comprise about 40 percent of humanity. Both countries boast economies that are becoming visible at present. They also represent two of the world's fastest-growing militaries, armed with nuclear weapons, and are expanding their spheres of influence across oceans.

Until today, India is carving a niche and prominence in the dotcom era of the current

detrterritorialised world. Most countries are looking up to Indian geniuses whose traditional mathematical and scientific thinking has been legendary to launch its lucrative and sophisticated business services in information technology.

Admittedly, Indian defense technology is more advanced than the Philippines. Especially with India's tremendous economic growth, it is acknowledged today as one of the leading and global producers of computer software, operates short and intermediate-range ballistic missiles and nuclear capable aircraft and naval vessels, and active in military space programme. Expectedly, India is a large country with a large armed forces and with a tradition of soldiering. Given its geopolitical situation, defense preparedness becomes essential.

Both countries can benefit from a much closer cooperation in development and application in aviation and space technology including telecommunications, television broadcast, meteorological services, disaster warning, and surveillance satellite.

Knowing India's strong Naval Aviation, it can assist the Philippines in defense research and technology transfer on naval ship design and repairs, and in maintaining stability in the high seas and other transnational crimes and terrorism.

Stronger strategic partnership

India has supported the Philippines' positions in quite a few international issues in world trade, labour, and even the latter's quest in 2004 to be a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council from 2005 to 2006 when India withdrew its candidacy in favor of the Philippines. In 2011, Philippines also supported India, as the latter was elected to the rotating two-year membership in the Security Council.

Consultative mechanisms evolving from political cooperation between the two countries fostered at the turn of the 21st century and

Stronger bilateral relations fortified by recent exchanges of high level visits between the two neighboring Asian countries were also seen when former Indian President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam made a state visit to the Philippines

during the Eighth Round of the Policy Consultation Talks held in New Delhi in 2005 in which the Philippines and India agreed to increase its multi-dimensional and comprehensive relations.

But before that, in 2004 both agreed to establish a security dialogue that would serve as a policy forum for sharing security assessments and for reviewing and giving direction to cooperation in bilateral or regional security and defense matters. As a result, the first Philippines-India Security Dialogue was held in Manila on 12 March 2004 that highlighted the signing of the Extradition Treaty.

Stronger bilateral relations fortified by recent exchanges of high level visits between the two neighboring Asian countries were also seen when former Indian President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam made a state visit to the Philippines from February 3-6, 2006. The said state visit of President Kalam was meant to reciprocate former President Fidel Ramos's three-day state visit to India on March 2-5, 1997.

These friendly ties were again followed when finally Prime Minister Manmohan Singh briefly visited the Philippines on January 14, 2007 to participate in the Fifth ASEAN-India

Summit and Second East Asia Summit in Cebu City. At that time, he discussed some bilateral, regional, and multilateral issues of mutual concern with President Gloria Arroyo on strengthening strategic partnerships in the fields of dairy production, importation of affordable medicines, and combating terrorism. Meanwhile, former President Arroyo undertook a three-day state visit to India on October 3-6, 2007, being only the second Philippine president to do so, as she visited Mumbai, New Delhi, and Agra.

On the relationship of Philippines and India within the context of ASEAN, H.E. President Benigno S Aquino III designated Vice President Jejomar C Binay to represent him during ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit on December 20-21, 2012, to celebrate closer ASEAN-India relations across many functional areas.

Strengthened ties: the way forward

The Philippines and India should hand in hand and equally engage each other in many fronts. Given all the confidence and potentials each country has, they must strategically continue to gauge assistance and learn best practices from each other in the fields of defense infrastructure, industry development, business process outsourcing, life sciences, research technology, higher education, agriculture, and medicine since both Asian democratic countries share similar values and cultures.

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