

Good afternoon! *Magandang hapon po!*

Before I begin, allow me to express my sincere condolences to the victims and families affected by the recent earthquakes in Cebu and Davao. In the spirit of solidarity, we pray for their swift recovery and return to normalcy.

I am deeply honored to be here for the Project for the Establishment of Rice Processing System in Isabela. On this signing ceremony, it is a privilege to be joined today by Secretary Lazaro.

More than just a staple food, rice in the Philippine is at the heart of every Filipino household and community. Similarly, we Japanese revere rice as a major food source and vital part of our culture.

As children, we are taught to respect every precious grain. I believe the crop's importance is captured beautifully in an old Japanese saying: Seven gods live in a grain of rice.

With this shared understanding, we are pleased to

assist the Philippine government in its important initiatives. With the Rice System Processing project, we hope to strengthen Philippine agriculture, including its rice sector.

Once operational, the rice processing system will help deliver a host of benefits — from reducing post-harvest losses to more employment opportunities. Apart from promoting an efficient value chain, it can assist the National Food Authority in maintaining its mandated rice buffer stock.

Above all, this project aims to deliver meaningful benefits to both producers and consumers of rice. Through this collaboration, we aim to secure the livelihoods of farmers and ensure a stable, affordable supply of rice. In achieving these, we hope to enhance the sustainability and resilience of Philippine agriculture.

As a vital sector, the importance of developing the country's agriculture extends well beyond the Philippines. In the context of the whole Asian region, the sector underpins both food security and broader economic development.

Realizing this, Japan provides strong support to countries, like the Philippines, in fostering their agricultural potential. In this partnership, I am pleased to see our efforts align closely with the set priorities of the Philippine government.

For almost seven decades, Japan has been a steadfast partner for the country's agricultural sector. Its assistance has manifested in infrastructure, machinery and farm tractors, irrigation projects, and through technical expertise.

In its commitment, Japan has also contributed through various international organizations. We have worked with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) towards global agricultural productivity and food security.

In April 2025, His Excellency President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Prime Minister ISHIBA Shigeru met and affirmed that Japan and the Philippines would work closely to strengthen agricultural ties between the two countries.

And just last October 2, Ministry of Agriculture,

Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) Minister Koizumi attended the 25th ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) Plus Three Meeting and held a bilateral discussion with Secretary Laurel. During their meeting, both reaffirmed their commitment to deepening agricultural cooperation. This includes enhancing trade, promoting technology transfer, and advancing sustainability initiatives.

Riding on this momentum, we now look to next year's milestone: the 70th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and Japan.

As we mark another bright chapter in our friendship, we are reminded of our journey as partners; of how much we have accomplished since, and how much more we can achieve down this shared road.

On behalf of the Government of Japan, we reaffirm our firm commitment to working closely with the Philippines. From Isabela to dining tables across the country, may our friendship nourish more Filipinos, one rice grain at a time.

Maraming Salamat po! Thank you very much! Arigatou

Gozaimasu!