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MEDIA RELEASE

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Dili, Timor-Leste

Singapore and the Philippines express support for Timor-Leste's bid for ASEAN membership after Official visits

A high-level delegation led by the Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, His Excellency Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão, has returned to Dili after official visits to near neighbours, Singapore and the Philippines. Meetings held during the intense schedule over the past weeks have strengthened Timor-Leste's bilateral relations in the region and consolidated support for Timor-Leste's bid for ASEAN Membership.

Prior to the Official Visit to Singapore the Prime Minister, accompanied by the Secretary of State for Defence, H.E. Júlio Tomás Pinto, and Chief of the F-FDTL, Major-General Lere Anan Timur, participated in the Shangri-la Defence Dialogue. This year the dialogue was held in Singapore between the 31st May to 2nd of June and brought together Defence Ministers, personnel and experts to discuss and debate issues on security and defence in a regional and global context. The Prime Minister delivered a keynote address on "Defending National Interests: Preventing Conflict." He also presided over the first Trilateral Defence Ministers meeting between Timor-Leste, Indonesia and Australia held in the margins of the Shangri-la Defence Dialogue.

The official visit, undertaken in response to the invitation of the Government of Singapore, took place between the 3rd and 5th of June. The delegation accompanying the Prime Minister included the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, H.E. José Luís Guterres, Minister of Finance, H.E. Emília Pires, Minister of Transport and Communications, H.E. Pedro Lay da Silva, Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, H.E. Alfredo Pires, Secretary of State for Defence, Secretary of State for ASEAN Affairs, H.E. Roberto Soares, and senior officials from the Timor-Leste Government.

Prime Minister Gusmão met with Singapore's President Tony Tan Keng Yam and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. The Prime Ministers engaged in bilateral talks and both welcomed increasing interest among Singapore companies to explore business opportunities in Timor-Leste, particularly in the oil and gas sector.

A bilateral air services agreement was signed on behalf of the Government of Timor-Leste by Minister of Transport and Communications, H.E. Pedro Lay da Silva, which Singapore's Prime Minister Lee said would boost trade and investment and bring the two countries' people closer together. "More can now enjoy bustling Dili, the beautiful Ataúro Island and the stunning Mount Ramelau", he said.

Members of the delegation visited Jurong Island to study Singapore's oil and gas processing facilities and Prime Minister Gusmão delivered a lecture at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies on "Timor-Leste's Role and Future in the Asia-Pacific", a second at the Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy on "Peace building and State building: From fragility to resilience" and a keynote address at the Thomson Reuters Asia Petroleum Lunch.

Regarding ASEAN Prime Minister Lee noted that "Timor-Leste naturally wants to strengthen its ties with the region and desires to join ASEAN." He reaffirmed Singapore's commitment to the ASEAN Coordinating Council Working Group process, and Singapore's continued assistance in capacity building for Timor-Leste.

At the invitation of HE Benigno Aquino III, President of the Republic of the Philippines, the Prime Minister then conducted



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an official visit to Manila in the Philippines from the 5th to 9th of June. On this occasion the delegation included the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Minister of Finance, Minister of Education, H.E. Bendito Freitas, Minister of Commerce Industry and Environment, H.E. António da Conceição, Minister of Public Works, H.E. Gastão de Sousa, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, H.E. Mariano Assanami Sabino, Minister of Tourism, H.E. Francisco Kalbuadi Lay and the Secretary of State for ASEAN Affairs.

President Aquino and Prime Minister Gusmão discussed the strengthening of cooperation in education, defense, technical cooperation, and trade and investment. Their bilateral meeting reviewed progress in existing agreements covering marine and fisheries cooperation, academic cooperation, and training and development of Timorese diplomats at the Philippines' Foreign Service Institute. The meetings were described as "warm, friendly and productive."

President Aquino said "We are bound by common aspirations. It is by working together that we realize the potential of our nations and of our region."

During the visit to the Philippines three important Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) were signed.

The first MOU, between the two countries' foreign affairs agencies, established a bilateral mechanism that promises dialogue and an exchange of views on bilateral, regional, and international issues of mutual interest. These include military consultations and sharing of intelligence.

Another MOU, between the Philippines' Department of Public Works and Highways and Timor-Leste's Ministry of Public Works, commits the DPWH to assist Timor-Leste public works' personnel in infrastructure planning, quality control, and maintenance.

Philippine Normal University and the Ministry of Education of Timor-Leste also signed an MOU, which aims to enhance training of Timorese teachers in various degrees, programs, and specializations.

Regarding ASEAN Prime Minister Gusmão said "Timor-Leste is seeking membership in ASEAN as we believe we can contribute to this dynamic and growing region to which we all belong. We look forward to joining with the Philippines in the ASEAN family."

President Aquino responded "Allow me to express the Philippines' support for Timor-Leste's bid to join the ASEAN community. We look forward to working more closely with you in the future in advancing regional dialogue, which we know will redound not only to the growth of our people and our countries, but will also contribute to the stability and continued development of our region."

During the visit, Prime Minister Gusmão delivered a lecture at the University of the Philippines on "Peace and Reconciliation: Timor-Leste experience". He met with Timorese students and also addressed potential investors. The delegation visited sites of interest to Timor-Leste's development such as the Water Treatment Plant and the Subic Exclusive Development Zone.

This recent visit to Singapore and the Philippines are part of the Prime Minister's tour this year of ASEAN countries. His first official visit was to Thailand in April.

Spokesperson for the Fifth Constitutional Government Agio Pereira noted "This trip has been an important investment of time and energy to further consolidate Timor-Leste's bilateral relationship with near neighbours Singapore and the Philippines. With the warm reception given to the delegation, the productive meetings on regional cooperation, the positive responses from investors and the expressions of support for Timor-Leste's ASEAN bid, this must be considered a very successful visit for the nation." **ENDS**



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