

The United States has an “unwavering” commitment to the Philippines, US Vice President Kamala Harris told the country’s president yesterday during a visit aimed at countering China and rebuilding ties that were fractured over human rights abuses in the Southeast Asian nation.

Harris is the highest-ranking US official to visit Manila since President Ferdinand Marcos took power in June, signalling a growing rapport between the longtime allies after years of frosty relations under his Beijing-friendly predecessor Rodrigo Duterte.

She also met with her Philippine counterpart Sara Duterte, the daughter of the former leader whose deadly drug war sparked an international investigation into alleged human rights abuses.

“We stand with you in defence of international rules and norms as it relates to the South China Sea,” Harris told Marcos at the start of talks in the presidential palace in Manila.

“An attack on the Philippine armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the South China Sea would invoke the US mutual defence commitment... that is our unwavering commitment to the Philippines.”

Marcos said he did not “see a future for the Philippines that does not include the United States.”



The United States has a long and complex relationship with the Philippines -- and the Marcos family. Marcos's dictator father ruled the former US colony for two decades with the support of Washington, which saw him as a Cold War ally.

Relations between the two countries soured under the foul-mouthed Duterte. In 2016, Duterte called Barack Obama a “son of a whore” over warnings he would be questioned by the then US president over his controversial drug war. Washington is now seeking to bolster its security alliance with Manila under the new president.

That includes a mutual defence treaty and a 2014 pact, known by the acronym EDCA, which allows for the US military to store defence equipment and supplies on five Philippine bases. It also allows US troops to rotate through those military bases.

EDCA stalled under Duterte but the United States and the Philippines have expressed support for accelerating its implementation as China becomes increasingly assertive.

"We have identified new locations and have begun a process with the Philippines to finalise those," a US official told reporters on condition of anonymity ahead of Harris's meeting with Marcos.

China claims sovereignty over almost the entire sea, while the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei have overlapping claims to parts of it.



PHOTO: AFP

Says China on global cooperation in curbing rising temperatures after COP27 climate deal

China yesterday welcomed a deal struck at the landmark COP27 climate summit in Egypt, but warned there was still a “long way to go” for global cooperation in curbing rising temperatures.

"The road map for doubling global adaptation funding is still unclear, which is not conducive to building mutual trust between the north and the south," Beijing's foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said, referring to funds for poorer countries already affected by climate change.

“Global climate governance has a long way to go,” she added, saying “developed countries have still not fulfilled their commitment to providing \$100 billion in climate fund-

ing to developing countries every year."

China attached "great importance to this meeting and fully supports Egypt in hosting it successfully," she said.

China -- the world's biggest polluter -- at the summit rejected the idea that it should no longer be considered a developing country, though it is now the world's second-biggest economy.

The issue was at the heart of a contentious debate at COP27 on establishing a fund to compensate poorer countries already devastated by the fallout from global warming.

The UN climate summit -- which wrapped up Sunday -- ultimately agreed on the creation of that fund. But it failed to push ahead on further cutting emissions in order to

keep alive the aspirational goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels.

South Africa hailed the historic United Nations deal, but said “further urgent action” was required. “While we welcome the incremental progress reflected in the... package on finance towards the establishment of the new collective goal in 2025, we believe further urgent action is required to meet developed countries’ obligations,” South Africa’s environmental affairs ministry said in a statement.

At the start of the talks South African President Cyril Ramaphosa criticised international funders for making it difficult for poorer nations to access aid to fight climate change.

MALAYSIA ELECTION

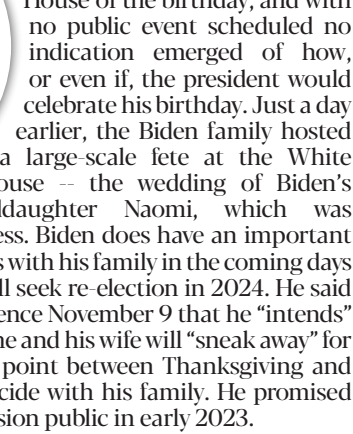
Race on to form coalition govt

Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said yesterday he is in talks with the party of ex-premier Najib Razak, who is in jail for corruption, to form the next government after an inconclusive election. Anwar's multi-ethnic coalition, which campaigned on an anti-corruption ticket, won 82 seats in Saturday's election, the most of any bloc but still short of the majority needed to form government. Malaysia, one of Southeast Asia's biggest economies, has had three changes of government in as many years, underscoring recent political instability. Saturday's election offered no immediate solution to that impasse, only more of the political horse-trading that have characterised recent polls. "I am still very optimistic that we will be able to form a government, more transparent, more democratic and to safeguard the interests of the people in Malaysia," Anwar told a news conference. Another bloc, headed by former premier Muhyiddin Yassin, has also claimed it has enough backing to form government with the support of the conservative Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS).

For the first time in history, a sitting president turned 80 years old in the White House on Sunday but did not celebrate in any public way. It wasn't until mid-afternoon that First Lady Jill Biden posted an affectionate message, with two photos of the couple dancing in tuxedos and gala attire.

“There’s no one else I’d rather dance with than you. Happy Birthday Joe! I love you,” Jill Biden tweeted. It was the sole mention from the White House of the birthday, and with

House of the one today, and with no public event scheduled no indication emerged of how, or even if, the president would celebrate his birthday. Just a day earlier, the Biden family hosted a large-scale fete at the White House -- the wedding of Biden's granddaughter Naomi, which was closed to the press. Biden does have an important matter to discuss with his family in the coming days -- whether he will seek re-election in 2024. He said at a press conference November 9 that he "intends" to run, and said he and his wife will "sneak away" for a week at some point between Thanksgiving and Christmas to decide with his family. He promised to make his decision public in early 2023.



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