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Philippines Pushes for Trade Breakthrough During Marcos-Trump Talks

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President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is in Washington seeking major trade concessions as part of high-level discussions with U.S. President Donald Trump. Central to the talks are reciprocal tariffs recently introduced by the U.S. and efforts to shape a broader economic agreement that supports Philippine exports and U.S. market access.

Under a July 9 directive, President Trump imposed a 20 percent tariff on Philippine exports, set to take effect on August 1, up from the previous 17 percent. While considered modest compared to steeper hikes faced by other nations, the increase has prompted swift diplomatic engagement. Trade Secretary Cristina Roque confirmed that negotiations have been conducted in good faith, aimed at securing balanced trade terms.

Ahead of the meeting, key Philippine officials, including Roque and investment lead Frederick Go, traveled to Washington to lobby for tariff reductions and discuss possible trade frameworks. They highlighted the impact of tariffs on priority exports, including coconuts, mangoes, and semiconductors, the latter of which currently benefit from partial exemptions.

President Marcos expressed his government's readiness to pursue a bilateral trade deal focused on long-term cooperation. Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary Raquel Solano noted that beyond trade, the agenda includes enhanced security cooperation, maritime stability, and the modernization of Philippine defense capabilities.

Manila has also proposed exploring a free trade agreement or a broader reciprocal trade pact. In exchange for reduced tariffs, the Philippines is open to adjusting local content laws and expanding imports of key U.S. goods such as soybeans and meat. Officials argue such adjustments would deliver mutual benefits and strengthen economic resilience.

In response to misinformation, Secretary Roque addressed a fake document circulating online that falsely claimed the Philippines had already agreed to major concessions. She urged the public to rely on official sources and warned against spreading unverified claims.

Despite the tariff concerns, the Philippine export sector remains relatively strong. As of May 2025, exports to the U.S. had grown by 10.8 percent year-on-year, driven largely by electronics and semiconductors.

As the talks conclude, the Philippines aims to secure reduced tariff rates and a clear framework for future trade cooperation. The outcome could significantly impact major export sectors and serve as a test of bilateral resilience amid growing economic and geopolitical pressure in the Indo-Pacific.