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Duterte off to India for 3-day official visit

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President Duterte sought stronger measures to fight extremist violence in the region through better cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), India and other partners as he flew to New Delhi yesterday for an official visit.

In his departure speech at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 2 in Pasay City, Duterte said ASEAN had been "all trade and commerce and everything else under the sun... but we do not have the platform for terrorism and other problems of law and order."

Duterte is attending the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit and India's National Republic Day in New Delhi beginning yesterday until Jan. 27.

While there have been agreements on extremism and terrorism

among ASEAN member-countries and their dialogue partners, Duterte said he would not hesitate to implement harsh and extreme measures to fight these problems as well as piracy at sea.

Otherwise, "we'd always be at the mercy of (the criminals)," Duterte said of his plans to adopt a hardline policy toward these security threats.

Duterte raised concerns anew over the piracy and kidnappings at Celebes Sea, Sulu Sea and the Molucca Sea, and stressed the need for ASEAN leaders to discuss maritime security concerns regularly to enable them to come up with more concrete actions to address the problems.

"They cannot accomplish anything because the waters contiguous to the archipelago of the Philippines are getting to be dangerous. And yet it is only Indonesia who's active there," Duterte said.

Duterte cited the impact of unabated sea piracy at the cost

* DUTERTE, RODRIGO

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of trade. "It's doubling up everything, fuel. You have to go around. Then the freight charges, of course it goes with it. And the insurance," he said.

"So we have to come up with a platform on how to deal with terrorism. Me, I go for a hardline policy. Blow them up in the high seas. Destroy them. Use cannons," Duterte said.

He said China, also ASEAN's dialogue partner, could likewise be tapped to assist the country in borderline patrolling and other piracy issues.

"I am telling you, if we cannot do it, we just have to call China to come in and blow them off just like Somalia, that Aden Strait there, were it not for the presence of the Chinese, piracy would not have stopped," Duterte said.

Indian investors

In New Delhi, Philippine Ambassador to India Teresita Daza said Indian firms are interested

to join the Duterte administration's "Build, Build, Build" program in a development that highlights the "exciting time" in the ties between the two countries.

Daza said the P8-trillion infrastructure program offers Indian companies an opportunity to explore the Philippines as an investment destination.

Daza did not identify the companies planning to pour investments in the program, which officials claimed would usher in a "golden age" of infrastructure in the Philippines.