

GMA trip bags \$2 billion in investment pledges

by PAOLO ROMERO
Philstar.com

MANILA – President Arroyo arrived on June 7 from an eight-day trip to South Korea and Russia where over \$2 billion in investment and financial commitments were secured and diplomatic and security ties with the two countries were strengthened, Malacañang said on Sunday.

Arroyo arrived aboard a Philippine Airlines flight at the Centennial Terminal at around 7:50am with First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo along with some Cabinet officials. She was met by Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde, who accompanied Arroyo to the trip, told an early news briefing at the airport that “the President was focused on labor and opening markets for our products in every country she visited.”

“All in all, we were able to get a total investment commitment of \$2.211 billion,” Remonde said.

In Seoul, South Korea, the President joined the celebration for the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and South Korea. While in Korea, she also joined other heads of state in the region to attend the Asean-Republic of Korea Commemorative Summit.

She also held bilateral talks with South Korean President Lee Myung Bak and Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, who agreed to strengthen his country’s defense cooperation with the Philippines and work together to maintain stability in the disputed areas in the South China Sea.

Among the investment commitments secured during the trip are \$12.97 million from the Korea International Cooperation Agency for a rice processing complex that will be built in Luzon; \$150 million from the Export-Import Bank of Korea for alternative energy projects and an additional \$475 million for similar ventures, including \$175 mil-

lion from Eco-Solutions for a jathropa plantation in South Cotabato and \$300 million of investment from Enviro-Plasma for a sugar ethanol plant in Clark.

Korean firm M Castle also pledged to push tourism projects in Subic worth \$1.521 billion while Dong Wang is planning to put up a \$515 million hotel and golf course in Clark, Remonde said.

Other investment pledges include the \$6.52 million for an agricultural project; \$10.9 million for the expansion of the Malinao Dam in Bohol; and \$49 million for a coconut shell processing plant.

Remonde said Hanjin, one of the biggest investors in the Philippines, informed Arroyo of plans to put up a ship component facility in addition to their ship building complex in Subic. The facility is expected to generate \$29 million in annual average production value.

In Russia, Arroyo was able to boost trade, tourism as well as defense ties following meeting with President Dmitry Medvedev at the sidelines of the 13th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum.

The two leaders gave the go-signal for the signing of the air agreement allowing direct flights between the two countries. Negotiations for the agreement have been concluded last year.

He said the President and the Russian leader also agreed to strengthen security cooperation starting with the exchange of defense attaches.

Remonde said during the forum, Arroyo “really stood as the voice of the Third World and the developing nations.”

“The President was really able to project the need for the world to look at the economic global perspectives not only from the optics of the developed countries but especially the developing countries,” he said. ■

Seaman’s wife: ‘He’s still alive’

by TONETTE OREJAS
Inquirer.net

MANILA – In a well-kept bungalow that Arden Jugueta built for his family in Barangay Buliran in San Miguel, Bulacan, there is a heavy sense of gloom.

The man of the house is still not home, his scheduled return delayed by three days now.

“Until we see his body, I believe he’s still alive,” said Jugueta’s wife, Miguela, 41.

A representative of Air France had called Miguela to confirm that her husband was among the 228 passengers on the plane that crashed into the Atlantic Ocean on May 31.

“He (Air France representative) told me, ‘Condolence.’ I said, ‘I won’t believe he’s dead until I have his body.’ Bong (Jugueta) is a good swimmer. He might have survived,” Miguela told the Philippine Daily Inquirer in a phone interview on Thursday.

Employed by El Borg Shipping Management as a fitter-mechanic on a vessel in Brazil, Jugueta was on his way home after finishing his three-month contract.

Turning 42 on July 9, Jugueta had been a seaman for 18 years.

“He last called me before he boarded the plane for the 7pm flight,” Miguela recalled.

Don’t take that flight
She said she discouraged her husband from taking that May 31 flight from Rio de Janeiro.

AIR FRANCE JET CRASH

“I advised him to rebook the flight to May 28 so that he wouldn’t have to pay for his hotel accommodation and he could have more days of vacation here (Bulacan). He was rather shy to ask the company because it always shouldered the fare for his vacation,” Miguela said.

“So he took the flight together with his Croatian boss and a Romanian co-employee,” she said.

Gold necklace
She spent the past few days in prayers for his safety. Arden, she said, kept deep faith in God. He always wore a gold necklace with a crucifix pendant and carried in his pocket a prayer booklet with the image of St. Joseph, the patron of fathers.

“I cannot do anything if this is the will of God, but I continue to hope he is still alive,” Miguela said.

Thursday was sadder because it was the 20th birthday of Argel, their eldest son.

“Bong always tries to be around during his children’s birthdays,” Miguela said.

Argel has taken a leave of absence from work as a seaman in Indonesia and is expected to be home on Friday, according to Miguela.

“The last time we saw him

(Arden) was on March 3 [when he left for Brazil],” she said.

Because her husband was frequently working overseas during their 19 years of marriage, Miguela has worked full-time as a mother to raise their three children. Aleli is 17 and Arden Jr. is 15.

Happy memories

Their relatives have tried to comfort the children by talking about their happy memories with their father, said Rommel Ramos, Miguela’s cousin.

Miguela has not discussed insurance matters with her husband’s company or Air France. “Not yet, I won’t until [we are sure] he’s dead,” she said.

Should that come, she said she would need assistance for the education of Aleli and Arden Jr. “That’s the reason that Bong has been working abroad. He wants the kids to get a good education, to live comfortably,” she said.

“I can say that Arden is the perfect husband and father to my three kids. He’s a good provider so this is difficult to accept,” she said.

Air France has told families of passengers aboard Flight 447 to abandon any hope of survivors. ■



FREE AT LAST. Kidnapped victim Lea Laping Patris, right, is escorted by Philippine Marine Captain Neil Estrella as they disembark from a navy boat Sunday, June 7, in Zamboanga City. Laping escaped from her abductors, members of the al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf, as they tried to evade a marine offensive that killed three kidnapers.

AP Photo by Al Jacinto

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