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ARROYO-EAGA

EAGA TOPS ARROYO'S AGENDA IN BRUNEI VISIT

MANILA, Aug 21 (Bernama) -- Reviving the inactive East Asean Growth Area (EAGA) tops President Gloria Arroyo's agenda when she leaves for Brunei tomorrow for a three-day visit.

Arroyo, accompanied by official and business delegations, will take up the EAGA, dormant for years, when she holds talks with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, official spokesman Rigoberto Tiglao said today.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had already backed the revival of EAGA during Arroyo's recent visit to Kuala Lumpur, the official said.

EAGA, a sub-regional grouping of border areas of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, was launched in mid-'90s by Asean leaders to spur trade and commerce in the region.

But since 1998, EAGA had failed to gain momentum due to lack of support by Asean governments, leaving the private sector alone to keep it alive.

Arroyo's visit to the tiny oil state will focus on the theme "Brunei's Leadership in the BIMP-EAGA (Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asean Growth Area)."

Arroyo said she and Dr Mahathir had already agreed to push the EAGA, adding "I hope to do the same in Brunei, especially because the Sultan of Brunei has been looked upon as a leader of the BIMP-EAGA."

The president and her delegation will be welcomed at the Istana Nurul Iman by Sultan Bolkiah and will be accorded military honours, including a 21-gun salute.

While in Brunei, Arroyo's delegation will hold bilateral talks with the Brunei counterpart to improve trade and investment ties between the two Asean partners.

She will also address Brunei businessmen and is expected to invite them to invest in the Philippines. From Brunei, Arroyo will proceed to Singapore for another official visit. -- BERNAMA

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