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Arroyo-Mahathir

ARROYO TO HOLD TALKS WITH DR MAHATHIR

MANILA, April 29 (Bernama) -- President Gloria Arroyo will take up the plight of Filipino refugees in Sabah when she holds bilateral talks with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on May 7 in Kuala Lumpur.

The talks, official statements say, will come at the sidelines of the Pacific Basin Economic Council (PBEC) meeting in Kuala Lumpur where Arroyo will deliver a keynote speech

Arroyo is keen in forging a new labour accord with Malaysia that will open certain industries, including those in Sabah, to Filipino labour to address the refugee problems in Sabah.

She has ordered Foreign Affairs officials to deploy more consular personnel to Sabah to document Filipinos, most of them displaced by the armed conflict in Mindanao, staying illegally there.

Malaysia has already deported over 3,000 Filipino illegals in Sabah and plans to carry out more as part of its crackdown on foreigners entering Malaysia without proper documents.

Arroyo says lack of travel papers was the reason that drove Malaysia to send illegal Filipino aliens home.

She says this could have been avoided had the Department of Foreign Affairs stationed more consular officials in Sabah.

The solution was "really to step up their documentation. And so we will expect presence of more Foreign Affairs personnel in the area to undertake this objective," acting Press Secretary Silvestre Afable quoted her as saying.

"But they (Malaysia) really cut down on their deportation since we sent" Presidential Adviser Paul Dominguez to Sabah last month, the president says

Aside from labour, Arroyo will also discuss with Dr Mahathir possible joint ventures in energy by capitalising on the Philippines' complementarities with Malaysia on this sector.

During the PBEC meeting, she will also seek more investments from PBEC economies in view of the Philippines' highly liberalised investment climate, particularly in finance, trade and technology.

PBEC, which groups senior business leaders from 1,100 major corporations in 20 economies in the Pacific, aims to expand trade and investment through open markets.

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