

09 MAY 2002

Arroyo

VISIT TO KL, THAILAND "FRUITFUL", SAYS ARROYO

MANILA, May 9 (Bernama) -- President Gloria Arroyo today described as "fruitful and rewarding" her just-concluded whirlwind visit to neighbouring Malaysia and Thailand.

In her arrival statement, she cited her talks with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad which, she said, forged firmer political and economic ties between the Philippines and Malaysia.

"The visit has brought the Malaysian people closer to our own in terms of greater security, progress and social advancement," Arroyo, who also delivered a keynote address at the Pacific Basin Economic Council meeting in Kuala Lumpur, said.

Arroyo and Dr Mahathir witnessed the signing of a trilateral agreement by the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia in the fight against terrorism and transnational crimes.

"In times of challenge and opportunity, there is nothing more natural or easier than to look to our neighbours for mutually beneficial arrangements," she said.

Arroyo praised Dr Mahathir for helping the Philippines bring about peace and progress in the troubled Mindanao region.

Philippine government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front representatives signed an agreement to undertake humanitarian, rehabilitation and development projects in the region.

Arroyo said the accord "paves the way for the participation of the Islamic Development Bank in the rehabilitation and development effort" in southern Philippines.

She said she was also pleased that while in Kuala Lumpur, officials of Maybank, a leading Malaysian bank, informed her of their plans to put up branches in Mindanao to support the government's development thrust in the region.

While in Bangkok, Arroyo said, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra pledged to join the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia in the fight against international terrorism.

She also witnessed the signing of six business agreements worth almost US\$1 billion that would further expand trade relations between the Philippines and Thailand.

-- BERNAMA

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