

GMA to promote hiring of more skilled Pinoy workers in Qatar

President Arroyo vowed to secure more jobs for skilled Filipino workers in the Middle East during her three-day visit to Qatar that started yesterday.

The President left early yesterday morning for Doha where she will meet with the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, several business groups and overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in that country.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said that Mrs. Arroyo sees this visit as an opportunity to strengthen the Philippines' ties with Qatar at all levels and on all fronts, especially in the critical areas of energy, telecommunications, tourism, agriculture and labor.

Ermita said the booming construction sector in Qatar provides a huge opportunity

for highly-skilled Filipino workers, particularly with the current global financial crisis.

"With the current requirements in Qatar's surging construction sector, the President's visit will underscore before key Qatari proponents the Philippines' capacity to provide necessary resources and highly-skilled technical manpower," Ermita said.

Qatar owns the third largest natural gas reserves in the world after Russia and Iran, and its economy is rated as the second most competitive among Middle Eastern countries aside from having one of the highest gross domestic product per capita in the world at \$61,895 as of 2006.

The constitutional emirate is also pouring billions into private and foreign investments in non-energy sectors.

The Department of Labor

and Employment said the real estate boom in Qatar has resulted in the need for engineers, architects, interior decorators/designers, mechanical, electrical and plumbing personnel, and marble, granite and ceramic tile setters.

The President will meet representatives of the 150,000-strong Filipino community in Qatar where she will brief them on current developments in the Philippines.

The President will also meet the Philippine ambassadors in the region to assess the impact of the global financial crisis on OFWs.

Ermita said that the President would seek broader discussions on the possible flow of

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Qatari investments in Mindanao's agriculture sector for the export of products from the region for the Qatari and Middle Eastern markets.

He said that the promotion of tourism would also be among the visit's priorities, as the President envisions an increase in visitor arrivals from Qatar to the Philippines and vice versa, with the maximization of Qatar's strategic location as a hub of civil aviation in the Middle East.

The DOLE said that due to growing population and high levels of income, the tourism industry in Qatar is progressing and the construction of hotels as well as franchised restaurants is a sign of the country's desire to become a major force in the hospitality industry, which would mean the need for hotel personnel and service crew.

"The President will push for the success of significant trade and business prospects involving both countries, see

to the signing of two agreements that bear on taxation and on economic, commercial and technical cooperation, and meet with members of the Filipino community," Ermita said.

An overview of the two countries' relations issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs showed that since the establishment of diplomatic relations in May 1981, the two countries have forged a total of seven bilateral agreements.