

GMA set to sign Tourism Bill tomorrow

President Arroyo will sign into law a bill seeking to strengthen the Department of Tourism (DOT) and boost the tourism industry after a Cabinet meeting in Cebu tomorrow, Malacañang said yesterday.

Speaking on government-run radio station dzRB, Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said the main agenda of the Cabinet meeting is the report of Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ralph Recto on his Global Recession Improvement Monitoring (GRIM).

Stakeholders and leaders of the tourism industry were invited to the meeting, he added.

Remonde said Mrs. Arroyo will also open in Cebu the P3.18-billion Imperial Palace Waterpark Resort and Spa, owned and developed by the Philippine BXT Corp., a tourism operator and developer registered with the Philippine Economic Zone Authority.

The resort is a foreign-funded investment and was a response to the call of the Philippine government for more investments in the tourism sector.

It is managed by the Imperial Palace Hotel Group, an international hotel management group that also manages two other hotels in Seoul, South Korea and Fukuoka, Japan.

In a statement, Malacañang said once enacted into law, the bill will empower the DOT to prescribe and regulate standards for the tourism industry.

It will make the tourism industry "an engine of investment, employment, growth and national development and strengthen the (DOT)," the statement added.

Malacañang said the DOT shall evolve a system of standard in the accreditation of tourism enterprises in accordance with the relevant tourism development plan.

The DOT and local governments shall ensure strict compliance by tourism enterprises with these standards, the statement said.

A corporate body known as the Tourism Promotions Board shall be created to be chaired by the tourism secretary with the TPB chief operating officer as vice chairman.

The board will formulate and implement an integrated domestic and international promotions and marketing program for the department.

Funding for the TPB shall come from the following:

- Investment earnings of the Tourism Promotions Trust;

- An appropriation of P500 million annually for at least five years from its constitution;

- Seventy percent of the 50 percent net income of the Duty Free Philippines Corp. accruing to the DOT, in lieu of its statutory remittance to the national government;

- Twenty-five percent of the 50 percent national government share remitted by the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. to the National Treasury; and

- At least 25 percent of the government share remitted by the international airports and seaports to the treasury.

- Paolo Romero