

# Palace cites success in GMA bilateral meeting with Medvedev

By MARVIN SY

President Arroyo is set to return today from an eight-day trip to South Korea and Russia.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde, in an interview aired over state-run dzRB, said the President concluded a successful bilateral meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in St. Petersburg shortly after she sat as a panelist at the International Economic Forum.

A number of formal and informal agreements were entered into by the two world leaders, including one that involves the supply of liquefied natural gas from Russia to the Philippines.

Russian liquefied natural gas exports are spread out as follows: 65 percent to Japan, 20 percent to the United States and the rest to South Korea.

"President Arroyo asked that Russia commit some of its liquefied natural gas supply to the rest of Asia and President Medvedev accepted this," Remonde said.

The two leaders also discussed the pending air agreement between the two countries

which, if approved, would pave the way for direct flights between Moscow and Manila.

President Arroyo noted that when she met with tourism operators in Moscow, they pointed out that there was significant interest in travel to the Philippines but the absence of direct flights discouraged a lot of potential tourists.

"President Medvedev said that this is just a bureaucratic matter and that he will follow it up with the Ministry of Transportation," Remonde said.

"So it's a major development that we will soon have a direct flight. It will boost tourism, between and among the Philippines and the rest of Asia," he added.

The two leaders also agreed to expand the existing military and defense cooperation between the two countries.

Remonde noted that the two countries have started by designating defense attachés in their respective embassies and would recommend what type of activities could be done as part of

the agreement.

A possible labor agreement in the future is also being worked out and Remonde said that this could open up Russia as a new labor market for Filipino workers.

On the part of the Philippine government, President Arroyo, who served as the spokesperson for the Third World during the forum in St. Petersburg, committed to endorse the membership of Russia in the East Asian Forum.

Remonde said the Philippines has been designated as the coordinator of relations between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Russia.

President Arroyo explained to President Medvedev that there were three criteria for admission into the summit, namely: becoming a dialogue partner, having a treaty of amity and cooperation with the member nations and the need to have substantial relations of trade with the members.

Mrs. Arroyo said there was consensus that

Russia had already met the first two criteria but as far as the third is concerned, there were some reservations from some member countries.

"That's why the President suggested that Russia would have to expand its trade with other Asian countries," Remonde said, adding that this was the reason why Mrs. Arroyo raised the issue of liquefied natural gas exports to Asia.

President Arroyo committed to support the membership of Russia in the East Asian Summit, which it has expressed interest in since it first convened in 2005.

The East Asian Summit is composed of 10 countries from the ASEAN namely the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia; plus China, Japan and South Korea; and India, Australia and New Zealand.

President Arroyo left for South Korea last May 29 for an official visit and to attend the ASEAN-Republic of Korea Summit.