

No stopping GMA's foreign trips – Palace

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo will not slow down on her foreign trips despite criticism over their necessity and expenses, Palace officials said yesterday.

Arguing that the trips bring huge investments and aid for Filipinos, Press Secretary Cerge Remonde and deputy presidential spokesman Anthony Golez, in separate interviews, pointed out that Mrs. Arroyo's latest four-nation swing netted over \$6 billion in investment and official development assistance (ODA) commitments as well as bigger markets for jobs and products from the Philippines.

The President was about to wrap up yesterday her most recent foreign travels that took her to Japan, Colombia, Brazil and Hong Kong.

"A good leader must do what needs to be done no matter how unpopular they are because good leadership means doing the right thing. A good leader has to pay a price for it because good leadership is not about being popular but about being right," Remonde, part of the presidential delegation, said.

He said such foreign visits

Turn to Page 17

No stopping

From Page 1

are necessary since presidents are the country's top salesmen "especially in this time of crisis."

"The President knows what she is doing and what needs to be done to bring huge investments and assistance to our country," Golez said.

He said those criticizing Mrs. Arroyo on her trips are only doing so because of their personal agendas.

"The numbers and figures speak for themselves. The public would see how such trips benefit our country," he added.

On her way back from her state visit in Brazil, Mrs. Ar-

royo made a stopover in Hong Kong to meet with some business leaders and members of the Filipino community yesterday.

She also attended Mass at the Hong Kong Cathedral with members of the Filipino community.

In the afternoon, she joined them again for a gathering and dialogue and to receive an award from Filipino workers.

She is scheduled to meet with leaders of the Kuok Group to discuss the possible expansion of the latter's investments in the country.

This afternoon, the President is expected to meet Hong

Kong's anti-corruption czar Tony Kwok to review the government's campaign against corruption.

Kwok was credited for dramatically reducing corruption when he headed Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption.

He said that the negative perceptions have clouded the reality of the country's gain against corruption.

Mrs. Arroyo is scheduled to arrive in Manila around 9:30 tonight.

While in Brazil, the President and Brazil President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva witnessed the signing of five bilateral agreements aimed at expanding the two countries' cooperation in several fields, including energy and agricultural

development.

One of the agreements was on Bioenergy Cooperation between the Department of Energy and the Ministry of Mines and Energy of Brazil. It aims to facilitate technical cooperation between the Philippines and Brazil in bioenergy, including the production and use of biofuels, particularly ethanol, and promote the expansion of bilateral trade and investment on biofuel.

Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes and Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap signed the accord in behalf of the Philippine government.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Roberto Romulo and his Brazilian counterpart signed in behalf of their respective countries, an Agreement on Remu-

nerated Employment of Dependents of Diplomats, Consular, Administrative and Technical Personnel.

The agreement allows dependents of Filipino and Brazilian personnel in the two countries' diplomatic and consular missions to engage in gainful employment in the host countries.

Also signed was the agreement between the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Brazil's National Confederation of Industry that seeks to expand business linkages and promote cooperative activities between their members.

The two agreements on agricultural cooperation between the two countries were the Cooperation on Agricul-

ture between the Department of Agriculture and Brazil's Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply, and between the Philippine Agricultural Development and Commercial Corp. and the Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuaria or the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corp.

The memorandum of understanding on cooperation on agriculture involves collaboration in livestock and animal health, biofuel feedstock and development, dairy, horticulture, food safety, agribusiness management, sustainable land management, genetics and biotechnology, processing and post-harvest technologies and agricultural machineries, and plant and animal science.