

GMA unveils new PNR trains

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo launched yesterday the new operations of the Philippine National Railways (PNR) that would help decongest traffic and allow commuters to travel throughout Metro Manila at low fares.

Mrs. Arroyo rode a brand-new coach from the Tutuban Station in Divisoria, Manila to Gil Puyat Station in Makati City with Vice President Noli De Castro and other officials including PNR chairman Michael Defensor, Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza and PNR general manager Manuel Andal.

Defensor said the President wanted the PNR to fast track cleaning up and beautifying the areas along the tracks that were cleared of squatters after seeing the debris left by the dismantling of the shanties.

The commuter coaches from South Korea will be used only in Metro Manila. Refurbished trains, on the other hand, will be used for provincial runs, particularly to Bicol. Defensor showed Mrs. Arroyo the refurbished trains, whose interiors looked like those of luxury buses complete with an LCD TV in the middle.

He said the cost of refurbishing was only P5.3 million per coach compared to buying a new one at P100 million per coach. He said a total of 30 coaches would be refurbished.

"The objective is that within the year, the trains will ply all over Metro Manila at intervals of 10 minutes," Defensor told reporters. There are 19 stations from Caloocan City to Alabang, Muntinlupa City.

He said the full Metro Ma-

nila run will be operational in the coming months though the line from Tutuban to Sucat, Parañaque City will start today at P16 per passenger. Travel time between the two points is about 30 minutes, he said.

He said the Manila-Bicol route could start before the end of the year with a travel time of six hours.

The PNR, he said, is also undertaking the upgrading of the tracks to double-rails. He said the cost of the rehabilitation of the tracks from Manila to Bicol was about \$300 million, with many bridges and tracks to repair between Manila and Bicol.

"Very soon, our trains will be of international standards like those in New York and Rome," he said.

Defensor said the coming months will also see the integration or connection of the existing train lines in Metro Manila - MRT, LRT and PNR - so it would be possible to travel all over the capital via commuter trains.

Mendoza, on the other hand, told reporters there are also plans to come up with a single ticketing system for the MRT, LRT and PNR lines.

The PNR and Metro Pacific also yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding for the possible construction of a highway above the rail lines that would connect the North Luzon Expressway to the South Luzon Expressway. The project will be easy to implement since there would be no right of way problems, he said.

There are also plans to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the SM group to run the stations in Metro Manila.



A newly-refurbished train operated by the Philippine National Railways is shown in the photo above. At left, a view of the inside of the train as a worker mops the floor. APP