

GMA off to Libya today

By PIA LEE-BRAGO

President Arroyo and her "very lean" delegation were scheduled to leave for Libya past midnight today instead of a Sunday late afternoon departure as announced by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) on Saturday.

The DFA said Mrs. Arroyo will have a full schedule in Tripoli, Libya where she will hold bilateral meetings with the heads of state and government of South Asian and African states.

The President and her delegation, composed of Foreign Affairs Secretary Alberto Romulo, Labor Secretary Marianito Roque, and Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Special Concerns Rafael Seguis, were scheduled to leave Manila at 12:10 a.m. today.

Mrs. Arroyo will immediately proceed to the African Union (AU) Summit scheduled on Aug. 30-31.

The 53-member AU is the premier institution and principal organization for the promotion of accelerated socio-economic integration of the African continent. Libya currently sits as AU chair.

The Special AU Summit coincides with the celebrations marking the 40th Anniversary of the Libyan Revolution. Libyan Leader Col. Muammar Qaddafi invited the President to attend the Special Summit and the anniversary ceremonies scheduled for Sept. 1.

The summit will discuss peace and security issues in the African continent, including international anti-piracy in the Somali coast.

At the sidelines of the Special AU Summit, the President will have a rare opportunity to engage the leaders of African states and push for stronger relations with the African continent.

On Sept. 1, Mrs. Arroyo will meet with the leaders of Libya, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

In her bilateral meeting with Qaddafi, the President will express the Philippines' gratitude for Libya's historic and continuing role in the peace and development process in Mindanao and for hosting a good number of Filipino workers.

Libya, under Qaddafi, was instrumental in the conclusion of the 1976 Tripoli Agreement and the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

The Philippines and Libya signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2000 to enhance and facilitate joint cooperation in the field of manpower and employment.

Mrs. Arroyo will also express the Philippines' commitment to convene the 2nd RP-Libya Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) to further increase economic, trade and investment cooperation between the two countries.

Meanwhile, the President will exchange views and experiences with Sri Lanka on counter-terrorism efforts when she meets President Mahinda Rajakasa.

She will also push for increased trade between the two countries.

The President will also sit down with Pakistani President Yousaf Raza Gillani. The meeting will be timely, as the two countries will celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations on Sept. 8.

She will discuss the planned visit of the Bishop-Ulama Conference to Pakistan in October this year. The BUC fosters inter-faith dialogue in support of the peace process in Mindanao.

On Aug. 31, President Arroyo is expected to meet with President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal; President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso; President Amadou Toumani Toure of the Republic of Mali; and Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, President of the National Council for Democracy and Development of the Republic of Guinea.

In her planned meetings with the African leaders, the President is expected to share and offer Philippine expertise and experience particularly in capacity-building and human resource development in the areas of agriculture, education, fisheries, health and technical skills.

- With Paolo Romero