

GMA in Singapore for APEC meeting, US-Asean summit

By MARVIN SY

SINGAPORE - President Arroyo arrived here last night to attend this year's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting and for the first ever United States-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit.

Mrs. Arroyo is scheduled to push for the enhanced partnership between the US and the ASEAN during its first summit here on Sunday.

ASEAN had chosen the Philippines as the grouping's coordinator for the US as a dialogue partner. The position is held on a rotating basis since ASEAN dialogue partners do not choose their coordinator.

The Philippines would act as the coordinator for US-ASEAN dialogue for the next three years until 2012.

As coordinator of the meeting, Mrs. Arroyo would be seated beside US President Barack Obama, who will be the first American president to meet all 10 ASEAN leaders in the same room.

Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Enrique Manalo said the meeting would take about an hour with each of the ASEAN leaders allowed to speak.

President Arroyo would be the fourth to speak and according to Manalo, she would be speaking on behalf of ASEAN, specifically on the US-ASEAN Plan of Action that was signed five years ago.

Manalo said Mrs. Arroyo would go over the Plan of Action and see which areas can be improved.

"The leaders will review this to see the state of progress and next year they will propose a new five-year partnership. The Philippines as coordinator will represent ASEAN to initiate the revised partnership Plan of Action," Manalo said.

According to Manalo, there is no indication that the human rights issues in Myanmar would be discussed during the meeting, although the US side indicated the issue would most likely be brought up.

Several ASEAN members refused to act on pressure from the US and other nations to take stronger action against Myanmar because of its human rights violations, the most prominent of which was its continued detention of Nobel Peace laureate and pro-democracy leader Aung San San Kyi.

The international community has called for the imposition of sanctions against Myanmar over a war of which involved

100,000 deaths. ASEAN has maintained its policy of non-interference in the affairs of its member nations and believes that diplomacy is still the way to address the issue.

ASEAN leaders have emphasized that excluding Myanmar would only worsen the situation in the country.

During the US-ASEAN summit, Obama would be in the same room as Myanmar's Prime Minister Gen. Thein Sein. The White House said there would

be no private conversation between the two leaders.

US National Security Council Senior Director for East Asian Affairs Jeffrey Badt said the US has been frustrated with its "inability to have interaction with Burma" which has "prevented certain kinds of interaction with ASEAN as a whole."