

RP, Bahrain pledge to further strengthen ties

MANAMA, Bahrain — The Philippines and Bahrain underscored the importance of expanding relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (GCC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations as well as strengthening ties with the Asia Cooperation Dialogue during the state visit here of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

In a joint statement issued following the President's visit on December 14 and 15, both countries agreed to benefit from Bahrain as a regional center to distribute the products and services of Philip-

pine companies in the region, and facilities offered by the Kingdom of Bahrain for private companies operating in the offshore, insurance and banking sectors.

The first meeting of the Bahrain-Philippines Joint High Commission to follow-up their agreements to develop bilateral relations will be convened next year.

The President and King Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa agreed to increase the bilateral trade by exchanging visits between officials and businessmen, organizing and participating in specialized exhibitions and supporting efforts to fa-

cilitate all forms of transport, in addition to strengthening cooperation between stock exchanges.

On terrorism, the two sides stressed the importance of strengthening cooperation in countering terrorism in all its forms, and of combating and condemning violence. They called for the combating of terrorism through comprehensive international measures under the auspices of the United Nations.

On the Middle East issue, both countries affirmed the necessity of Palestine and Israel returning to the negotiating table and of

beginning the implementation of the roadmap in order to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

The two countries also reaffirmed the importance of strengthening their commercial and economic cooperation and signed a protocol to amend and supplement the Air Services Agreement of 1992, as well as a Memorandum of Understanding on Tourism and a Memorandum of Understanding on Technical Education.

Existing agreements between the two governments were likewise activated.