

The Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal-3 (NAIA-3) will start accommodating international flights by August this year.

President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who arrived at the airport from Cebu Province on Thursday, inspected again the NAIA-3 to determine whether it is now ready to accommodate international flights.

After checking on the improvements in the terminal after almost a month after her first dawn inspection, the President said the NAIA-3 will be "the gateway of our country from the rest of the world. It is our showcase for tourism and economic progress."

"Today's commercial opening is a result of our resolve and determination to move this nation forward," she added.

Task Force NAIA-3 Chief Michael Defensor said the airport will start accommodating more or less 28 international flights daily by August 8.

At present, only domestic flights by Philippine Airlines (PAL) Express, Air Philippines and Cebu Pacific are being accommodated by the terminal.

Defensor said the NAIA-3 is expected to be fully operational by February next year.

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He assured that with the legal impediments slowly being addressed by the government, passengers "will have a safe flight ahead."

"The cloud of legal turbulence that once hovered above it and darkened its future is slowly going away," he added.

But above all, Defensor said the capability of NAIA-3's professional staff guarantees the airport's bright future.

"Those who know how to run airports and not the lawyers who are good in running circles around the law, will make this structure of glass and cold steel a truly warm place, which would give our returning kababayans the first authentic feel of home," he said.

On the other hand, Alfonso Cusi, general manager of the Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA), said "we are currently operating T3 to initially service domestic flights of Cebu Pacific, PAL Express, and Air Philippines."

"Hopefully, by early part of August, we will be able to service an initial 28 international flights per day," he said.

Cebu Pacific began operating at T3 last July 22. It operates 16 domestic flights daily to five destinations -- Caticlan, San Jose in Mindoro, Tuguegarao, Naga, and Laoag.

PAL Express, meanwhile, will operate services to Caticlan, Busuanga, Calbayog, San Jose, Surigao, and Virac; while Air Philippines will operate services to Bacolod, Dumaguete, Iloilo, Naga, Puerto Princesa, Ozamis and Tuguegarao.

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Cusi said PAL Express is set to operate a total of 75 flights per week while Air Philippines will have 56 flights per week from T3.

Asked how they were able to start operation in just so short a time since the President ordered for the terminal's immediate opening last June, Cusi said "perseverance and determination did it."

"We just had to find ways and explore strategies to be able to open it for the benefit of airline passengers, in particular, and national interest in general," he said. (PNA) Lilybeth G. Ison

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Overseas Filipinos, retirees remain top buyers in RP residential market
MANILA, July 23 (PNA) -- A top official of an international real estate services company said on Wednesday Filipinos overseas and retirees remain the most active buyers of residential properties in the Philippines thus boosting market demand.

Mike Mabutol, Director for Investment Properties and Capital Markets at CB Richard Ellis Philippines said that the bulk of overseas Filipino workers and retirees from around the world residing in the country or considering residing here invest in mid-end residential development projects.

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Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) have long been a lucrative market for residential properties because of their desire to provide a better life for their families.

According to Mabutol, OFWs prioritize investing their hard-earned income in residential properties.

"Retirees have also ramped up property spending, mostly from life savings and retirement benefits," Mabutol said.

"This trend started four to five years ago and now we see these retired buyers becoming more active in the market," said Mabutol, despite property woes in other parts of the world, particularly the U.S.

To address increasing demand by OFWs and retirees, real estate developers are developing affordable housing developments and condominium projects, with investments ranging from PhP 1-Million to PhP 2.5-Million, according to a CBRE Philippines report.

In the period 2008 to 2013, 28 residential condominiums are expected to rise in Makati City, providing more than 18,000 units.

In Fort Bonifacio, 33 residential condominiums are expected to be completed between 2008 and 2013, which will provide more than 11,500 units.

High-end residential condominiums are also in demand. As a result of increased demand,

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prices for high-end residential condominiums in Makati City have risen from Php 90,000 per square meter in 2006 to Php 100,000 to Php 130,000 per square meter this year. Low interest rates and flexible financing terms have helped boost the residential property sector.

According to Trent Frankum, CBRE Philippines General Manager, mortgage rates are hovering in a range of 8.5 percent to 12 percent.

Another bright prospect for the Philippine residential market is the development and market positioning of retirement villages for expatriate "empty nesters.."

Studies show that retirees from the US, Europe and other countries in Asia, such as China, South Korea and Japan are flocking to tropical countries like the Philippines for their retirement and

"The retirement market is a potential multi-billion-dollar industry, and the Philippines has stepped up efforts to entice foreign and local investments in such projects," Mabutol said.

The Philippine Retirement Authority (PRA), a government owned and controlled corporation, and the Philippine Retirement Institute (PRI) encourage local and foreign investors to support retirement community projects. Road shows in Korea, Japan, and the United States, have promoted Philippine retirement villages, offering tax incentives for pioneering projects in the country. (PNA)

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PGMA to inspect operational NAIA Terminal 3 on Thursday

MANILA, July 23 (PNA) -- President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo will disembark here at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) 3 at around 10 a.m., Thursday (July 24) to inspect the now operational terminal which opened for domestic flights the other day, Tuesday.

President Arroyo will be flying in from the South where she inspected jathropa and rubber plantations in central Mindanao, among other activities.

It would be the second time for the President to inspect the third terminal of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA-3). The first time was upon her arrival from the United States at month-end last month.

President Arroyo's PR Flight # 105 last June 30 aboard a Philippine Air Lines (PAL) plane was the first-ever flight to be serviced by the 'NAIA-3' which is just across the Base Operations Center of the

Philippine Air Force (PAF) where the President had immediately sent off planes-load of relief goods for the then victims of super typhoon Frank.

The President shall be checking on the improvements in the terminal almost a month after her first dawn inspection following her successful 10-day visit to the United States where she was able to request instant assistance from the United States government for areas battered by typhoon Frank which struck just as she was already on her way to the US.

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For this second inspection, the President shall be joined by some 50 ambassadors to the Philippines, and by leaders of foreign chambers of commerce, and representatives from travel agencies.

The President shall be received at the NAIA-3 by Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA) general manager Alfonso Cusi, Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza, and NAIA-3 Task Force head Mike Defensor.

With its total floor area of 240,000 square meters that can accommodate 13 million passengers annually, NAIA-3 is now "the Philippines' most modern airport terminal today," according to the MIAA.

In an earlier press release for the opening of the NAIA-3 for domestic operations, the MIAA related that the new terminal was built to "address the congestion in Terminal 1, the (NAIA's) first international passenger terminal... which opened in 1982 with a design capacity of 4.5 million passengers per annum, (and which) level was reached in 1991."

"Improvements raised its design capacity to six million passengers per year but with the traffic passenger volume growing at an annual rate of nine percent, a peak level of 7.7 million passengers was reached in 1997, causing an overflow of passengers that year.

"In 1990, the NAIA Master Plan Study conducted by Aeroports de Paris included the construction of a much bigger and far modernized international passenger terminal to accommodate the increasing volume of passengers going in and out of the country. This became the rationale behind the construction of a new international passenger terminal," the MIAA added. (PNA)

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PGMA orders Marina to revise shipping standards

CEBU CITY, July 23 (PNA) -- President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has instructed the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) to review and revise the Philippine shipping standards to be at par with international standards so that the "brain drain" of competent Filipino seafarers is kept to a minimum, Transportation undersecretary Ma. Elena Bautista said today.

In a press conference at the Malacanang sa Sugbo (MSS) this afternoon, Bautista said the President ordered a revision of the "salary standardization" of Filipino seafarers to match with their international counterparts so that they will be more enticed to stay and work here instead of abroad.

"The President has instructed MARINA to revise shipping standards in the Philippines kasi napaka-in demand ng ating seafarers abroad," Bautisata said.

"Kaya kailangan tingnan natin yung sweldo na binibigay ng ating mga domestic shipowners kasi kung may oportunidad ang ating mga kapitan at mga seafarers na doble o triple ang kita abroad, mas gugustuhin nilang mag-abroad kesa mag-trabaho dito," she added.

As an example, a Filipino ship captain earning up to P60,000 a month could earn as much as

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US\$ 5,000 in the same capacity on a foreign owned ship.

Bautista stressed that adjusting the pay-grade of Filipino seafarers to that of their international counterparts would ensure that competent shipping crews would be hired because by then, the hiring standard for crew members would have also gone up thereby preventing "undesireables" from being hired.

Bautista also cited the possible "upgrading" of the insurance coverage for seamen to be "more comprehensive" to include better oil pollution, salvage and third party liability coverages in the event of accidents similar to that suffered by the M/V Princess of the Stars.

She said the President had instructed DoTC Secretary Leandro Mendoza to hold discussions with Government Service and Insurance System (GSIS) president Winston Garcia on the possibility of the state-run pension to fund such an undertaking which she said would provide protection for those affected by shipping mishaps. (PNA)

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GRP, MILF close to signing an agreement on ancestral domain issue
MANILA, July 23 (PNA) --
The Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) are close to signing the memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain that would move the peace talks leading to a final peace agreement that would bring sustained peace and development in Mindanao, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said today.

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In his weekly media briefing in Malacanang, Ermita said a possible announcement would likely take place between tomorrow and July 25th as negotiators are now finalizing the draft of the MOA.

"And, if things stand out alright tomorrow there'll be an announcement of the signing of the memo of agreement or the initialing of the memo of agreement in Kuala Lumpur in the presence of the (Philippines)

Foreign Affairs Secretary and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia," Ermita said.

Ermita said both panels have agreed on the terms of reference for future negotiations leading to a final peace agreement.

If the MOA on ancestral domain is eventually signed, Ermita said this would be incorporated to the draft compact or final peace agreement with the MILF the timeframe of which is still subject to future negotiations.

Ermita said the signing of a final peace agreement would then lead to the enactment of a law and then to a plebiscite before it can be fully implemented.

Ermita added that government has not yet given in to the proposed inclusion of the 712 barangays in the expanded coverage of the ARMM as it is still subject to negotiations within the framework of the

Constitution just like when Basilan was included during the expansion of the ARMM when Republic Act 9054 was passed.

"...Even the timeframe for that matter is still subject to negotiation towards reaching the comprehensive compact agreement which is the final peace agreement,' Ermita said.

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Ermita said the need for postponement of the ARRM elections, which requires an enabling resolution or law from Congress, was largely influenced by the report of GRP panel chief ret. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia on the positive outcome of the Kuala Lumpur negotiations and even by the request of mediators.

"So, you can see that the higher consideration here really is to move the peace process forward," Ermita said.

In a teleconference in Malacanang, Press Secretary Jesus Dureza said postponing the ARMM elections is crucial to the success of the peace process particularly with the impending signing of the MOA on ancestral domain.

If the ARMM elections push through, Dureza said we have to wait for another three years before the MOA can be implemented as we have to respect the mandate and term of the new officials who would win in the elections earlier set on Aug. 11 this year. (PNA)

Speech of PGMA during the upgrading of Datu Odin Sinsuat Municipal Hospital

Odin, Sinsuat, July 22, 2008

On Social Services: "We allotted half a billion pesos for the senior citizens who are not members of the GSIS or SSS, and half a billion capital for the housewives and families of drivers and conductors, and another half a billion for the improvement of facilities of small hospitals in the provinces."

"And so now, we are launching this program, half a billion program to upgrade and improve the facilities and capabilities of primary care hospitals to become secondary care hospitals which can perform simple operations, including Caesarean operations. These funds are from the proceeds of VAT for the months of April to June. We chose to launch this program here in Datu Odin Sinsuat because we prioritize the areas where there are many poor who need utmost care and compassion. Your province is included in our priority provinces to receive services to alleviate poverty. In our move to upgrade your hospitals, we invest in your people."

Disaster Management: "Climate change is a key factor in increasing frequency and intensity of typhoon. Over the last 36 years, it cost the country 0.5 percent of the GDP. Our disaster management consists of mitigation, preparation, response and rehabilitation."

Foreign Relations: "We must continue to build and buttress bridges to neighbors, and strengthen ties with allies around the world to bring in the rice we need to feed our people."

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Peace and Order: "For decades, a comprehensive peace has eluded us, but I am proud the talks will soon resume, and we are on the threshold of peace. If we can truly move from arms to farms in Mindanao, we can give the gift of peace and prosperity to Mindanao and to the whole country. And so I expect for all your support for peace and success of the peace talks."

Full text of speech at <http://www.op.gov.ph/speeches.asp>

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PGMA optimistic peace and development in Mindanao will be achieved soon

COTABATO CITY, July 23 (PNA) -- President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is optimistic that Mindanao will soon achieve peace and development in the region.

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In her speech during the launching of "Katas ng VAT" (value added tax) program in Shariff Kabunsuan Province where she turned over P2-million check to Secretary Tahir Sulaik of the Department of Health-Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (DoH-ARMM) for the upgrading of the Dinaig Municipal Hospital from primary care to secondary care hospital, the President said that despite having large agricultural land and high productivity rate, "Mindanao has six or seven of the 10th poorest provinces in our country."

She attributed this to the "endless conflict" in the region which has affected its economy for many years.

"For decades, a comprehensive peace alluded us. But I am proud that (peace) talks will soon resume (between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front)," she said.

"We are on the threshold of peace," she added.

President Arroyo noted that if the Mindanaoans "can truly move from arms to farms, we can

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give a gift of peace and prosperity to Mindanao and to the entire country."

"Kaya inaasahan ko ang tulong ninyong lahat para sa kapayapaan at tagumpay ng ating peace talks," she said.

Meanwhile, Press Secretary Jesus Dureza said despite having problems with regards to peace and security situation in the region, Mindanao has improved its poverty incidence ratings based on the latest result of the survey conducted by the Social Weather Station (SWS).

"If you looked at the data, Mindanao improves at a low 12.3 percent as compared to previous rating of 16 percent," he said.

"Alam nyo naman, Mindanao is supposedly troubled with poverty and conflict or both. Pero yung results (in the latest SWS survey) is indicative of a positive result," he said.

Dureza credited this to various government interventions in addressing the challenge to improve the lives of the Mindanaoans.

"Ang focus ng Pangulo -- with all interventions she has ordered implemented and are ongoing right now --we hope as we overcome this challenge, eventually this will also improve peace and order in the region that would lead to progress," he said.

Dureza earlier announced that members of the GRP-MILF peace negotiating panel will be meeting again on July 24 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to finalize the memorandum of agreement (MoA) on ancestral domain that they will sign that would signify the resumption of formal peace talks.

Ancestral domain has been the key and thorny issue in the negotiations between the government and the MILF since December 2004.

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Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Hermogenes Esperon Jr. has said the three remaining contentious issues on territory and governance of the Bangsamoro ancestral domain were resolved by both panels.

He said both parties have agreed to meet again on July 24 to finalize the draft MoA on Ancestral Domain and its signing before the end of July. (PNA - Lilybeth G. Ison) # # #

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