



President Arroyo meets with Central Intelligence Agency Director Leon Panetta at Malacañang yesterday.

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## GMA, CIA chief discuss terror issues

By PAOLO ROMERO

President Arroyo and US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Leon Panetta agreed to strengthen cooperation in the fight against terrorism after holding talks for nearly an hour at Malacañang yesterday, according to officials.

Panetta was escorted to the Palace by Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro and Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo for the closed-door security meeting.

Panetta was accompanied by US Ambassador Kristie Kenney.

His stop in Manila was part of his first tour as CIA chief in the Asia-Pacific region, officials said.

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said the meeting was cordial and included Romulo, Teodoro, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita and National Security Adviser Norberto

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Gonzales..

"While it was mainly a social call, they also discussed issues of common concern on international terrorism," he said.

Gonzales told The STAR Panetta was "happy" over the results of the two countries' cooperation in the fight against terrorism in Mindanao.

Panetta was given a briefing on the spate of attempted and actual bombings in Metro Manila and Mindanao, he added.

Gonzales said Panetta also carried "greetings" from US President Barack Obama.

"The visit was an affirmation of what we have now between our two countries and that cooperation against terrorism is working," he said.

Ermita, who chairs the Anti-Terrorism Council, said he briefed Panetta on the recent bombings in Mindanao and the Human Security Act.

"He (Panetta) thought it wise to meet with no less than the President because the Philippines is the US's closest ally in the region," he said.

"We told him of the successes we have in the counter-terrorism campaign because of the intelligence fusion we have with the US."

Ermita said Panetta was a former lawmaker from California and was in charge of an oversight committee on the budget.

Panetta vowed to help the Philippines in terms of budgetary allocations of the US government, he added. - With AFP