

GMA leaves for US today

By MARVIN SY

President Arroyo will leave for the United States today for her first meeting with US President Barack Obama.

The visit to the US comes just two days after the President defended her numerous overseas trips during her final State of the

Nation Address (SONA).

Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said that the President would be taking a commercial flight to Washington, leaving at around 1:30 p.m.

This would be one of the few instances that the President would be taking a commercial

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flight for an overseas trip.

Remonde admitted that the decision to take a commercial flight was made to cut costs, though he would not admit that it was in response to the criticisms of the political opposition.

The opposition has criticized the President for spending billions in taxpayers' money for overseas trips, which they feel were not all that necessary.

According to Remonde, the President would immediately be meeting with President Obama at the White House upon her arrival in Washington.

Remonde said that the President would be accompanied by five Philippine officials during the meeting and the same number of American officials would be with Obama.

About 20 members of the Philippine Congress will be accompanying Mrs. Arroyo on her visit to the US, which Remonde said will be at their own expense.

After her visit to the White House, the President will have separate meetings with the members of the US Congress and other officials of the executive branch.

The Washington visit would be followed by a trip to New York where the President will meet with American business leaders.

During the New York leg, Remonde said that the President would be interviewed by American cable television network CNBC.

Chicago would come after New York for a series of meetings with business executives and the Filipino community there.

Before returning to Manila, the President will stop over in

Guam for meetings with government officials and the Filipino community.

The President is expected to be back in Manila by Aug. 5.

Pampanga visit

Before flying to the US for her meeting with Obama, President Arroyo will pay another visit to Pampanga's second district today.

"There's nothing wrong if she runs for representative of the second district," Candaba Mayor Gerry Pelayo, spokesman for the Pampanga Mayors' League and the Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (Kampi), told The STAR amid growing speculations on the motives behind her frequent visits to the district this year.

The Philippine Information Agency (PIA) confirmed to The STAR that the President is expected in Sta. Rita town where she is a registered voter, although details of her sortie were not immediately available.

Mrs. Arroyo went to Pampanga last April 30 to inaugurate a farm-to-market road project and last May 22 to inspect the reconstructed park at the town plaza.

Meantime, presidential adviser on global warming and climate change Heherson Alvarez will be meeting with key US climate change officials and organizations, including US President Barack Obama's special envoy to the UN climate change negotiations, as part of the upcoming working visit of Mrs. Arroyo to the US.

In a statement, Alvarez said one of the major issues to be discussed during the meeting of the two presidents is global warming. - With Ding Cervantes, Perseus Echeminada