



## *“Our Target is to help our Farmers”*

### *Interview*

#### Engr. Nestor Ballano, President of the Philippines Bahrain Business Council

*As President of the Philippines-Bahrain Business Council, would you describe us your expectations following the Memorandum of Understanding signed last October between CACCI and the FGCCC?*

It is a wonderful agreement that will link strong ties on our people from Asia and from the GCC Countries.

First of all, the advantage of this MOU will provide benefits for the movements of the products from Asian countries to the GCC C. Moreover, as President of the Philippine-Bahrain Business Council, this new agreement will be helpful for us to develop more deeper relationships with the Bahraini companies and the Bahraini people and we could now promote our products from Philippines more easily.

*Moreover, what was the aim of the official visit of the Philippines President in January?*

Increasing the cooperation between Bahrain and the Philippines was the main reason of the official visit of our President, Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, in January 2009. This visit has confirmed as well the business agreement, which was signed last year between both countries. The cooperation is

representing something very important for Filipino people, Philippine companies and even for the Filipino community living in Bahrain, which is numbering around 40 000 people. Now, the time has come to activate, promote and develop these relationships.

*What are the main contents of this business agreement?*

We would like to develop the imports of our agriculture products to help our farmers. The Philippine agriculture is very efficient nowadays; It is time for us to develop this sector and to increase our exports to other countries like the GCC. Our goal is to help our farmers.

The Philippine Business Council is spearheading a project seeking help from the Philippine Government officials and likewise from the Kingdom of Bahrain the possibility of chartering cargo aircrafts primarily to ferry fresh items from Philippines to Bahrain and the GCC Countries as well. With operational costs kept low, airfreight rates could be pegged at the lowest possible rate keeping products especially fresh items competitive in Bahrain. Having aircraft especially ready for the purpose has the advantage of top handling

of the products from the farm to the marketplace with thousands of miles distance maintaining their freshness and quality to meet consumer demands and expectations.

It is hoped that with the help of the Bahraini Government, preferential fuel rates could be accorded to the airline to be able to compete in the market. For sure, the support of the Philippine Government when necessary will always be there for the benefit of the project and for mutual benefit of the two countries.

But the Agriculture is not the only sector we would like to develop in the Bahraini market, sectors as education and petrochemicals. However, such cooperation should have vice versa effect and we hope also that Bahrain could introduce in our local market products from Sea Sector or Aluminum.

***It seems that the relationships existing between Philippine and Bahrain are very strong nowadays and will increase the coming years...***

Obviously. As I said before, the Philippine community

are represented by 40 000 people in Bahrain and almost 100 000 people in Saudi Arabia. Most of these people are working as employees, other are entrepreneurs but all are promoting both, Bahrain and Philippines.

Furthermore, I have been in Bahrain for 28 years and I am a witness of the evolution of our community and a witness of the evolution of the relationships between Bahrain and Philippines. And I can assure, that relationships, investments, economic and trade relations will grow deeper and deeper the coming years thanks to all kinds of links existing.

***Could you see the same evolution for your counterparts in other GCC Countries?***

Definitely. There is a common vision and a positive move regarding the relationships between both countries. Moreover, to be more efficient, we would like to unify all the Philippines Business Council under the same umbrella of the Philippines Embassy to move in the same direction for the benefit of both countries.