

**By PAOLO ROMERO**

President Arroyo will fly to the stronghold of Moro Islamic Liberation Front commander Abdullah Macapaar alias Commander Bravo to hand out government assistance packages when she arrives from New York at around 2 a.m. today.

Deputy presidential spokeswoman Lorelei Fajardo said Mrs. Arroyo would distribute grocery packs, hybrid corn seeds and medicine like paracetamol and antibiotics to indigent residents of Lanao del Norte.

The area is now safe and secure based on assessments by security officials, and Mrs. Arroyo is likely to hold dialogues with local leaders on the peace process, she added.

Fajardo said Mrs. Arroyo would also inspect the construction of a P10-million farm-to-market road in Nunungan

**Turn to Page 10**

**GMA** From Page 1

town in Lanao del Norte.

The farm-to-market road is a project of the Department of Agrarian Reform to speed up the transport of agricultural products between neighboring barangays, she added.

After her live radio interview at the Macaraeg-Macapagal ancestral house in Barangay Tombagon in Iligan City, Mrs. Arroyo will fly to Barangay Putanon in Nunungan.

Fajardo said there are no major se-

curity concerns on Mrs. Arroyo's visit to the province, which has been the scene of heavy fighting in recent weeks.

"This is part of her official schedule," she said.

Mrs. Arroyo will be welcomed at the airport by Lanao del Norte Gov. Khalid Dimaporo and Nunungan Mayor Abdulmalik Manamparan.

**15 MILF rebels killed**

Fifteen MILF rebels were killed in clashes with troops in Pigkawayan town in Cotabato province the other day.

Lt. Col. Julieto Ando, Army 6th Infantry Division spokesman, said in a phone interview that nine of the rebels were killed in an encounter in Barangay Cabpangi, while the others were slain in a subsequent firefight in Barangay Bulacaon in Pigkawayan town.

The information came from civilian reports, not from actual body counts, he added.

The soldiers were hunting down a band of 50 MILF rebels led by Musa Alameda alias Paradise, who attacked an Army detachment in Cabpangi

shortly before dawn Wednesday, Ando said. Army artillery fired at the rebel positions, forcing them to withdraw westward on board pumpboats, according to Maj. Randolph Cabangbang, Armed Forces Eastern Mindanao Command spokesman.

Troops continue to pursue Aseem Sulaiman alias Commander Pangalian, and Ameril Umbra Kato and Bravo. Lt. Col. Romeo Brawner, Army spokesman said.

More than 60,000 families have been displaced by fighting between

government troops and the MILF, the Department of Social Welfare and Development said yesterday.

Social Welfare Secretary Esperanza Cabral said as of yesterday, a total of 62,317 families have been displaced by the conflict.

Of this number, 13,836 have sought refuge in 146 evacuation centers in the three regions in Mindanao, she added.

Meanwhile, Cabral said supplemental feeding has been provided to some 23,627 children in the four evacuation centers in Northern Mindanao, Davao Region and the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

"The supplemental feeding will boost the energy and resistance of these children to prevent them from getting sick while inside the evacuation centers," she said.

These are children up to six years old in evacuation centers in Maguindanao, Shariff Kabunsuan, Cotabato province and Lanao del Norte, she added.

Cabral said the DSWD has also conducted supplemental feeding for 126 pregnant and breastfeeding mothers in the evacuation centers in Kolambugan, Muna and Tangkal in Lanao del Norte.

Likewise, 326 children between the ages of six and 12 years in the same evacuation centers in Lanao del Norte were provided with supervised neighborhood play by the social workers, she added.

**MILF wants peace**

The MILF has welcomed calls by the Organization of Islamic Conference for the resumption of peace talks.

Mohagher Iqbal, MILF chief peace negotiator, said in a phone interview that the government was responsible for the collapse of the talks.

"What you have to understand is that it was not the MILF who caused the collapse of the talks, it was the government, when they did not sign the MOA-AD in Kuala Lumpur last Aug. 5 and then they even disbanded their panel, thereby making the resumption impossible, and then change the peace policy from talking (with the MILF) to talking to the communities and on top of this, fighting in Mindanao is mainly being initiated by the government, not the MILF," he said.

Iqbal said the government's actions have made the MILF pessimistic about the resumption of the peace talks.

"It seems that the executive, legislative and judiciary (branches) have conspired to kill the peace process," he said.

- With James Mananghaya, Helen Flores-