

# GMA orders NLEX to lower toll rates by June 30

MINALIN, Pampanga – President Arroyo ordered yesterday the reduction of toll at the North Luzon Expressway (NLEX), effective June 30.

Mrs. Arroyo arrived here by helicopter at 10:15 a.m. to make the announcement before attending the First Egg Festival and Exhibit yesterday.

"I am here to make an important announcement and that is, I ordered the Regulatory Board through (Transportation) Secretary Larry Mendoza to review the NLEX toll fee rate," she told a crowd of more than 15,000 people.

"By lowering the toll fee rate at the NLEX, the cost of produce such as rice, meat and other commodities will also be lowered."

Mrs. Arroyo said officials of the Manila North Tollways Co. (MNTC) can now reduce their toll because of the dollar's fall from P54 to P43.

"I ordered the Regulatory Board to approve the reduction of toll fees at the NLEX for all types of vehicles passing there," she said, adding that the MNTC can greatly help reduce the prices of food if the NLEX toll is reduced.

No increase in toll will be made within two years and six months, Mrs. Arroyo said.

However, MNTC senior manager Kit Ventura told **The STAR** they could not immediately say how much the toll would be reduced.

"We have a new toll rate formula which factors in inflation, but not foreign exchange since we are converting our loan into peso," he said.

Ventura said the present toll is P38 for the first 14 kilometers from Balintawak to Bocaue and P2.20 per kilometer for the rest of the NLEX for Class A vehicles.

The rate is higher for bigger vehicles, he added.

Ventura said the MNTC ob-

tained a loan of \$200 million to upgrade the NLEX.

About half of the loan has already been settled, he added.

Minalin town Mayor Edgar Flores led in welcoming Mrs. Arroyo, who was among some 10,000 visitors and local folk who received boiled eggs for snack during the egg festival.

Flores said 70 poultry owners belonging to the Minalin Poultry and Livestock Cooperative (Mipolco) donated 80,000 eggs to people affected by the recent storm "Cosme" in Pangasinan and Zambales.

Minalin now produces one million eggs a day, he added.

Mrs. Arroyo saw off some 15 trucks which formed a convoy to deliver the eggs to the disaster areas.

Founded by local poultry raisers in 1971, Mipolco became one of the country's first millionaire cooperatives with assets worth P146 million as of December last year.

Mipolco manager Jon Juico Jr. said his cooperative manufactures about 36,000 metric tons of feeds for poultry, livestock and fishponds.

Mipolco has been allocating some P500,000 from its yearly income to build one classroom per year in the town, he added. – Ric Sapnu, Ding Cervantes, Marvin Sy