

GMA opens Masskara Fest

By ANTONIETA LOPEZ

BACOLOD CITY - President Arroyo yesterday declared the 29th Masskara Festival here open.

The festival was born 29 years ago at a time of tragedy and economic dislocation with the sinking of *M/V Don Juan* and the crash of the sugar industry.

It is represented by smiling masks and street dancing as a collective show of optimism and declaration of hope amid adversities.

Bacolod Mayor Evelio Leonardia said the festival has evolved over the years and is now known worldwide.

However, he stressed that Masskara is not only about the parade and the colorful masks but that it is a celebration of the Bacolodnons' resiliency.

Mrs. Arroyo said she hopes that the festival will "reflect the real faces of the people of Bacolod," as she expressed confidence in the economy of Bacolod and Negros.