

# GMA to hold Cabinet meeting in Cotabato

By MARVIN SY

President Arroyo has decided to hold her Cabinet meeting in Cotabato this Tuesday as a response to the two recent incidents involving attacks on officials in Mindanao, Press Secretary Cerge Remonde said yesterday.

Speaking over state-run *Radyo ng Bayan*, Remonde said that the attempted assassinations of Sulu Governor Abdusakur Tan and former Maguindano governor Datu Andal Ampatuan prompted the President to bring the Cabinet meeting to the Southern Philippines to show the resolve of the government against violence in the region.

"It is because of these developments that the President decided to bring the entire Cabinet to Mindanao where she wants the focus and attention of government to be," Remonde said.

He said the President has ordered Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro Jr. and

Interior and Local Government Secretary Ronaldo Puno to heighten security in the region in light of the attacks against Tan and Ampatuan.

Remonde said the Cabinet meeting would focus on the peace and order situation in Mindanao as well as the updates on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Free Trade Agreements (AFTA).

Trade Secretary Peter Favila would brief the President on the status of the AFTA after which the officials concerned with national security would take over.

One of the main concerns in Mindanao is the presence and continued activities of the Abu Sayyaf Group, which currently has in its custody Italian Red Cross member Eugenio Vagni.

The government is also in the process of restarting negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to try to reach a final peace agreement.