

Road project that has become the flagship project of Misuari.<sup>15</sup> Estrada also approved the construction of P 4.3 billion worth of 163 steel bridges (total span of 7,476 meters) in the basis of loans from the British government in collaboration the Department of Public Works and Highways. The 1999 budget of US \$ 111 million mostly covered the salary of the region's 19,000 employees.<sup>16</sup> As Nur Misuari himself has admitted: "his administration in the ARMM had failed to address the people's expectation, especially on the implementation of major infrastructure and development projects due to the laxity of the government to provide necessary support..."<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, in the 26<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers Misuari complained on the "flawed and erratic implementation of the Peace Agreement" due to the "unnecessary dilly dallying with the development funds, thereby procrastinating and delaying our development and rehabilitation program to an uncertain date in the future."<sup>18</sup> Hence, he opined that since they embarked on the governance and supervision of the ARMM and the SPCPD "nothing meaningful and visible that can touch the life of the people and society have transpired", including the anti-poverty programs.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, although the MNLF expressed their discontent over what they consider as the Government's unfulfilled promises, the Government has expressed satisfaction over the gains of the peace accord.

At this point, however, what bears watching is the progress of the peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), together with the prospects of the plebiscite, both of which will define the political landscape and the future of Mindanao.

Chairman Misuari had reportedly expressed his opposition to the holding of a plebiscite unless it is certain to "deliver genuine autonomy," and that he would "rather go back to war than have a referendum."<sup>20</sup> It is also possible for MNLF to reject the results of the plebiscite.

On the other hand, MILF Chairman Hashim Salamat, while demanding an independent

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<sup>15</sup> Speech of Nur Misuari during the 26<sup>th</sup> Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Ougadougou, Burkina Faso, in *The Seeds of Lasting Peace*. Published by the Office of the Chairman, MNLF Central Committee, n.d. p., 8

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Lopez, "Mindanao's Chance".

<sup>17</sup> "1<sup>st</sup> cabinet meeting Gov Nur lays down rules; go to people, talk to them, be patient, be humble, be on time," in *The Bulletin* (Cotabato City), Vol. XIII No.2 October 5-11, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Speech of Nur Misuari, p., 11.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Patricio Diaz, "The Rough Road to Mindanao Peace," *Inquirer Mindanao*, 12 February 2000.