



# It's final: Automated polls for 2010 elections

by ANNA VALMERO  
Inquirer.net

MANILA – The Commission on Election (Comelec) finally inked on Friday the P7.2 billion automation contract with the winning bidder, signaling the start of the automation project for the upcoming 2010 elections.

Comelec chairman Jose Melo signed the contract with Juan Villa of Smartmatic Southeast Asian operations who was also representing Total Information Management (TIM), the other half of the joint venture.

The signing took place despite a petition filed by lawyer Harry Roque on Thursday afternoon against the implementation of the project.

"With the signing of the contract, Comelec will immediately issue the 'notice to proceed' to Smartmatic-TIM so they can start with the manufacture and customization of the poll machines," said Melo.

Melo dismissed the grounds cited by Roque for filing the petition at the Supreme Court such as the bidder's lack of papers and failure to meet

requirements of the poll machine error rate.

Melo cited that multinational Smartmatic and local partner TIM submitted a joint venture agreement as part of its bid documents and secured its incorporation papers for joint venture and corporate registration from the Securities and Exchange Commission on Thursday – the final step.

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## SOLON TOLD:

# DFA confirms DC post covers Smartmatic

by ANNA VALMERO  
Inquirer.net

MANILA – The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) confirmed the jurisdiction of the embassy in Washington DC to authenticate bid documents of multinational Smartmatic, clarifying earlier allegations made by Senator Francis Escudero that another embassy has jurisdiction over the firm, a poll executive said.

"In its letter to Comelec, DFA confirmed that the Philippine embassy in Washington DC, United States has consular jurisdiction over the country of Barbados, where the foreign bidder Smartmatic is based. I believe this clarifies Sen. Escudero's belief that the key

document should have been authenticated by the Philippine consulate in Caracas (in Venezuela)," Special Bids and Awards Committee (SBAC) chairman Ferdinand Rafanan told Inquirer.net.

In a Senate committee hearing in

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Comelec chairman Jose Melo (R) and Juan Villa, chairman of the board of Smartmatic-TIM Corp., ink the P7.2 billion automation deal. Inquirer.net photo by Anna Valmero

# Filipinos arrested in State's biggest MediCal scam

by JOSEPH PIMENTEL  
AJPRESS

THE United States Department of Justice (DOJ) Attorney Thomas P. O'Brien hails it as the single largest case of MediCal fraud ever filed in the state.

Officers arrested 20 people Thursday morning accused of being part of a medical fraud ring that defrauded the state millions of dollars and put the lives of children in danger.

DOJ official Thom Mrozek said the majority of those arrested and implicated in this case are Filipino.

"The majority of the defendants in this case are Filipino," said Mrozek, Public Affairs Officer for the DOJ to the *Asian Journal*. "Many of them are

from the Philippines and are Philippine citizens. A number of the people arrested [Thursday] are here illegally."

The 20 defendants arrested Thursday morning are among 42 defendants named in a 41-count indictment that was returned by a federal grand jury on June 25.

The indictment alleges that a Santa Fe Springs nursing agency called Medicare Plus Home Health Providers would send out individuals and pose them as a licensed nurse to provide in-home care to disabled patients and some cases children with cerebral palsy and other disabilities. The nursing agency would then bill Medi-Cal nearly \$4.6 million for in-home licensed nursing services that were actually provided by unlicensed individuals,

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# CIA chief's visit not linked to blasts – DFA

by CYNTHIA BALANA  
Inquirer.net

MANILA – The forthcoming visit to the Philippines of US Central Intelligence Agency chief Leon Edward Panetta was scheduled a month ago and has nothing to do with the recent bombings in Mindanao.

This was stressed by the Department of Foreign Affairs on Thursday to correct reports linking the one-day visit next Sunday to the bombings in Mindanao and efforts by pro-administration sectors to amend the Constitution.

"This has been in the works for the last four weeks. The visit is unrelated to certain developments in Mindanao," DFA spokesperson Ed Malaya told the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* in an interview.

Malaya said a request for a courtesy call was made by Panetta and was coursed through the US embassy in Manila a

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## DATELINE USA

# Ring king meets basketball royalty

THE king of the ring met with basketball royalty on Wednesday.

The pound-for-pound boxing champion Manny Pacquiao made a surprise visit to Los Angeles Tuesday night.

And the reason:

"I have a pictorial with Kobe [Bryant] and LeBron James," he said to the *Asian Journal* as he and his family came out of the Tom Bradley International terminal at LAX. "I'm very excited and looking forward to seeing them."

"That's why he's here," said Pacquiao advisor Mike Koncz. "There's a Nike shoot [Wednesday] with Kobe Bryant."

Nike officials declined to comment about the commercial or photo shoot. The set was off limits to media.

"We're not commenting on the shoot at this time," wrote Nike spokeswoman Jacie Prieto to the *Asian Journal*. "Thanks for your understanding."

A commercial or photo shoot with basketball king James and NBA finals MVP Bryant signifies Pacquiao's commercial crossover to the US main-

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PRAYERFUL FRIENDS. El Shaddai leader Mike Velarde (left), Vice President Noli de Castro (right) and other close friends of former President Corazon Aquino attend the last day of the series of healing Masses held for her at the Sto. Niño de Paz chapel in Greenbelt, Makati on July 9. (Story on Page A3)

# House Dems want to tax the rich for health care

by ERICA WERNER  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON – Key House Democrats decided Friday to raise taxes on the wealthy to help pay for health care legislation, capping an up-and-down week for President Barack Obama's top domestic priority. At the same time, Democratic leaders tried to quell concerns among moderate and conservative lawmakers about other elements of the bill.

"We're closer to that significant reform than at any time in recent

history. That doesn't make it easy. It's hard," Obama said while traveling overseas.

Democrats on the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee agreed to a new surtax that would start with households making \$350,000 a year and begin in 2011, said the committee's chairman, Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y.

It would raise some \$540 billion over 10 years, about half the cost of Obama's ambitious plan to reshape the nation's health care

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