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HONORING THE DEAD. Cemetery visitors use umbrellas to protect them from the sun as they flock at Manila's north cemetery to observe All Saints Day on Sunday, Nov. 1. Huge throngs of people jammed cemeteries to pay respect to their dead in this devoutly Roman Catholic nation as the sun shone back in the capital a day after a strong typhoon hit the country leaving more than a dozen people dead.
AP Photo by Aaron Favila

Comelec opens ballot printing to watchdog checks

Printing agency to use CCTV cams

by KRISTINE L. ALAVE
Inquirer.net

MANILA - The Commission on Elections will install closed-circuit television cameras at the National Printing Office when the printing of the ballots for next year's elections starts in January.

Comelec chairman Jose Melo said the poll body will implement security and transparency measures at the NPO once the printing starts to "dispel suspicions" that the ballots will be tampered.

"We will install CCTV cameras 24/7," he said. He also noted that the Comelec would invite politicians and poll watchdogs to monitor the printing, which

is scheduled to start in January 2010. This was not the first time that the Comelec placed cameras at the NPO.

In the preparations of the ballots and other election paraphernalia in the 2008 Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao elections, the Comelec installed CCTV cameras on the printing floor and hooked it up to the Internet so that voters and other interest groups could monitor the activities.

Ramon Casiple, of Bantay Eleksyon, said security cameras were not enough. "The cameras will only show unauthorized people. What about those authorized who can tamper the ballots?" he said.

He cited the 2007 incident

in NPO where three employees were fired for copying the serial numbers of election returns, the document used in tallying the votes. The employees wore NPO uniforms and identification cards. The serial numbers of election returns are supposed to be confidential.

Casiple noted that representatives from political parties and citizens' groups should be allowed to observe the printing.

Casiple also raised concerns about former Vice Admiral Tirso Danga, an ex-general who was appointed to head NPO early this year. "That's another [concern.] You know in Malacañang, they're all generals there," he said.

Danga has been implicated in the alleged cover-up of claims of vote padding in the 2004 balloting revealed in wiretapped conversations purportedly between President Macapagal-Arroyo and former Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano.

Prioritize climate change...

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thority and Laguna Lake Development Authority.

The additional spillway, said the architect, will reduce flooding to only 20 days as opposed to about 65 days without one.

"The remaining 20 days can be addressed with the help of pumping stations and dredging," he said.

Palafox stressed this period was crucial in implementing

both short-term and long-term recommendations that include the relocation of those in flooded areas to higher grounds.

"We hope the politicians will not forget these climate refugees so they can have a dry Christmas," he said.

"It's also time we start preparing for the next big disaster during the rainy season of 2010, as well as the next big earthquake," warned the urban planner. ■

Danga has been implicated in the alleged cover-up of claims of vote padding in the 2004 balloting revealed in wiretapped conversations purportedly between President Macapagal-Arroyo and former Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano.

The retired Philippine Navy vice admiral was chief of the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP) when the telephone calls were allegedly monitored.

Danga has denied that the ISAFP was in the business of wiretapping. ■

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