

Comelec to seek barangay officials' help in voters' education

by CECILLE SUERTE FELIPE
Philstar.com

MANILA—The Commission on Elections (Comelec) disclosed the plan to tap the assistance of barangay officials to help educate voters on how to fill up the ballots for the automated elections next year.

Commissioner Armando Velasco said barangay officials would help in the information campaign in the grassroots level of voters.

Various sectors expressed apprehension over the automated poll's viability and security and the case against computerized elections now pending at the Supreme Court.

"We will be training our people in the field on how to fill up the ballots," said Velasco during a lecture initiated by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) in Laguna.

Velasco admitted that the commission slowed down the training

of Comelec personnel and the preparation for the poll automation because of the case filed at the SC to stop the automated elections.

He, however, assured the people that the poll body is duty bound to implement Republic Act 9369, an act authorizing the Commission on Elections to use an automated election system.

Velasco said the Comelec has chosen Precinct Count Optical Scan (PCOS) system in which a voter will manually fill up by shading with a pencil an oval opposite the names of candidates of their choice and the elective office they are running for.

He explained that the voter will personally feed the ballot to the machine, which he likened to a fax machine and at least 10 voters can cast ballots at any one time.

The voters should not feel intimidated by the new system and should participate in the

elections, he added.

Velasco said the ballot can be fed at any orientation with whatever end and after the voting, the machine will automatically count the votes. Then the total number of voters will be electronically transmitted to municipal centers, and then simultaneously transmitted electronically to provincial centers and the Comelec headquarters.

He said the Comelec will need about 80,000 PCOS machines but the poll body intends to purchase 82,000 PCOS to have spare units in case some of the machines malfunction.

He admitted that there are possible glitches with the machines, including the failure to scan votes, inability to print election returns, and failure to transmit and consolidate.

Velasco expressed optimism that elections will push through on May 10, 2010. ■

Binay drops out of 2010 race, wants to be Erap's vice president

by JOSE RODEL CLAPANO
Philstar.com

MANILA—Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay wants to run for vice president in tandem with former President Joseph Estrada next year.

Speaking at the launching of a book honoring Sen. Benigno Aquino Jr. and former President Corazon Aquino, Binay said he would not run for senator if Estrada does not choose him as running mate.

"President Estrada said he is running for president in 2010," Binay said. "So I will now only aspire to be his vice president. But if he will not choose me, I will return to private life and I will not run for senator."

He added: "I am an executor of policies and I only want a position of an executive. I have nothing to do in Congress."

Binay said he supports Estrada's effort to unite the opposition and field a single candidate for president in 2010.

"To enable us to unify, we must talk," he said.

"But for me, if I am not chosen as vice president of the opposition, I will no longer run."

"President Estrada is carrying programs of a true opposition. Same as the program of the late former President Cory Aquino."

Earlier, a source in the opposition said Estrada favored Sen. Francis Escudero as his running mate in 2010 because of his good showing in the surveys.

Still dreaming of power
Twenty years after the death of her controversial husband, former first lady Imelda Marcos still dreams of a return to power but this time with her son as president.

"Yes, I am egging him... I am practically pushing him to run for a higher office," the energetic and immaculately dressed 80-year-old told AFP when asked if she wanted Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to

lead the Southeast Asian nation.

Marcos Jr., 51, only son of the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos, has already forged a successful political career that has been partly based on his parents' enduring strengths and alliances.

He served as governor of Ilocos Norte, his father's former stronghold, for 12 years and is currently an opposition member of the House of Representatives.

While acknowledging all mothers were proud of their sons, Mrs. Marcos said she had many special reasons to boast about hers.

"He has done great miracles in Ilocos," she said in an exclusive interview on Monday from her double-storey penthouse apartment in a luxury suburb of Manila.

She said that among his many achievements while governor of Ilocos, the man nicknamed "Bongbong" had built hundreds of kilometers of roads, ensured all the poor had access to medical services and tripled average incomes.

"Bongbong, I am very proud of him. He can qualify for anything," she said.

There is speculation that Marcos Jr. will run for the Senate in next year's national elections, but he has not publicly announced any ambitions to lead the nation of 92 million people.

There is no clear front-runner among the more than a dozen candidates who have said they may enter the running to succeed President Arroyo, who is constitutionally mandated to step down next year.

However, Mrs. Marcos did not say when she hoped her son, educated at Oxford University and the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton Business School, would assume the nation's highest office.

Marcos Sr. remains one of Asia's most controversial and divisive figures despite two decades

having passed since his death in exile on Sept. 21, 1989.

He ruled the Philippines from 1965 until being ousted by a "people power" revolution in 1986 that forced him and his family to flee to the United States.

His critics accuse him of plundering billions of dollars from government coffers and presiding over widespread human rights abuses.

His wife's famously extravagant clothes and lifestyle were regarded as one of the most powerful symbols of the couple's excesses, however, she insisted she and her husband have nothing to apologize for.

"Marcos was no dictator, she said before launching into a defense of the martial law that her husband introduced in 1972 to stay in power.

After returning to the Philippines following her husband's death, Mrs. Marcos made a failed bid for the presidency in 1992.

And unsullied by a conviction for committing any crime during her husband's reign, she believes she still has much to offer her country.

Mrs. Marcos said she harbored ambitions of a top government post in her son's administration that would put her in charge of overseeing basic services for the Philippines' 42,000 villages, known as barangays.

She said the reason she was pushing her son to become president was that: "I want him to appoint me as 'mother of the barangay' at one peso (two cents) a year salary."

"Marcos has already institutionalized politics in the family," she said of her husband.

"What I want to do is simultaneously go to the barangay and bring basic services there so that people will not be deprived of care and attention. I just want to be mama of the barangays," she said. ■

'Brother Mike' may not run for president

by EVELYN MACAIRAN
Philstar.com

NOVALICHES Emeritus Bishop Teodoro Bacani Jr. claimed that El Shaddai leader Bro. Mariano "Mike" Velarde might not continue with his plan to run for president in the 2010 elections because of the lack of any sign of support from his church members.

Bacani, Velarde's spiritual adviser, said that the El Shaddai leader has been consulting with his members, but it seemed that they do not agree that he should enter politics.

In an interview with the Church-run Radio Veritas, Bacani said: "I

don't think that Bro. Mike would run. I think that he is not getting positive responses. The members want him to just stay with the mission."

Bacani said Velarde has not yet mentioned any concrete plan to run for president. "I think he sensed the sentiments of the people."

He added that while they respect his decision, "We at the El Shaddai... talked to him and told him that we do not want him to run and he accepted wholeheartedly our opinion."

He also said that religious leaders entering politics is an indication that the people are looking for

good candidates who could help the country.

Bacani clarified that Velarde's case was different from that of priest turned Pampanga Gov. Ed Panlilio, who has been suspended from performing the sacraments while he is holding a position in government.

Velasco is a layman while Panlilio is a priest.

"The case of Governor Panlilio is a special case. I do not support and I do not think that he would continue to run for president while remaining as a priest. I don't think that it is advisable for him to run for president, it would be good for him to withdraw," he added.

Meantime, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. urged his PDP-Laban party mate Sen. Jamby Madrigal to look for another party if she intends to pursue her presidential candidacy. ■



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by SHELIA CRISOSTOMO
Philstar.com

MANILA—Health experts have warned that dengue is becoming a global public health threat, owing to rapid urbanization, growing population, increasing international travel and climate change.

Dr. Duane Gubler, director of Program on Emerging Infectious Diseases at Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School in Singapore, said dengue is no longer confined to tropical countries and is spreading rapidly across the globe.

Gubler noted that in the 1960s, less than 10 countries were reporting dengue cases to the World Health Organization but this grew to some 65 nations in 2007.

He added that the "global movement of dengue" was driv-

en by uncontrolled urbanization and "increased movement of people, animals, commodities and pathogens" brought about by modern transportation.

"The world has become urbanized... People are moving to cities to find jobs so dengue is also moving to cities," he claimed during the opening of the Novartis Institute for Tropical Disease Symposium on Dengue Fever last Monday.

Gubler said that dengue has reached epidemic proportions also because of "lack of effective mosquito control."

Dengue is spread by the bites of infected stegomyia aegypti and stegomyia albopictus—previously known as Aedes Aegypti—mosquitoes.

Climate change is also being eyed as a "driver" for expanding geographical distribution

of dengue.

A handout released by Novartis showed that "temperature limits the range of the mosquito that carries dengue fever" and that "frost kills both adults (mosquitoes) and larvae."

"In the past, this has prevented the disease from spreading from the tropics, but rising temperatures are changing that. It has moved steadily north in recent decades and to higher elevations. In the United States, the mosquitoes that carry dengue have reached as far north as Chicago," the handout stated.

There is no available treatment for dengue fever yet but supportive treatments like bed rest, fluid administration and analgesic are given to patients.

Gubler added that efforts are now underway to develop vaccines but this might take at least

seven years.

According to Dr. Lyndon Lee Suy, head of the Department of Health (DOH)'s National Dengue Program, the development of vaccines drags on because there are four strains of dengue that surface at any given time.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III said the Philippines had already experienced its "second worst year of dengue outbreak since we reported the first one in 1998."

"In 2007, we had over 45,300 cases and 416 deaths. It was also the third straight year that the country had been trying to push back an alarming rise in reported dengue cases... a pattern that was unusual because we were reporting dengue even at the start of the year—outside of the peak dengue season," he added. ■

Palace increases 'pork' by P700 million

by JESS DIAZ
Philstar.com

THE administration did not reduce the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) or the pork barrel allocation for senators and congressmen, which actually increased by P700 million, contrary to the claim of Malacañang officials.

Research conducted by The STAR showed that last year, Malacañang proposed P6.24 billion for PDAF in the 2009 budget, the same level as in

previous years.

During the Senate-House of Representatives conference on the budget, senators increased the PDAF appropriation by P3,425,027,000, to P9.665 billion.

President Arroyo did not veto the P3.425-billion increase in pork barrel funds when she signed the 2009 national budget.

Mrs. Arroyo has proposed in the 2010 national budget a PDAF allocation of P6.940 billion, which is P700 million more than what she proposed in previous years.

Congressmen sitting in the House appropriations committee surmised that the additional P700 million would be for the 32 new party-list representatives the Supreme Court recently added to the chamber's membership.

The PDAF is a more transparent form of the pork barrel and it is the source of funds for so-called "soft" projects like medical, livelihood and educational assistance.

Funds for "hard" projects are embedded in the budgets of infrastructure agencies such as the Department of Public Works and Highways, Department of Transportation and Communications, and Department of Agriculture (for farm-to-market roads and irrigation canals).

The pork barrel dispenses P200 million for each senator and P70 million for each House member.

Only opposition Sen. Panfilo Lacson does not avail himself of his P200 million.

In the House, militant party-list members like Satur Ocampo and Teodoro Casiño of Bayan

Muna do not receive their allocations.

Last week, interviewed by radio station dzMM, former economic planning secretary Ralph Recto said pork barrel funds in the 2010 budget proposal have been reduced by as much as 50 percent to keep the budget deficit down.

"I've seen the numbers in the DBCC (Development Budget Coordinating Council), and I can tell you that these funds have been reduced to P100 million per congressman," Recto said.

The economic planning secretary and the budget secretary sit in the DBCC.

Contacted for confirmation by the same radio station, Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya Jr. confirmed that there have been reductions.

On the same day, Andaya issued a statement saying the PDAF has been slashed by more than P2 billion, from P9.666 billion to P6.940 billion.

"We're cutting PDAF by almost 30 percent and we hope that this will meet the concurrence of Congress."

His claim of reduction was based on the Congress-increased level of P9.666 billion.

The country has been incurring record levels of budget deficits under President Arroyo. The 2010 deficit is estimated at P233 billion. This year's deficit is officially projected to reach P255 billion.

If pork barrel allocations were cut to P100 million per senator and P40 million per House member, the nation could save more than P10 billion.

Total allocations would be reduced from P18.8 billion to



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