

### **Melo resigns as Comelec chairman**

Commission on Elections (Comelec) Chairman Jose Melo has tendered his resignation effective January 31, 2011, four years before his term of office is scheduled to end. Comelec spokesman Director James Jimenez said that Melo submitted his “irrevocable resignation” to Malacanang and the chairman would leave it to President Benigno Aquino III to decide. No ambassador position has been offered to Melo as of this time. Comelec Commissioner Gregorio Larrazabal and Rene Sarmiento also confirmed Melo’s resignation but declined to comment further saying he has yet to confer with other commissioners. Larrazabal said the Comelec en banc has yet to act on the resignation. The en banc received the letter on November 23. With Melo's resignation, there will be three vacancies in the Comelec in 2011. Larrazabal and Commissioner Nicodemo Ferrer are also set to end their terms by February next year. The palace will commence the process of seeking a replacement of the outgoing commissioners through its search committee.

### **Deferment of ARMM polls pushed**

The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) has urged the national government to wait for the outcome of the tripartite review of the 1996 government-MNLF peace pact, which is focused on improving Moro autonomy in the South before holding an election in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The national government is set to conduct an election in the autonomous region in August next year to determine a new set of government officials who will serve the region in the next three years. However, Rep. Bai Sandra Sema (1st District, Maguindanao) said she will file a resolution in the Lower House to convince the legislature to delay the September 2011 ARMM elections. She said a delay in the holding of the regional elections would allow the government and the MNLF to have ample time to refine the region’s charter, Republic (RA) Act 9054, based on the review of all perceived flaws, strengths and weaknesses of the 14-year-old peace accord. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP), MNLF, and Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) are presently conducting a review of the GRP-MNLF peace accord and is focused on five concerns – Sharia, education, natural resources, political representation of Moro communities, and regional security. Lawyer Naguib Sinarimbo, ARMM executive secretary, said deferring the regional polls will also give the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) enough time to craft their final peace pact. MNLF officials said the ARMM has to be entrusted only to qualified “caretakers” if the regional elections are postponed. Sema said caretakers must be barred from running for any elective position in the regional government once the elections are set. A multi- sectoral rally was held on November 22 calling the government to continue talks on the situation of Moros and end the long-historic conflict in Mindanao.

Legislatures must conduct consultations with different sectors involved if there is a need to defer elections prior to the tripartite review of the peace pact and hearing to minimize an adverse impact on the region. Rep. Sema’s proposal that if the ARMM elections be suspended, officers in charge should be barred from running will provide credence to the outcome of such deferment. This will also set the proper climate of trust to eventually seek a sustainable solution to end the conflict in Mindanao and assuage concerns on the motive of power grabbing by means of deferment of the ARMM elections

### **NAMFREL commences search for new Chairperson**

NAMFREL has started its search for a new Chairperson due to incumbent chair Mr. Jose L. Cuisia Jr.'s recent appointment as commissioner for the Social Security System (SSS). The National Council sits collectively as a search committee. NAMFREL upholds its policy that its members and officers should be non-partisan and should not hold any appointive position in the government.

[Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer, GMA News, NAMFREL data]

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