



### Comelec's unliquidated advances exceed P200M

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) has to settle more than Php 200 million in unliquidated cash advances (UCA). The Comelec was found by the Office of the Ombudsman as the government agency with the second-biggest UCA next to the Department of Education. The poll body en banc has decided to withhold salaries of its seven commissioners--including Chairman Jose Melo--until their respective UCAs are settled. As of July 28 this year, the Comelec registered its record high of Php 406,029,645.99 in unliquidated cash advances but after a warning was made by the Ombudsman on August 8, the UCA was reduced to Php 333,417,065.89. Zita Buena-Castillon, the chief accountant of the Comelec, states that as of October 22, 2010, Gideon de Guzman--a finance director--topped the list of those with UCAs with P48,850,373.32. De Guzman was followed by the chief personnel official of the poll body--lawyer Adolfo Ibanez with Php 4,435,560.68 and Director Ester Villaflo Roxas, the head of Election Results and Statistics Department, with Php 1,383,358.71. Also on the list were Disbursing Officers Danilo Cartagena with Php 53,379,959.08; Ricky Catamora (Php 40,605,605.00); lawyer Allan Enriquez, the Provincial Election supervisor of Quezon province (Php 21,721,500); and lawyer Temie Lambino, the Provincial Election supervisor of Pampanga province (Php 20,154,800.00). Under Circular 97-002 of the Commission on Audit, cash advances that must be liquidated are: salaries, wages, etc.--five days after each 15 day/end of the month pay period; petty operating expenses and field operating expenses--within 20 days after the end of the year; subject to replenishment as frequently as necessary during the year; Official-travel expenditures--within 60 days after return to the Philippines in case of foreign travel or within 30 days after return to his permanent official station in case of local travel; and Intelligence and confidential funds for national and corporate sectors--within one month from the date the purpose of the cash advance was accomplished. Commission on Audit (COA) Circular 2003-002 states that for projects continuing beyond one month, a monthly progress liquidation report shall be submitted starting one month after the commencement of the project. COA Circular 97-002 states that failure of the accountable officer to liquidate his cash advance within the prescribed period shall constitute a valid cause for withholding of his salary. In addition, such officer may be held criminally liable for Violation of Section 89 in relation to Section 128 of Presidential Decree 1445 (Government Auditing Code of the Philippines); Article 217 of the Revised Penal Code (RPC) (Malversation of Public Funds) and Article 218 of the RPC (Failure of Accountable Officer to Render Accounts). The officer also may be charged for administrative liabilities such as gross neglect of duty and dishonesty. Failure to liquidate could cost the alleged delinquents criminal and administrative charges before the Office of the Ombudsman.

On August 18, 2010 the Comelec confirmed that about 100 high-ranking poll officials and employees have indeed failed to liquidate their cash advances, but chairman Jose Melo said that even before the Office of the Ombudsman could issue the order to withhold the salaries, the poll body has already sent notices reminding those officials to liquidate their cash advances. He also said that as early as 2008, the Commission en banc sent out notices requiring some employees, including ranking officials such as directors, with unliquidated cash advances to make the necessary liquidation report and even withheld the salaries of some of them. It is also stressed that in the past, the Comelec already withheld the salaries of some officers who failed to comply with the notice to liquidate their cash advances. It was on the same year that the Senate questioned Melo of the unliquidated cash advances amounting to Php 5 billion since 1984 and yet two years after such hearings, the issue of non liquidation of expenses is not resolved.

### Comelec still unsure if ARMM elections will use PCOS tech

The elections in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in August 2011 will be automated but the Comelec still has to determine whether or not it will utilize the precinct count optical scan (PCOS) machines used in the May 10 polls. The agency would have to study if the PCOS technology would be adopted in the ARMM polls or if it would still look for another automated election system (AES). The Comelec on December 3 convened the technical working group to discuss the preparations for the ARMM elections and the mid-term polls in 2013. The agency said that although the Comelec purchased 920 PCOS machines, it does not mean that these would be used in the ARMM polls. The procurement of the PCOS machines at Php 25 million was for them to be used in hearing the electoral protest cases filed in connection with the May 10 elections.

The budget appropriated for the 2011 ARMM elections is only Php 487 million compared to the Php 867 million in 2008 ARMM elections. The allotted budget is only about the 25 percent of the Comelec's budget proposal of Php 2.69 billion. With this meager budget, it is questionable that the Comelec would not want to reuse the 920 PCOS machines to be used in election protest cases to cut down expenses. Considering also that there are only less than eight months left, looking for another technology might delay the August 2011 ARMM elections. Issues and controversies will likely occur during the bidding and procurement process that would likely cause delay in the election. The Comelec also claims that the PCOS machines are accurate as shown in the Random Manual Audit (RMA) with 99.51 percent accuracy with a .49 variance from 99.995 percent accuracy required by the Comelec. If they claim that the PCOS machines used in the May 2010 polls are credible and accurate, why are they looking for another technology that would again be subjected to public's scrutiny?

### DepEd Procurement Monitoring Update: Printing, Packaging, Labelling and Delivery of NAT Materials

NAMFREL observed today the Department of Education's (DepEd) Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) Pre-Bid conference on the "Printing, Packaging and Labeling of Test Booklets and Non-classified Materials: Printing, Packaging, Labeling of Scannable Answer Sheets, School headers and Printing and Processing of Certificate of Ratings; Delivery and Retrieval of Text Materials; and Delivery of Examiner's Handbooks and Certificate of Ratings for the 2011 National Achievement Test (NAT) for Grade (3) Three, Grade (6) Six, and Second Year". Although eight prospective bidders purchased the bid documents, 9 bidders were present during the meeting. The Approved Budget for the Contract (ABC) is worth Php 133,550,010 for nine packages from printing to delivery. Due to the projects security and confidential requirement, all 90 workers to be employed under this contract will be vetted accordingly and would require an NBI Clearance as they are deployed during the entire process to meet the delivery schedule on May 2011.