

'New president known 2 days after polls'

MANILA – The successor of President Arroyo will be known in just two days with the full automation of the May 10, 2010 elections, winning bidder Smartmatic-Total Information Management Corp. (TIM) assured the public on Wednesday.

"The current manual system takes several weeks to produce results... But with full automated polls, within one or two days, we will have the results for all the positions nationwide," said Smartmatic sales director Cesar Flores.

Smartmatic-TIM was given the "notice of award" by the Commission on Elections (Comelec) on June 10, formally announcing it as the winner of the lease contract to supply the 82,000 precinct count optical scan (PCOS) machines that will be installed in every precinct across the country.

The contract still has to be prepared by the Comelec in consultation with various stakeholders but it will amount to P7.2 billion, the bid offer of Smartmatic-TIM.

The Comelec has directed the consortium to post a performance security bond of P360 million that is equivalent to five percent of the contract price.

"We are honored, humbled and happy to have been awarded this very important contract that is important to the lives of the Filipinos, important to the development of democracy in the Philippines," he noted.

Flores claimed that while election results would be known faster, the automation technology would still observe the "levels of transmission" mandated under the country's election laws.

This means that as in the manual polls, the automated elections will still maintain the transmission of election returns from the polling precincts to the municipal canvassing centers, to the provincial canvassing centers and to the Comelec central for national positions.

'Comfortable with Comelec's timetable'

According to Flores, they are "comfortable" with the Comelec's timetable for next year's polls.

"We are comfortable with the time that we have left to prepare. From now to May 2010, we believe we have a comfortable schedule. We'll be submitting all the machines according to schedule," he added.

Smartmatic chief executive officer Antonio Mugica stressed that their machines are tamper-proof.

"The system that we have was designed not to be tampered with. So even if we want to, we cannot tamper with our own system... Even if anybody wants to tamper it, if anyone really has the ability, it would really be impossible," he said.

Regarding the opposition of some legislators and sectors to the poll automation, Mugica maintained that they expect such resistance.

"Whenever you are trying to make elections cleaner and more transparent, you will find resistance. So there are people, there would be people, that will feel threatened by cleaner and transparent elections. Those who benefit from cheating – financially or politically – will be against automation. So we'll find critics, we'll find attacks... and that we have to fight against," he added.

The consortium is willing to reveal the "source code" of the automation system as demanded by some critics. A source code is a computer programming language that can show if the system can easily be hacked or tampered with.

Flores said Smartmatic-TIM would make public the source code "for sure" as it is one of the requirements in the Comelec's request for proposals.

"We stick to that commitment, we have no objection. In fact we encourage that the source code

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ALL DOLLED UP. American pop group Pussycat Dolls, from left, Kimberly Wyatt left, lead singer Nicole Scherzinger, Ashley Roberts and Melody Thornton perform before thousands of Filipino fans Thursday, June 11, in suburban Pasay City.

AP Photo by Pat Roque

Outrage vs constituent assembly on Facebook

by NIÑA CATHERINE CALLEJA
Inquirer.net

MANILA – Facebook addicts are gearing up to give the constituent assembly a thrashing.

If thousands of people will

converge on Makati's financial district on Wednesday, a similar movement has started in cyberspace.

Around 13,000 Facebook users have signed up for a campaign in the popular social networking Web site Facebook to oppose and condemn the resolution by the House of Representatives calling for a constituent assembly to amend the Constitution even without Senate participation, said Manolo Benavent, an Internet and Facebook user.

Benavent, who attended a meeting of the organizers of the Wednesday's planned multi-sectoral rally, put up the cause campaign titled Stop Con-Ass Now! on June 3 through Facebook.

He said a booth would be set up in Makati to gather Facebook members joining the protest.

Benavent said that because up to 2,000 Facebook users were signing up each day, he expected the Facebook campaign to reach the 100,000 mark this Friday.

"There's an exponential growth [in the number] of people opposing Con-ass in cyberspace," Benavent told the Philippine Daily Inquirer.

The Facebook cause campaign, Benavent said, was an offshoot of the Facebook eyeball vs Con-ass, a meet-up of Facebook users last Friday to discuss the pros and cons of the constituent assembly.

"We aim to put all the statements about Cha-cha [Charter change] and Con-Ass [constituent assembly] in one page," he said.

He said he was encouraging the members to invite their Facebook contacts every day to join the cause.

The cause campaign, Benavent said, has members among call center agents and government employees who could not "physically attend the rally" but wish to do something.

"This is our parliamentary move on the Internet," he said, explaining that if the House denied the people a public hearing, the Internet users will speak out through cyber forums.

He added that people were outraged because what the House did was a "mockery of democracy."

"We were taught in history class that the Congress is composed of the lower house and the Senate. How come a House-only Con-Ass is possible?" he said.

The Facebook cause campaign serves as a medium to educate Internet users about the constituent assembly. The complete list of congressmen who signed the resolution was uploaded on the site, so that viewers would not vote for them again in the coming elections, Benavent said.

Many Facebook users would also first ask about the House resolution before joining the cause.

Benavent said that a Facebook user normally has 200 friends, and if he or she invited half of his contacts, the campaign would trigger a ripple effect.

In the last two years, the Internet, through social networking sites, has been a powerful platform for launching a cause.

During the last "People Power" anniversary, Internet users and bloggers launched Edsa Wave 1.0 as a new EDSA Revolution to call for the resignation of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. ■



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