

Comelec: 2010 poll automation still on

by MAYEN JAYMALIN
Philstar.com

POLL automation in 2010 would push through even with the disqualification of firms bidding to provide automated counting machines (ACMs), the Commission on Elections (Comelec) said last May 10.

Comelec Chairman Jose Melo junked calls to consider partial automation or use P1.2 billion

worth of ACMs purchased from the controversial Mega Pacific Consortium (MPC) for the 2004 elections.

Due to various documentary deficiencies, the Comelec last week rejected the bids of all seven foreign and local bidders to supply machines for the automated elections.

Melo said the Comelec has not yet declared a failure of bidding and that there is still time for full

automation.

"We have not yet reached a situation where we would opt for partial automation. We have yet to declare a failed bidding," he said.

Melo said the poll body would only opt for partial automation if the winning bidder would tell them that they do not have the time to produce the necessary 80,000 automated machines.

Lawyer Romulo Macalintal, election counsel of President Arroyo, last May 11 suggested to the Comelec to consider using the ACMs purchased from the MPC in its pursuit of automation of the 2010 general polls.

The Supreme Court (SC) stopped the use of the 1,991 ACMs bought from the MPC in 2004 only on the ground that they were "illegally procured and improvidently paid by the Comelec," he said.

Reliability never questioned
Macalintal said the reliability and accuracy of the machines were never questioned.

In fact, the Department of Science and Technology even certified that the ACMs of MPC were "100 percent accurate and can be used to automate the counting and canvassing of votes in the 2007 elections," he said.

On July 24, 2006, Science and

Technology Secretary Estrella Alabastro submitted to the Office of the Ombudsman a report stating, among others, that these ACMs "exhibited 100 percent accuracy rating in continuously counting a total of 440,000 votes for a period of 14 hours."

Macalintal said he then asked the SC to allow the use of the ACMs for the 2007 mid-term polls, but the High Court denied his petition due to the pending criminal cases then against some officials of the Comelec and MPC before the Ombudsman and the civil case filed by the Office of the Solicitor General against MPC before the Makati City regional trial court to recover the P1.2 billion from the consortium.

Macalintal said this is no longer the case.

"It seems it's going nowhere considering the length of time it will take the court to decide the case. Any aggrieved party will even seek remedy before the Court of Appeals and then the Supreme Court, all of which may take 10 years to decide," he added.

Macalintal said waiting for the resolution of the cases involving supposed anomalies in the purchase of the ACMs from MPC would only make the machines futile. ■

Youth voters need to register again for 2010

by ANNA VALMERO
Inquirer.net

YOUTH voters who registered during the 2007 Sangguniang Kabataan (Youth Council, SK) elections should register again with the Commission on Elections (Comelec) if they want to vote in the 2010 elections, an election official said.

Filipinos aged 15 to 17 years old may have registered for SK elections but this registration does not make them "qualified for regular elections," Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said.

Under the Omnibus Election Code, a person should be at least 18 years old on Election Day and is a resident of the country prior to the elections before he or she can register, Jimenez said.

The verification process for voters in regular elections is more thorough compared to that in SK elections, he said.

At least 3.154 million youth registered for the 2007 SK elections.

Voters who will be turning 18 by May 10, 2010, Election Day, can start registering on Tuesday, May 12.

To register, an applicant must appear before the election officer of the city or municipality where he or she resides and present any of the following identification documents: employee's ID with the signature of the employer or authorized representative, postal ID, student's ID or library card signed by the school authority, senior citizen's ID, driver's license, National Bureau of Investigation or police clearance, passport, Social Security System or Government Service Insurance System ID, or Professional Regulations Commission (PRC) license.

In the absence of any of the required identification documents, the applicant may be identified under oath by any registered voter of the precinct, or any of his relatives within the fourth civil degree of consanguinity or affinity.

Upon receipt of the application forms from the election officer, the applicant must accomplish the forms, submit the accomplished forms to the election officer and go to the data capturing machines for to get his biometrics.

Deadline of registration for the 2010 elections is on October 31. For absentee voters, deadline of registration is on August 31. ■



HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE COUNTRY OF CLARK

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Sealed bids marked "APPLIANCES – REFRIGERATORS & STOVES – IFB # 9103-0097" will be received at the office of the Interim Executive Director, Housing Authority of the County of Clark (HACC), 5390 East Flamingo Road, Las Vegas, Nevada 89122, in accordance with the IFB# 9103-0097 solicitation, at which time all bids properly received will be opened, read aloud, and made a matter of public record.

HACC is requesting four (4) sealed bids (1) marked original and the rest marked copies (3) from qualified and experienced firms and/or individuals for Appliances – Refrigerators & Stoves IFB#9103-0097.

A pre-bid meeting will be held on **May 19, 2009 at 10AM** in the HACC Board Room, at which time the IFB documents, scope of work (SOW), and specifications will be distributed. A site visit will follow this conference. Sealed responses to this solicitation will be received by HACC until 1:00 PM local time on 27, 2008. No late bids will be accepted.

Minority- and women-owned businesses are encouraged to respond.

All IFB documents are available on the HACC website at www.haccnv.org in Portable Document Format (PDF). Contact the Shap Herskovic, Procurement & Warehouse Manager at 702-451-4081 ext. 1616, for a bid package

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Tourism push 'all out' despite flu scare

DoT chief sees 11M tourists in '09

by CHRISTIAN V. ESGUERRA & VICENTE LABRO
Inquirer.net

MACTAN, CEBU—The Department of Tourism has no intention of going slow in encouraging foreign tourists—even from countries where the potentially deadly A (H1N1) flu virus has broken out—to come to the Philippines.

"It's still all-out," Tourism Secretary Joseph Ace Durano told reporters, referring to the government's tourism campaign.

Durano said he was supporting the government's approach of vigilantly monitoring inbound passengers and providing stringent health management to those

who might be suffering from the virus.

He said the department has been sending advisories to travel agencies around the world so they could inform their clients that the Philippines remained free from the A(H1N1) virus.

He said this fact—coupled with the country's "political stability" and strong private sector investment—was helping keep the tourism industry strong.

Durano said the government was expecting at least 11 million tourists this year. Of the number, at least three million were projected to be foreign, he said.

In a separate interview in Basesy town, Samar province on Monday, Durano said he was confident that the tourism would continue to grow in 2009.

The DoT earlier reported that

1.3 million tourists came to the Philippines from January to March this year, which was 10.33 percent higher than the 1.1 million visitors who came to the country during the same period in 2008.

"If we started at 10 percent [growth], that would be the basis in forecasting that the entire year will be a very good one," he said.

Tourist arrivals start slow at the start of the year but picks up later in the year as cols weather sets in other countries, Durano said.

About 60 percent of the country's foreign tourists come from countries in north Asia such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, and China, he said.

European tourists make up about 10 percent of arrivals and another 10 percent come from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries such as Singapore and Malaysia. The

rest are Americans and tourists from other countries.

He said that Chinese, Russian, and French tourists comprised the "fastest growing" sector among visitors to the country.

In an interview Monday, May 11, on a board a river boat making its maiden cruise on the Golden River of Basesy, Durano told reporters that the DoT has been pushing for ecotourism, which helps attract more foreign tourists to visit the country.

He said the country's tourism industry had once lost the French, Hong Kong and Singapore markets, but with the promotion of ecotourism, tourists from these countries have started coming to the Philippines.

"It's because many of them, especially those in the younger generation, are looking for nature-based, adventure-type of travel," he said. ■

FOR 1ST QUARTER OF 2009

Cebu now RP's top tourist destination

by NESTOR P. BURGOS JR.
Inquirer.net

ILOILO CITY, Iloilo—Cebu has become the country's top tourist destination based on tourist arrivals, according to the Department of Tourism.

The province led 14 other key tourist destinations in the country, including the world-famous Boracay Island in tourist arrivals from January to March.

Data from the DOT on tourist arrivals for the first quarter showed that 422,239 tourists went to Cebu, nearly 3 percent higher than the 410,597 tourists who went to the province during the same period last year.

Boracay was second with 158,030 arrivals, followed by Davao City (156,468), Camarines Sur (140,220), Zambales (88,718), and Bohol (71,876).

The increase reflected the growth in over-all tourist arrivals in the country during the period, reaching 10.33 percent or a total of 1.3 million from last year's 1.1 million, the DOT said.

Cebu was also the most frequently visited destination by foreign tourists with 184,790 arrivals, or drawing nearly half of the 383,608 foreign tourists who visited the country. It was followed by Boracay (63,903), Zambales (25,252), Camarines Sur (24,976), and Bohol (24,350).

Overall, the volume of domestic tourists visiting

key destinations grew faster at 13 percent while, foreign arrivals recorded a 4-percent increase in the first quarter.

Eduardo Jarque, tourism undersecretary for planning and promotions, credited the rise of tourist arrivals in the regions, especially Cebu, to more and cheaper direct flights, and better infrastructure, including hotels, pensions houses, and ancestral homes to accommodate tourists.

"Manila has become a stopover for leisure travelers who proceed to the regions like Cebu," Jarque told the *Inquirer* in a phone interview.

He said it has developed into a lifestyle for expatriates and other tourists to head to the provinces and beaches for a vacation.

Cebu has become a center of the tourism upswing because it combines a rich historical backdrop, modern infrastructure, and varied destinations, according to Jarque.

But, he said, tourist arrivals on Boracay continue to grow with more hotel rooms needed because the existing hotels are always fully booked.

"Among island resorts, Boracay remains the top tourist drawer with tourist arrivals growing by an average of 6 percent annually for the past decade," said Edwin Trompeta, tourism director of Western Visayas. ■

NGOs fight vote-buying

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Asked for their opinion on the statement "In an election, it is not bad to accept money provided one votes according to one's conscience," 50 percent of the respondents agreed, 32 percent disagreed, while 16 percent were undecided.

Those in the rural areas (56 percent) were found to be more likely to approve of accepting money, compared to those in urban areas (43 percent), according to the survey held before the May 2007 elections.

Nationwide reach

Fifty-four percent in the Visayas, 51 percent in Mindanao, 49 percent in the rest of Luzon and 45 percent in Metro Manila also agreed with the statement.

The survey also showed that seven out of every 10 registered voters (69 percent) expected vote-buying

to occur in their areas.

"In my talks when I go around the country I tell my audience the story that 'Come May 9, 2010, I'll be given P500 which I'll use to pay for the graduation of my children.' How can I judge such a person who will accept that P500?" Soliman said.

To show its nationwide reach, ChangePolitics was simultaneously launched Sunday in Mandaue, Dumaguete, Davao, Cagayan de Oro, Iloilo, Ormoc and Naga cities, Samar and areas in the Caraga region. These areas were even linked by streaming live video.

"The prevailing view is that the poor can be easily bought. That is why our politicians do not do their work because they think that when voting day comes, we can be bought," said Jose Morales, an urban poor organizer. ■

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