

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

Ex-Comelec official doubts poll automation in 2010

by EVELYN MACAIRAN
Philstar.com

FORMER Commission on Elections chairman Christian Monsod doubted last March 10 the capability of the Comelec to fully automate next year's national elections. Speaking at a forum in Manila, Monsod expressed apprehensions over the precinct count optical scan (PCOS) system. He had discussed with Comelec Advisory Council chairman Ray Anthony Chua the possible scenarios and problems in a fully automated election, he added.

"One possible situation with the PCOS is that the voter has shaded or marked the space provided for opposite the name of his chosen candidate in the ballot," he said.

"But what if the voter changes his mind, makes a mistake in shading or there is a smudge in the ballot, would his vote still be counted by the machine? Would this forfeit his right to vote?"

During the same forum, Comelec Commissioner Rene Sarmiento assured Monsod that the poll body is bent on upholding a person's right to vote.

By using a full automation system, errors from the precinct level like the wrong appreciation of votes and mix up in tally numbers could be avoided, he added.

Monsod said the most transparent portion of the present electoral system — manual voting and precinct counting—must be retained.

"The problem is... the next 42 days which is canvassing at the national level, that is where wholesale cheating takes place," he said.

"When automation was first conceived it was meant to address wholesale cheating in the national level."

Monsod said they would never bring the matter to court even if they have reservations on the Comelec's decision.

"Commissioner Sarmiento and I were in the Constitutional Convention," he said.

"What is important to us is institution building whether we talk

process or agency, (what) is important is the enhanced trust of the people.

"At the end we must get together provided that all the safeguards and questions can be answered by all means. Let us get together and automate."

Monsod has been advocating the Open Election System developed by the University of the Philippines.

In that system, the voting and counting would be done manually, while the canvassing and transmission would be computerized.

On the other hand, the untested PCOS system could be prone to fraud if sufficient safeguards are not put in place.

Monsod said he is worried that difficulties would be encountered under PCOS, considering the time constraints.

"There is no system in the world that is fool proof," he said.

Monsod said it would be better if the automation of the elections would be done in transition. "Why don't we be careful and be more conservative in approach, do it in stages and let the people begin to grasp it because there could be many possible problems that could happen in a one-step full-fledged nationwide automated election right away," he said.

The Philippines is probably the first country to shift from a full manual to full automation election system.

The Comelec is expecting some 50 million voters to flock to the polling precincts next year. ■

Attorney Bankruptcy

Bonney & Associates
Attorney at Law Serving the SF Bay Area Since 1983



AFFORDABLE

No Interest Payment Plans. We work with you.

BANKRUPTCY RELIEF

MOST CONSUMERS MAY QUALIFY TO

- STOP FORECLOSURE - RESOLVE DEFAULT
- 2d MORTGAGE LIEN STRIP ELIMINATE OR REDUCE A SECOND MORTGAGE
- ELIMINATE CREDIT CARD & LOAN DEBT
- KEEP YOUR HOME & YOUR PROPERTY

FORECLOSURE HELP

- STOP FORECLOSURE - SAVE YOUR HOME
- 5 YEARS TO REPAY YOUR DEFAULT
- COURT PROTECTION
- MORTGAGE LOAN MODIFICATIONS

ELIMINATE or REDUCE DEBTS

- RELIEF FROM CREDIT CARDS - TAXES - DEBT
- SETTLEMENTS - WORKOUTS - LEGAL RELIEF
- STOP COLLECTION HARASSMENT

Experienced & Aggressive - Former Attorney For Several Bankruptcy Trustees

415 986-0115

www.Lbonney.com
825 Van Ness Ave #304
San Francisco, CA 94109

Honorable & Wise Financial Relief & Solutions for Honest Hardworking People

DOF, Senate to look into road fund anomalies

by PAOLO ROMERO
Philstar.com

CLARK FIELD, Pampanga—Two members of the Road Board and the Senate disclosed last March 10 that they will investigate allegations by

lawmakers that some P50 billion in proceeds from the road users' tax have been misused.

Congressmen said earlier this week they would conduct an investigation into the alleged misuse of the proceeds from the Motor Vehicles User's

Charge (MVUC).

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves and Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya Jr. in separate interviews here said they have read the newspaper reports on the allegations but have not yet received any official communication from the lawmakers.

The Road Board, headed by the Secretary of Public Works and Highways, is under the Office of the President. The Secretary of Transportation and Communications and three nominees from motorist and transport groups are also members of the Board.

The COA earlier said auditors found a "breach in the budget process" regarding the use of funds under the MVUC that resulted in "irregular" expenditures that are not covered by the supposed allotment.

Legarda seeks Senate probe

Sen. Loren Legarda is also seeking a Senate investigation into the alleged P50 billion misuse of road users' tax for possible violations of the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act and the Reformed Government Procurement Reform Act.

She also urged the COA to initiate the filing of appropriate charges.

The COA audit covers the 2007 report on the Road Board, which administers MVUC funds collected from registration fees of motor vehicles. The audit agency has yet to issue its report on the use of the funds in 2008.

As early as July of 2007, Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago filed Resolution No. 30 directing the Department of Public Works and Highways and the Road Users' Tax

Board to account for the proceeds of the road users' tax, which under Republic Act 8794 should be earmarked solely and used exclusively for road maintenance and improvement of the road drainage; for the installation of adequate and efficient traffic lights and road safety devices; and for air pollution control.

The Road Board, composed of the secretaries of public works and highways, finance, budget and management, and transportation and communications, has been mandated to prudently and efficiently manage the special road funds.

There has been no major investigation on the issue at the Senate since the resolution was filed.

Sen. Francis Escudero also lamented that despite the road users' tax, the government had not made the country's streets safe especially for children.

COA auditors found that notices of cash allocations were received by the DPWH for "carriageway and maintenance activities" from the Department of Budget and Management even without special allotment release orders.

This resulted in "irregular incurrence of obligations and disbursements" by the DPWH and other government agencies even before the receipt of allotments, something that is not in accordance with the budget process.

Malacañang officials said that the administration welcomes the looming congressional investigation even as officials of the Road Board maintained the funds are all properly accounted for. ■

FOUNDER'S DAY PROMO



Regular Box

\$45

\$45 NA!
JUNIOR BOX PA?

DROP OFF ONLY

FOR METRO MANILA DELIVERIES
(THIS OFFER IS FOR NORTHERN CALIFORNIA RESIDENTS ONLY)
Restrictions apply

Please call toll free:

1-888-712-8527

510-222-6471

SEAFOOD CITY SUPERMARKET

SEAFOOD CITY DROP OFF LOCATION

ATLAS VAN ON-SITE

VALLEJO • SAN PABLO • SACRAMENTO
DALY CITY • SAN JOSE • UNION CITY • DALY CITY

Ebola: From bat to pig?

by DINO BALABO
Philstar.com

MALOLOLOS CITY—The Ebola Reston Virus (ERV) found in pigs in a farm in Pandi, Bulacan might have come from fruit bats, a health official disclosed last March 10.

Dr. Eric Tayag of the National Epidemiology Center said there is a possibility that ERV was transmitted from fruit bats to pigs recently depopulated in Pandi town.

"We suspect that the virus came from fruit bats but that is not definite yet," Tayag said.

Tayag based their suspicion on earlier studies in Africa where experts found Ebola virus in fruit bats. They said fruit bats are thought to have transmitted the virus through their droppings or dead bodies.

Similar bats live in the Philippines.

A low pathogenic virus, ERV is a type of filo virus or thread-like virus normally found in monkeys. Its discovery in pigs is the first case in the world.

The virulent subtypes of Ebola virus were found in Zaire, Sudan, Ivory Coast and in Bundibugyo, and caused hemorrhagic fever in its victims.

Tayag said they would now coordinate with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for the monitoring and surveillance of all types of bats.

With regard to human cases that developed anti-bodies for ERV, Tayag gave no explanation.

In his power point presentation, Tayag showed the possibility of the virus being transmitted to pigs then to humans either through eating or handling meat, particularly for people working in slaughterhouses.

The Ebola Reston strain, first found in monkeys exported from the Philippines to the US, is not known to be dangerous to humans.

But just the same, Tayag reminded the public to follow the four lines of defense to avoid getting infected by the virus.

These are: report all occurrences of sick or dying pigs; be cautious in handling sick or dying pigs, be careful in handling raw meat; prohibit and confiscate double dead meat; and cook pork thoroughly with adequate heat.

Meanwhile, Bulacan Gov. Joselito Mendoza led local officials in eating roasted pork (*lechon*) last March 11, to prove that it is safe to eat pork.

He voiced optimism on the recovery of the local hog industry.

Dr. Joy Gomez, provincial health officer and spokesperson on ERV, said although the depopulation procedure was successful, they would still conduct public meetings in Pandi starting March 12 to address the fears of local residents. ■