

# 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 12 suggested to the Comelec to consider using the ACMs purchased from the MPC in its pursuit of automation of the 2010 general polls.

"This is the time for the Comelec to ask the Supreme Court to set aside all legal technicalities and yield to what is practical and economically viable under the present crisis where the much awaited poll automation is in peril. This is the best remedy to answer the call to start even a partial poll automation in our country," he said in a statement sent to *The STAR*.

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."

Alabastro said she was willing to stake her reputation in attesting to the reliability and accuracy of the counting machines.

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 peti-

tion 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 today.

"As we all know, nothing happened to the criminal cases as (these) were all dismissed by the Ombudsman for lack of evidence to prove the guilt of the Comelec officials and officials of the MPC. As to the civil case to recover the P1.2 billion from the MPC, the government is not even sure of winning this case," he said.

"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

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# RP seen to improve anticorruption rating

THE Presidential Anti-Graft Commission (PAGC) expects an improvement in the Philippines' ranking in international corruption surveys with the implementation of government agencies' moral renewal action plans starting May 13.

The action plans were formulated according to the results of a national anti-graft workshop held in Malacañang on March 5, and "all manifested sincere and determined government-wide efforts" to promote integrity in public service, PAGC chief Constancia de Guzman said in a statement.

The implementation of the "agency-specific" action plans is in compliance with President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's Administrative Order No. 255 on moral renewal in government, De Guzman said.

According to De Guzman, Ms Arroyo's anticorruption campaign began on April 16, 2001, when she formed the PAGC. In 2004, she made the

and civil society groups in accordance with her Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan.

The number of government agencies implementing the IDAP has risen from 39 in 2005 to 156 in 2008, De Guzman said.

She said the number would "definitely increase to cover all government agencies in the executive branch as they implement their respective moral renewal action plans." ■

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