

## **ARMM consultation meetings on election postponement commence**

The House Committees on Suffrage and Electoral Reforms, and on Muslim Affairs are holding public consultations on the proposed postponement of the election in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) scheduled for August 2011.

The consultation meetings are scheduled as follow:

1. In Shariff Kabunsuan on March 11, for Maguindanao
2. In Marawi City on March 12 for Lanao del Sur
3. In Zamboanga City on March 13 Sulu and Tawi-Tawi

After President Benigno Aquino III met with Muslim legislators, he agreed that consultation meetings should be conducted to get the pulse of the majority of the stakeholders in ARMM. Congress was given until March 25, 2011 to act on House Bill 4146 which seeks to postpone the ARMM elections and synchronize it with the 2013 general elections, and to allow the President to appoint Officers-In-Charge in the ARMM.

According to Malacañang, ARMM constituents are in favor of having the elections synchronized with the 2013 mid-term elections to give way to improvements and reforms in the region. Malacañang also said that they do not have intentions to delay the polls to buy time to appoint their allies to positions in the region.

Expected to participate in the consultations are election stakeholders in the region including peace advocates, local officials, and Ulama.



## **Special elections being held today**

The Commission on Elections (Comelec) is holding simultaneous special elections today, March 12, 2011, in five different areas: 2nd District, Cagayan Province; Paracelis, Mountain Province; Sumisip, Basilan; Sapa-Sapa, Tawi-Tawi; and Indanan, Sulu.

The special election in Cagayan is being held to fill the position vacated due to the untimely death of Rep.

Florencio Vargas. House Speaker Feliciano Belmonte assigned Cagayan 1st District Rep. Juan Ponce Enrile, Jr. as the caretaker for the 2nd District until a new representative is elected.

In Paracelis, Mountain Province, the Comelec declared a failure of election in precinct No. 30A in sitio Apalis after armed men burned the PCOS machine and election paraphernalia in the area during the May 10, 2010 elections.

In Bgy. Baldatal Islam, Sapa-Sapa, Tawi-Tawi, as well as in Indanan, Sulu and Sumisip, Basilan, the Board of Election Tellers withdrew from carrying out their tasks due to security concerns in the May 2010 elections. Additionally, in Sapa-Sapa, contending political parties did not agree as to what military unit to tap to ensure order in the conduct of the May elections. There were also issues encountered such as the non-determination of the venue for the elections, among others. Namfrel Tawi-Tawi chairperson Termizie Masahud reported that the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) will play a major role in the special election in Sapa-Sapa to ensure that the exercise will be secure from threats and election-related violence. Members of the Special Action Force (SAF) from the ARMM Regional Office shall be appointed as Board of Election Inspectors (BEIs). The composite security unit that will ensure order during the conduct of the election will be composed of members from the Philippine National Police (PNP), Philippine Marines, Philippine Air Force and the Special Warfare Group (SWAG) of the Philippine Navy.

For Indanan, Namfrel Sulu chairperson Adzfar Usman said that they are expecting a low turnout of voters due to intimidation and vote-buying.

The Comelec, through Minute Resolution 10-1434 has resolved to adapt manual voting process for today's special elections.

## Special election planned for Ilocos Sur

With Rep. Ronald Singson's resignation as representative for the 2nd district of Ilocos Sur, following his conviction by a Hong Kong court for drug possession, a resolution was filed declaring a vacancy. Singson may be replaced through special elections as provided by Republic Act No. 6645. The law states that a special election must be held for a vacant House seat if the vacancy takes place at least one year before the date of the next regular elections, which in this case is May 13, 2013.

"The special elections will be scheduled within 90 days after our receipt of the Congress' resolution," Comelec spokesman James Jimenez told reporters.

Under RA 6645, the House must first come up with a resolution certifying the existence of a vacancy and calling for special elections. The Comelec must then fix the date of the special election, which shall not be earlier than 45 days nor later than 90 days after the receiving the House resolution.

"Normally, in such cases, we would want to complete the process within that 90-day period so that the vacancy will not last long. We want it over and done with as soon as possible," Jimenez explained, adding that the date of the special elections would depend when the House would transmit the resolution to Comelec.

Whoever gets elected in the special elections will only serve Singson's unexpired term, or until June 30, 2013. (Source: PDI)

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