

Comelec wants to automate ARMM elections using PCOS

The Comelec en banc has reportedly decided to adopt the PCOS machine and the OMR technology to automate the ARMM elections. The polls tentatively scheduled for August, would involve only a small number of candidates vying for governor, vice-governor, and assemblyman posts in the five province of the autonomous region. The en banc supposedly voted 6-1 in favor of the automation using the PCOS, with only Commissioner Augusto Lagman maintaining that the ARMM elections should be automated using another technology. The Comelec has not publicly released any resolution on this matter.

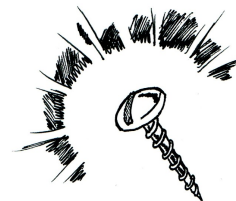
In previous months the House Committee on Suffrage, IT, civil society, Comelec Advisory Council and election monitoring organizations have called to forego the use of the PCOS technology in succeeding elections due to unresolved technical and systems issues. Proposals for the ARMM have been made for an all manual election or conduct the polls in a manual voting and/or count but automating the transmission and canvassing process for transparency and practical reasons.

Earlier, Comelec has assured the public that the correction of the defects will be discussed together with the negotiation of the contract. However, the en banc reportedly agreed last Tuesday that Smartmatic demonstrate first to the Comelec that all the defects have been corrected before the Commission negotiates the contract. This week, Systest Labs is expected to release to the Comelec its report on its assessment on the fixes to the software.

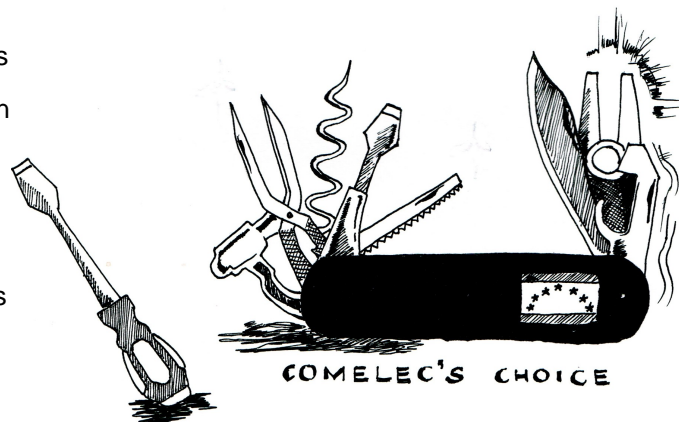
The Comelec will use some 5,000 PCOS units in the ARMM. It has already acquired some 900 units and is currently negotiating to buy an additional 4,000 machines from Smartmatic. The proposed cost to run the ARMM elections for its estimated 1.7 million voters is at Php 1.9542 billion (or Php 1,150 per voter) with the following cost components:

- Php 198 million pesos for hardware (Php 130.9 million), ballot boxes (Php 17 million), election & stress test consumables and software components (Php 50.3 million)
- Php 756 million for Technology-related services (no specifics)
- Php 1 billion for Non-Technology related services (no specifics)

If approved, the estimated 2011 ARMM polls expense per voter is more than three times that of the estimated cost per voter incurred in the May 2010 national elections (Php 322 per voter). Namfrel estimates that the Comelec spent Php 16.5 billion to conduct the 2010 automated elections for around 51,292,465 registered voters. (Sources: Namfrel data, SunStar, Malaya)



COUNTING IN THE
ARMM ELECTIONS



COMELEC'S CHOICE

A state subsidy for Philippine political parties?

There is a pending bill in Congress on political party strengthening that is up for approval just before Congress goes on recess in June. Introduced by Rep. Rufus Rodriguez, et al, the proposed bill (a substitute bill to HB nos. 49 and 403), seeks to introduce reforms in party membership, platform, and vision. It emphasizes the importance of membership contributions in the operations of a party, and to allow only the dues-paying members to elect the party's candidates for elections. The substitute bill also seeks to limit campaign contributions to only P1million for natural persons, and P10million for juridical entities. It also seeks to prevent party members to switch parties sixty days prior to election day.

The bill however also seeks to create a state subsidy for political parties. The bill proposes that 35% of the amount be allocated among the political parties in the Senate, and 65% among those in the House of Representatives, to be based on the number of seats won by each party in the last election. The remaining 5% shall be given to the Comelec to add to their funds for information dissemination campaign and voters education.

Another bill, HB No. 159 filed by Rep. Arthur Yap, seeks to limit campaign contributions to P5million for both natural and juridical persons.

In a hearing conducted by the House Committee on Suffrage on May 10, resource persons from civil society and other congressmen were invited to comment and propose changes to the bills. Some of the proposed amendments by the resource persons were:

- To bring down further the allowable amount of campaign contributions because the amounts mentioned will still encourage overspending; a suggested amount was P100,000 for natural persons and P1million for juridical entities. It was also suggested that the bill be clear on whether the limits set are the allowable contributions per party, or the total amount for one or more parties.
- To indicate specific period (say in the next two terms) wherein the six-month window to change parties will be allowed to further discourage turncoatism.
- That issues pertaining to campaign finance be in a separate proposed bill than to incorporate it in one for political party strengthening, because there are certain campaign finance contributions that can already be implemented
- On the allocation of funds among the parties, that: a) the number of constituents should also be considered; b) that a certain percentage be allotted for qualified political parties that are still "struggling" (guidelines to be put in place) so that the state subsidy will not be used to just maintain the dominance of political parties already in power
- To include a provision that would also limit how much a candidate could spend in a given constituency. This would entail the adjustment of the P5/voter limit stipulated in the 1987 Omnibus Election Code, to about P20/per voter when adjusted for inflation.
- To include a provision on what to do with excess funds, if any.
- That party list organizations not be included as they are governed by a separate party-list law, unless they are also registered in the Comelec as a political party like Akbayan and Bayan Muna.

The House Committee on Suffrage is accepting position papers regarding these bills up to this week, before the Committee reconvenes to deliberate and approve them by the end of this month.

Read Rep. Rodriguez's proposed bill here: <http://scr.bi/jYQxrU>

Read Rep. Yap's proposed bill here: <http://bit.ly/lj6j4s>

Listen to an audio recording of the hearing here: <http://chirb.it/55qC5n>

People's initiative vote held in Quezon City by Michael B. Mundo (Chairperson, NAMFREL Quezon City)



A pioneering political exercise was held on May 14, 2011 at the Pura V. Kalaw Elementary School in Project 4 Quezon City last Saturday, May 14, 2011. This is a precedent-setting process of ratifying a village regulation petitioned under the system of people's initiative.

It took 465 affirmative votes as against 384 negative votes to enact a barangay ordinance on illegal settlers, mendicants, abusive barangay officials, and drug trafficking at Barangay Milagrosa, District 3, Quezon City. One voter abstained. There was a marked ballot. There were at least two stray ballots. Voter turnout, however, was disappointingly low at 23.4% or 856 votes cast out of 3,665 registered voters in 12 clustered precincts.

The Initiative Board of Canvassers led by Quezon City District 3 Election Officer Evelyn B. Bautista as chair and Quezon City Prosecutor Donald D. Lee as vice-chair with Darna C. Dimaya as member started the official canvass of the results from 12 clustered precincts at 5 p.m. at the Reading Station at the ground floor of the school's main building. Present were initiative proponents; volunteers from the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) under the Our Lady of Miraculous Medal parish; representatives from the Legal Network for Truthful Elections (LENTE); and the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) Quezon City chapter. None of the the initiative opponents came to witness the process, but a barangay kagawad briefly entered the canvassing room. Deputized members of the Philippine National Police were also posted outside the canvassing room for security purposes.

At the close of the voting at 3 p.m., votes were only recorded by the Initiative Committee from the returns as watchers monitored the reading out of the votes. No tally sheets were posted on the blackboard for simultaneous recording of votes as provided for under Comelec's rules. For the benefit of the public, however, some teachers wrote the results in their polling place on the blackboard.

The Commission on Elections promulgated the rules and regulations that would govern the conduct of the initiative on April 20, 2011 (Comelec Resolution No. 9205 - <http://bit.ly/iBXkaW>)



Lucena City Election Protest

One of the election protest cases brought to the Comelec was for the mayoral race in Lucena City, Quezon. Constituents were reported to have been appealing for the poll body to decide on the legality of the administration of former mayor Ramon Talaga's wife, Mayor Barbara Talaga. After she was proclaimed winner of the May 2010 polls, her rival candidate Philip Castillo and Vice Mayor Roderick Alcala claimed that the proclamation of Mayor Talaga was invalid due to irregularities.

Former mayor Ramon Talaga was the original candidate who ran for mayor but Comelec disqualified him for already having served three terms. Barbara, or "Ruby" to her constituents, then took the place of her husband and ran. Reports say that what the former mayor filed was not a withdrawal of his candidacy, but an ex-parte manifestation and motion for reconsideration as a response to a Comelec resolution granting Philip Castillo's petition to cancel Ramon's candidacy.

Experts said the withdrawal of Ramon Talaga's motion for reconsideration was not tantamount to the withdrawal of his candidacy. Hence, Mayor Barbara should not have been considered as her husband's replacement but rather another candidate. The opposition further cited that the Comelec ruling granting mayor Talaga's candidacy as official, replacing that of her husband, and her certificate of candidacy were acted upon and approved by the poll body on May 13, 2010 or three days after the election. Barbara was proclaimed in 2010 after Ramon Talaga got the highest number of votes.

Alcala on the other hand filed a petition to annul the proclamation of Barbara, and cited that it is he that should be proclaimed mayor since he obtained the second highest number of votes, per rules of succession under the Local Government Code of 1991.

Last February, Comelec junked the petitions filed by Castillo and Alcala assailing Talaga's proclamation. The decision however had the dissenting opinion of Commissioner Lucenito Tagle. Alcala was reported to be Tagle's nephew.

After both Alcala and Castillo filed a motion for reconsideration, Tagle drafted a resolution favoring Alcala's petition, instead of inhibiting himself due to consanguinity issue. The draft which is expected to become a resolution anytime soon, will contest that mayor Talaga's proclamation as city mayor is illegitimate. This will, as a result, allow Alcala to be proclaimed as the city mayor. (Sources: PDI, PhilStar)

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