

# Palace asked to compel GMA adviser to testify on Piatco

President Arroyo should compel one of her advisers to give details of a government contract, which lawmakers suspect was awarded to a company in exchange for kickbacks, a former Securities and Exchange Commission official said yesterday.

Former SEC chairman Perfecto Yasay urged Mrs. Arroyo to order Presidential Adviser on Strategic Affairs Gloria Tan-Climaco, who reviewed the contract, to appear before the Commission on Appointments (CA).

Last Wednesday the CA ordered the arrest of Climaco and consultant Alfredo

By **SHEILA CRISOSTOMO**  
Liongson for repeatedly failing to attend the confirmation hearings on Transportation and Communications Secretary Pantaleon Alvarez despite a subpoena.

Lawmakers want to question Climaco about a contract awarded to Philippine International Air Transport Co. (Piatco) for the construction of terminal 3 of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA).

As for Liongson, a multimillion-dollar consultant of Piatco, lawmakers want him to shed light on the work he did for the company.

Climaco, who failed to appear in the May 6, 15 and 21 hearings, told the panel last week that she had to go to the United States to be beside an ailing brother.

She, however, told the committee she was not at liberty to disclose the nature of her brother's illness.

Liongson, on the other hand, said he was sick the first time, and that he was going to the US the second time. He gave no excuse the third time.

Liongson was dubbed the "consultant of the century" for getting from Piatco \$200,000 a month, plus

**Turn to Page 5**

# Palace asked From Page 1

\$200,000 as initial fee, and a total of \$2.2 million for carrying out certain tasks.

Last Friday, acting Press Secretary Silvestre Afable called on the CA to recall its arrest order and proceed with Alvarez's confirmation hearings.

That irked Yasay, who said Malacañang should not interfere with the CA. "President Arroyo must not pressure the CA to railroad the confirmation of Alvarez," said Yasay, now chairman of the MIA-NALIA Service Operators (MASO), an association of airport ground service providers.

Climaco's testimony is vital to Alvarez's confirmation because she evaluated the Piatco contract, Yasay said.

"Climaco found out that the contract was highly disadvantageous for the government. She found onerous provisions in the transaction," he said without elaborating. "This is a very urgent matter. She is not an ordinary witness. I personally believe that Climaco is not conveniently out of the country on her own. There is some pressure on her."

Alvarez had earlier said the contract was above-board.

Yasay believes otherwise. "Alvarez said there was nothing irregular in the contract. But this is not the case," he said.

He said Alvarez was guilty of conflict of interest because one of Piatco's subcontractors, Wintrack Builders, was owned by his family.

"How can he protect the public if he has personal interest in this? He compromised his position," Yasay said. "He placed his personal interest above all."

He urged Mrs. Arroyo to withdraw Alvarez's nomination "if she is sincere in appointing people to her Cabinet who are qualified and of good moral character."

MASO opposes the contract, saying giving Piatco a monopoly of operating NALIA terminal 3 would lead to higher airport terminal fees, which, in turn, would "raise prices that would eventually be passed on to passengers."

"Certainly, anything that adds costs to the airlines flying to the Philippines runs counter to her vision," MASO said in a statement, referring to Mrs. Arroyo's recent speech before the Association of Foreign Travel Agencies expressing her desire for lower air fares to accelerate the growth of the country's tourism industry.

"The fact that Piatco is allowed to increase passenger terminal fees to more than double the existing rates already goes against the President's tourism development program," the group added.