

GMA gets 2 new helicopters

By JESS DIAZ

While the Air Force finds it too expensive to add one more C-130 so that it would have at least two cargo planes in working condition, Malacañang has acquired two helicopters worth P1.4 billion, or P700 million each, for use by President Arroyo.

Members of the House appropriations committee learned of the acquisition

Turn to Page 9



GMA gets From Page 7

yesterday when they compared the P1.3-billion budget of the Office of the President (OP) this year and its proposed P2.9-billion outlay for 2009.

They told reporters that the difference of P1.4 billion between this year's and the 2009 OP budgets represents the purchase price of the two presidential helicopters.

The new acquisitions are in addition to several choppers and other aircraft comprising the presidential fleet being available to Mrs. Arroyo.

In contrast, the Air Force could not buy a replacement for its C-130 transport plane that crashed in the Davao Gulf more than a month ago.

Defense Secretary Gilbert Teodoro told an appropriations committee hearing last week that a brand new C-130 would be "expensive" at P300 million.

"We would rather make do with the remaining C-130 that is still operational and two more that are under repair and maintenance. Those would be sufficient for our requirements, if we can make them fly," he said.

Though congressmen learned about Malacañang's helicopter purchase, they did not question OP officials about it. In fact, they approved OP's 2009 budget without scrutiny "in deference to the highest official of the land."

The office of Vice President Noli de Castro was given the same treatment. De Castro's P182.8-million 2009 budget was also approved without question.

While the OP budget for next year

would be P1.4 billion less than this year's, the President's travel expenses would go up by P25 million to P608 million.

Funds for "professional services," which include the hiring of consultants, would go up from P262.2 million this year to P298.9 million in 2009.

Mrs. Arroyo will have P600 million at her disposal for "confidential and intelligence expenses," the same amount that is available to her this year.

That sum is half the total government-wide intelligence budget of P1.3 billion. The remaining half is shared by the

Armed Forces, Philippine National Police, National Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Immigration, and a few other agencies.

Of the President's P600-million intelligence fund, P150 is appropriated for OP proper, while P300 million is allocated to the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission (PACCC).

The commission was created during the time of former President Ramos. It was headed by then Vice President Estrada, who appointed Panfilo Lacson, then a senior police officer, chief of PACCC's Task Force Mabugat.