

# GMA urged to punish execs in anomalies

By JESS DIAZ

Nueva Ecija Rep. Edno Josen has urged President Arroyo to punish government officials and personnel involved in irregularities uncovered recently by the Commission on Audit (COA).

"At the very least, the President should ask these officials to explain why the anomalies happened and why they allowed the wastage of hundreds of millions, if not billions, in taxpayer's money," he told a news forum in Quezon City.

Josen, however, said there has been no statement of admonition or sanction from Mrs. Arroyo or from any Palace official.

"Their complete silence could be misinterpreted as toleration of the irregularities and wastage of precious funds. No wonder, it's business as usual for those involved in these anomalies," he said.

Josen cited COA's findings of anomalies in the Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Education (DepEd) and the Road Board, an agency attached to the Department of Public Works and Highways.

He said the President has not asked officials of these agencies to explain the irregularities.

Josen pointed out that in the case of the COA report on the DA, many of the acts of wrongdoing auditors discovered "were a repeat of the P728-million fertilizer scam in 2004."

According to the COA report, the agriculture department gave more than P400 million to several private foundations in 2007. The funds consisted of regular DA allocations and money from the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) of members of the House of Representatives.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap has told a House budget hearing that some of the foundations have submitted "liquidation reports," while the others have been required to account for the money given to them.

The biggest recipient-private organization is a certain Antipolo Philanthropy Foundation, which received P147 million in 2007 and an additional P30 million in February this year.

In the DepEd, more than P1 billion worth of computer equipment, textbooks, chairs, and other school supplies were not used and were allowed to rot in stockrooms in 2007.

Of that amount, more than P400 million came from the PDAF allocations of congressmen, while the remainder was sourced from the DepEd budget.

As for the Road Board, which distributes road maintenance funds, there have been several complaints that its projects could not be found.

In Cagayan Valley, for instance, Nueva Vizcaya Rep. Carlos Padilla said the P1 billion the board allocated for the region was "missing."

Padilla said in his province, which was supposed to have received P380 million, the money could not be accounted for.

- With Delon Porcalla