

GMA advances deadline for P40-B infrastructure projects

LUBAO, Pampanga – Presidential Management Staff (PMS) chief Hermogenes Esperon said recently that the deadline for the various projects set by President Arroyo in her past State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) has been moved forward to December 2009 from the original 2010 target.

These are mostly infrastructure projects nationwide amounting to P40 billion.

In an interview during the celebration of Mrs. Arroyo's 62nd birthday here Sunday, Esperon said "we have moved the deadline for the projects from 2010 to this

December."

"As PMS head, I am now focusing on SONA commitments including major thoroughfares such as the South Luzon Expressway, the roads connecting to Batangas, and also the road that will connect Tarlac, Pangasinan and La Union," Esperon said.

He said that as early as January, the President had instructed that no less than 60 percent of these projects be bidded out to private contractors within the first quarter of this year.

"So by February, most of the projects were already bidded out," he said, refer-

ring to P20 billion worth of irrigation projects and P6 billion worth of farm-to-market roads.

Esperon, however, also admitted that some projects could still not be completed this year, including the long-delayed Calocan-to-Clark railway and the modern passenger terminal at the Diosdado Macapagal International Airport (DMIA) at the Clark Freeport.

"We have added more funds for the railway," he said, referring to the \$317 million additional cost for the \$1 billion railway which has been delayed for five years.

But North Luzon Railways Corp. (Northrail) chairman Edgardo Pamintuan said that Mrs. Arroyo has insisted on the completion of the project before her term expires next year.

Sources from the Clark International Airport Corp., meantime, admitted that the new terminal, whose private contractor has yet to be picked, could be finished only in the latter part of next year, past the Arroyo administration.

- Ding Cervantes