



PRESIDENT AQUINO

MANILA — Businessmen disclosed that they are giving President Benigno Aquino III a “barely passing mark” for his first year in office because although the new administration started on the right foot with the anti-*wang-wang* (siren) campaign, several administration officials got involved in controversies.

Management Association of the Philippines (MAP) president Felino Palafox Jr. told a press conference at The Peninsula Manila hotel in Makati that the business group gave Mr. Aquino a grade of 75.

“I don’t see yet how we can be brought to the promise land,” Palafox said.

He is still looking for concrete plans on how the administration would eliminate corruption and

criminality and address climate change.

Palafox said there are government agencies that are doing its best to follow the President's anti-corruption battle cry of "*tuwid na daan* (straight path)."

He cited the good example of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH).

When asked if he can also give a passing mark to the President's economic team like the Department of Finance, Department of Trade and Industry, Department of Agriculture and the rest, he said he does not have any opinion on the matter yet.

Palafox lauded the Aquino Administration for not persecuting their critics, but he said there are sectors that observed the worsening corruption.

"We can speak more openly now than before," he said.

He said property developers from the Chamber of Real Estate and Builders Association (CREBA) and the Subdivision Housing Developers Association Inc. (SHEDA) are already complaining that corruption is getting worse.

He cited three agencies — namely the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the local government units (LGUs).

"The per square meter of corruption is getting worse," Palafox said.

He stressed that aside from corruption, the competence of each appointed government official must also be scrutinized.

Palafox presented over 200 recommendations, advisories and commentaries to the President.

This is on top of the 120 recommendations addressing disaster preparedness, response and mitigation the group gave the President last year.

Out of the 120 recommendations, Palafox said the government implemented only one, but the business sector is still hopeful that this administration will listen to them.

Among the key recommendations of MAP to increase the competitiveness of the Philippines are: the lowering of energy cost, professionalism of key government agencies, pursue infrastructure projects and establish a robust investor assistance office.

MAP said the energy cost must be addressed because it brings up the cost of doing business in the Philippines.

If energy cost can be tempered, the Philippines may become the preferred investment destination in the region.

MAP said the government agencies that should be professionalized are: Department of Education, Department of Health, DPWH, Department of Transportation and Communications, Philippine National Police, Bureau of Internal Revenue, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Civil Service Commission, Philippine Navy, Philippine Army, Philippine Military Academy and the National Electrification Administration.

For infrastructure, MAP said more policy must be put in place for the development of agribusiness, tourism, IT enabled services, electronics, logistics enabled products, health wellness and retirement, manufacturing and mining.

Lastly, the investor assistance office similar to the model of the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) will send a strong signal to investors.

Malacañang officials vowed that the Aquino Administration would continue to work hard to keep the people's confidence in government.

Presidential spokesman Edwin Lacierda cited the government's early gains in fiscal consolidation but acknowledged that the administration should do more to improve the lives of ordinary Filipinos.

He said the President would face the nation and deliver a speech and "we would let you judge the performance (of the administration) based on what the President will be saying."

"We have put a system that has replaced the old one and we are in the process of continuing to improve the system financially, physically towards poverty reduction and curbing graft and corruption," Lacierda said.

"It's still a long way, a long journey but the recent survey of the SWS would show that the (people) are giving the President and our administration allowance and so they are saying that one year is too early to tell," Lacierda said.

Lacierda said the Aquino government recognized the people's understanding and was focused on improving the quality of life of Filipinos, as well as the system of governance of the administration.

Deputy presidential spokesperson Abigail Valte said over Radio Mindanao Network that there were many tasks ahead of them.

"There are problems that can be solved easily but there are those that need time to be addressed," Valte said.

Senate Minority Leader Alan Peter Cayetano challenged the President to tell the nation what he intends to do in his second year and what actually happened in the past 12 months.

Cayetano said that the best thing for the President to do now is to come up with an honest State of the Nation Address next month, his second since assuming office in June last year.

He admitted that coming up with significant achievements in his first year in office would be very difficult, especially because the nation was coming from a “semi-dictatorship and corrupt regime.”

“The new administration will always have an understandable handicap. But it’s no excuse to be inefficient,” Cayetano said.

Binay credits P-Noy for his popularity

Vice President Jejomar Binay said that he was the “creation of the President” in reaction to the recent popularity survey that showed him overtaking the President.

Binay said he owed his high survey ratings to the President for trusting him with a Cabinet post.

He said there was no basis for comparing his high survey ratings with that of the President and that “I don’t want to compare, in the first place.”