

AFP: Most corrupt agency

Written by Editor-in-chief
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WE have scant reason to disbelieve a recent Pulse Asia survey dubbing the Armed Forces of the Philippines as the most corrupt agency in the government.

That scathing reputation used to be consigned to the Bureau of Internal Revenue, followed closely by the Bureau of Customs.

The BIR and BoC were the valedictorians of the corrupt class of government agencies until the once-revered AFP was embroiled in a cycle of corruption unearthed in the course of a plunder complaint against former AFP comptroller Carlos Garcia starting in 2002 and still unresolved up to now.

What happened to the institution which is mandated by the Constitution to protect the Filipino people?

Its once idealistic officer corps, practically all of them products of the premier military academy (PMA), became politicized, got drunk with power and had fallen victim to a pervasive culture described by a whistleblowing officer as “ABS,” the initials standing for “Alak, Babae at Sugal.”

Former comptrollers were accused to have built their own nest eggs, buying luxury properties at home and abroad, while their wives went on shopping junkets on many trips abroad.

The unadulterated greed went on undetected, and probably encouraged by higher-ups, by providing “pasalubong” and “pabaon” to AFP chiefs of staff, to the tune of hundreds of millions.

This sordid shenanigans came to light during a televised public hearing by the Senate blue ribbon committee investigating corruption in the military.

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One of those being grilled, former AFP chief of staff and cabinet member Angelo Reyes, shot himself to death before his guilt or innocence could be determined.

Another former comptroller, retired Gen. Jacinto Ligot, was detained in a Senate jail for consistently refusing to answer questions from senators on whether houses naming him as the owner were his or not.

His wife was similarly ordered detained in the Senate jail but was allowed to stay at a private hospital for humanitarian reasons.

The Senate later released the couple on condition that they would cooperate in future investigation.

Never in the colorful history of the Philippine Army, as it was known when the country was a commonwealth, to the postwar AFP until the 2000s, has its reputation sunk so low in public esteem.

The challenge to the current and future military leadership is to reclaim its dignity and honor with wide-ranging reforms from top to bottom.