

## Philcomsat Holdings prexy is mentally unfit; name used in 'looting' company

BY PETER TABINGO

THE counsel for Philcomsat Holdings Corp. (PHC) president and chief operating officer Manuel H. Nieto Jr. has asked the Sandiganbayan First Division to dismiss contempt proceedings against his client on the ground that he is mentally unfit to face trial.

Manuel M. Lazaro, in a six-page explanation, said his 91-year-old client is suffering from "orientation problems and severe short-term memory deficit — a criteria for Alzheimer's disease."

Lazaro made the disclosure by way of an apology for Nieto's failure

to attend the hearing last July 6.

Nieto, PHC director Philip Brodett and PHC assistant vice president and accountant Johnny Tan were ordered to submit explanations about their statement that the company spent P2 million for PR (public relations) at the Sandiganbayan.

They were ordered to appear before the court last July 6 under pain of contempt.

Presiding Justice Teresita Leonardo-De Castro and Associate Justices Diosdado Peralta and Efren dela Cruz cried foul over an item in the expense report submitted by

PHC to the Senate committee on government corporations which read "Cash for Sandiganbayan, tro, potc-philcomsat case - P2,000,000."

The magistrates said the expense report tends to cast aspersion on the court's integrity and degrade the administration of justice.

The expenditure was incurred by the Presidential Commission on Good Government-backed Philcomsat board which is being investigated by the Senate for allegedly using government-sequestered PHC, the Philippine Communica-

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tions Satellite Corp. (Philcomsat) and the Philippine Overseas Telecommunications Corp. (POTC) as "milking cows."

Lazaro said based on the findings of neuro-specialist Dr. Michael Grecius of the Stanford Hospital and Clinics in California, Nieto's

mental functions have been deteriorating for over the past two years.

He said his client's condition was exploited by other officials of Philcomsat to commit irregularities with the company's funds.

"Unfortunately, some cruel, heartless, and vicious persons aware of respondent's dementia took advantage of his condition and caused

him to sign documents that are questionable, if not unlawful," Lazaro said.

Sen. Richard Gordon, chairman of the Senate panel, has waived issuing summons on Nieto due to his precarious health condition. He has also voiced suspicion that Nieto is being used by other PHC officials as a scapegoat.