

# Lucky Mayor Joy, poor Mayor Isko

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Quezon City Mayor **Joy Belmonte** is definitely the luckiest of the new Metro mayors.



While other cities in the metropolis are wallowing in debt, Belmonte's predecessor, Mayor Bistek Bautista, has turned over to her administration an unprecedented surplus budget of P26.27 billion (cash on hand and in banks as of June). The money was certified by the Land Bank, Development Bank of the Philippines and Overseas Filipino Bank. Still to be collected until December are the real estate, community and business taxes in addition to several other revenue sources in the amount of P6.49 billion.

In her inaugural speech on June 30, Mayor Joy quickly clarified that of the amount, P4.6 billion represented "funds in trust" while P2 billion referred to long-term investments, leaving only P19.9 billion in the general fund.

Whatever the final amount, this windfall will definitely help Mayor Joy fulfill her campaign promise of good governance and improved housing, social services, education and health programs in her first 100 days. She has a specific plan to address the needs of 188,549 "documented" informal settler families in danger zones, open spaces and private properties in the city.

As a no-nonsense graft buster, Mayor Joy's first executive order will be a "cleansing program" at city hall affecting department heads to the lowest-ranked employees. Good and honest behavior will be rewarded with incentives while those who betray public trust will face the full force of the law. Scalawags and nonperforming personnel face suspension or removal from service.

— — — — Manila Mayor Isko Moreno, on the other hand, finds himself in a situation that is the complete opposite of Mayor Joy's.

Defeated Mayor Erap Estrada publicly declared after the May 13 polls that he was leaving city hall with P14 billion in funds after paying off the previous administration's P4.4-billion debt.

But as of June 30, no formal turnover of official government documents has occurred. There are reports circulating that Manila is operating on a "deficit budget" with debts of P4 billion in the general fund and P1 billion in the special education fund. These were all supposed to be confirmed during the transition period.

Mayor Isko has told this columnist that he is grappling with a P200-million debt to the Government Service Insurance System which may jeopardize the retirement pensions of

city hall employees.

Even worse, he revealed that in just three weeks last month, the past administration paid out more than P2.9 billion to suppliers and contractors, the specifics of which will be the subject of an investigation.

Only two days before the June 30 turnover, this columnist learned that Isko called the attention of the city treasurer's office to ask why it was still issuing checks to previously favored contractors for amounts reaching hundreds of million of pesos.

No further details were available but the rushed postelection payments have already depleted the city's general fund.

Mayor Isko Moreno is beginning to worry, simply because "ubos na ang budget. (the budget has been spent)." Now, his hands are tied when it comes to delivering public services for the rest of the year. Tune in to the "Banner Story" radio-TV show, Monday-Friday, 6-9 a.m., on dzIQ (990AM), ABS-CBN TV Plus Channel 30. E-mail [jakejm2005@yahoo.com](mailto:jakejm2005@yahoo.com) for comments.