

'Rappler got at least P40M from Aquino govt'

BY RIGOBERTO D. TIGLAO ON AUGUST 24, 2018 OPINION ON PAGE ONE

Twitter



RIGOBERTO D. TIGLAO

Secretary Romulo-Puyat must disclose details

NO wonder the online newsite Rappler managed to survive since its establishment in 2012 despite its huge expenses on expensive internet technology, in order to rank high in Google searches, among other aims, which couldn't be recovered through advertising revenues.

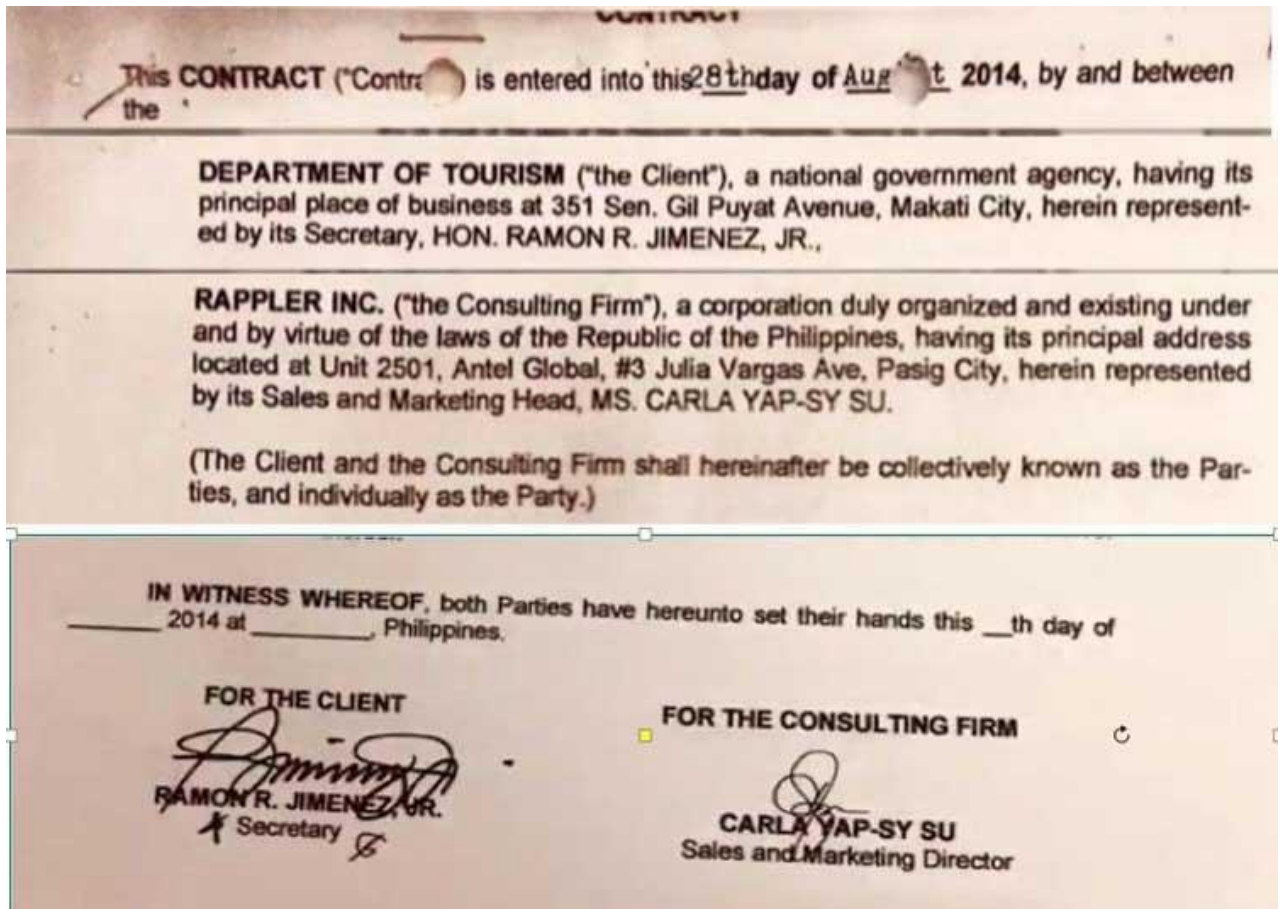
No wonder it has been so much a tool of the past regime of Benigno Aquino 3rd, that it was even at the head of the pack that lynched Chief Justice Renato Corona, and now so vociferously anti-Duterte that it has been grossly exaggerating the number of people killed in the wake of the President's anti-drug war.

According to documents and claims by very reliable sources, Rappler received as much as P40 million from 2014 to mid-2016 from government agencies in the form of dubious consultancies, "intelligence services," and advertising revenues.

Call a spade a spade: Rappler has been the Aquino regime's paid media.

Rappler allegedly badgered Aquino for the funding when its main stockholder Benjamin Bitanga started to distance himself from the outfit mid-2014, after putting about P50 million into the firm. Rappler, however, got about P100 million in funding in late 2015 from US outfits Omidyar and North Base Media. But that got it into serious legal trouble since foreigners are totally banned from media under our Constitution.

Documents made public recently showed that Aquino's tourism secretary Ramon Jimenez signed a contract with Rappler (represented by its sales manager Carla Yap Sy Su) on August 28, 2014 for the tourism department to pay the outfit P9.6 million for just three months of service.



Jimenez didn't bother with rank.

Anyone familiar with internet consultancy—or any kind of consultancy services—would be shocked how generous Jimenez was and at how anomalous the contract was.

In just a month and a half after the contract was signed, on October 15, Rappler was paid P3.2 million. The output? A vague “tourism intelligence report” and “launch of microsite and crowdsource platform for 1st city.”

After another month and a half, on November 31, 2014, Rappler was paid another P3.2 million for “2nd intelligence report” and “launch of microsite and crowdsource platform for 2nd city.” And then on December 31—in time to celebrate the New Year—another P3.2 million for similar mysterious reports. C'mon, do you know of any outfit that works so feverishly as to complete a report through December?

Anybody who reads the contract (parts of it accompany this column) would have absolutely no doubt how very questionable it is:

The Jimenez-Rappler contract was so brief—at just three pages—it was obviously done in haste and only to put something on paper.

In contrast to most consultancy contracts, there wasn't even a reference to any other document (usually called "terms of reference") that would detail exactly what the "intelligence reports," "microsite," "crowdsourcing platform" Rappler would produce that taxpayers would be paying P9.6 million for.

There is a reason why Jimenez and Rappler labeled the outfit's services as "intelligence reports." Jimenez could use the classification as an excuse to hide the contract from the Commission on Audit, claiming the confidential nature of "intelligence."

The new tourism secretary Berna Romulo-Puyat should make public—if these exist at all—Rappler's "intelligence reports" etc. for which her department paid P9.6 million. She should do this with haste to debunk the very strong allegations, made by my esteemed colleague Jojo Robles, that it was the previous secretary, Jimenez, who maneuvered to put her in the post and she is filling up the department with Yellow moles.

Rappler itself confirmed the P9.6 million contract in an article on its website on May 5, 2015. It was cowardly—or to evade legal issues—bylined though not by its editor Maria Ressa, but by "Rappler.com."

CAMPAIGN NAME: TOURISM INTELLIGENCE PLATFORM
Campaign length: 3 1/2 months
Start date: September 15, 2014
End date: December 31, 2014
Terms of payment:

Valid until December 31, 2014

- First (1st) tranche : PhP3,192,000 (inclusive of all applicable taxes) by October 15, 2014, upon submission of the following milestones:
 - **Submission of 1st Intelligence Report**
 - **Launch of microsite and crowdsource platform for 1st city**
- Second (2nd) tranche : PhP3,192,000 (inclusive of all applicable taxes) by November 15, 2014 upon submission of the following milestones:
 - **Submission of 2nd Intelligence Report**
 - **Launch of microsite and crowdsource platform for 2nd city**
- Third (3rd) tranche : PhP3,191,000 (inclusive of all applicable taxes) by December 31, 2014 upon submission of the following milestones:
 - **Submission of 3rd and 4th intelligence report**
 - **Launch of microsite and crowdsource platform for 3rd city**

Total Amount: Php 9,575,000 (Inclusive of all applicable taxes)

Not bad: P9.6 million revenue for three months.

Its response was curt. After saying that the contract was a “valid and legal advertising contract with the DoT in 2015, it claimed: “Commercial transactions between government agencies and media companies are not unique. The current DoT secretary herself says her agency also spent tens of millions of pesos for ads with ABS-CBN, GMA, CNN Philippines, CNN International, Discovery Channel, and the BBC.”

In just three sentences to answer the questions over its P9.6 million contract with government, its stupid writer admitted to Rappler’s financing by Aquino’s regime in different ways.

The P9.6 million questionable contracts were not for advertising, and not made in 2015. It was for Rappler to produce “tourism intelligence reports” and, obviously to confound the COA, “microsites” and “crowdsourcing platforms” in 2014.

Revealingly, Rappler’s own claim though that it had a “valid and legal advertising contract with the DoT in 2015” bolsters allegations by insiders in the department that Aquino had ordered it to heavily support the financially struggling outfit with advertising, which wasn’t justified by its reach.

The sources claimed that from 2014 to the time Aquino stepped down in mid-2016, the tourism department and other government agencies—Pagcor and PCSO were mentioned as the main “suspects”—paid P20 million for their advertisements in Rappler. I myself at that time was suspicious at the many advertisements in the website on Philippine tourism sites.

Again, Secretary Romulo-Puyat at least should make public how much in advertising money her department had given to Rappler.

Rappler’s P9.6-million revenues from Aquino’s tourism department was unearthed by broadcast journalist Erwin Tulfo, obviously given to him by insiders in the agency. When it was disclosed in May, Rappler managed to skirt the issue by claiming that it was simply Tulfo’s way of evading the controversy of his and his siblings’ P60 million advertising contract with the department when it was headed by their sister Wanda Tulfo Teo.

Whether or not it is accurate, that has become irrelevant. The Tulfos have been put under extreme scrutiny not just by the public or even by the courts, if Sen. Antonio Trillanes 4th would have his way.

The disclosure of the Jimenez-Rappler contract though would bolster claims by insiders that there wasn’t just one P9.6 million but at least two more three-month contracts, that the Commission on Audit didn’t pay notice to. The first contract was contrived as a three-month period, in order to put it below the radar of the

COA, which would have questioned not just its sloppiness and vagueness, but why it wasn't bid out.

For Rappler to be used to the fullest of course was seen as necessary starting in late 2014 by the Yellow strategists, who thought it was a powerful propaganda weapon for the 2016 elections for Mar Roxas to win the presidency.

With the P9.6 million 2014 contract, P20 million in tourism advertising contract and at least one more for "intelligence services," Rappler could have gotten P40 million from the Aquino government since the first payment in November 2014.

Not bad: That's P2 million monthly in revenues up to the elections in May 2016. And it had P100 million from American firms. Not even the broadsheets make that much in revenues. What gets my goat is that this outfit claims to be a crusader for truth and transparency.

Secretary Romulo-Puyat should make public how much the past tourism department financed Rappler. I am confident that she will, even if she was with the Aquino government in its six years.

Postscript

In a column last month ("Do the Yellows now control Rappler?") I wrote: "Sources in the business community claim that at least two old oligarchic clans that were close to former President Benigno Aquino 3rd are now either the biggest funder, or in fact the largest stockholders, of Rappler." This explains why two diehard Coryistas Solita Monsod and Fulgencio Factoran, Jr. are now in its board of directors. The two haven't denied my claim. Monsod could have written a single sentence in her column at the Philippine Daily Inquirer to deny my claim. But no denial.

Of course, with the Yellows no longer in power, Rappler could no longer rely on government money so the Yellow oligarchs have no choice but to bankroll it.

Email: tiglao.manilatimes@gmail.com

Facebook: [Rigoberto Tiglao](#)

Twitter: [@bobitiglao](#)

Archives at: www.rigobertotiglao.com