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# DOTC pressed to address Puerto's airport problem

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PUERTO PRINCESA CITY – “Embarrassing” is how Mayor Edward Hagedorn describes the situation of the Puerto Princesa International Airport. Plans to upgrade the airport have been stalled because of the absence of funding from the Department of Transportation and Communication.

Hagedorn and 2nd district Rep. Abraham Mitra, in separate interviews Monday, accused the DOTC of being responsible for the delay in the repair and upgrading of the main terminal, even as they demanded immediate action from the department.

With the city government hosting next week's Palarong Pambansa, the local Air Transportation Office (ATO) cannot do much with the intense heat that waiting passengers have to experience in the pre-departure area and the congestion they experience in the temporary arrival area.

Hagedorn has expressed concern that the ATO and the DOTC “are not doing enough to remedy the problem” caused by the lack of ventilation in the passenger terminals, and aggravated by increased passenger traffic and the intense summer heat.

Two passengers reportedly collapsed last week while waiting for their flights in the pre-departure area because of the intense heat, while one passenger reportedly died earlier this year of a heat-induced stroke.

“We have given them (ATO) so many electric fans but this is not enough. We have thought of installing airconditioning ourselves at the risk of being questioned by COA (Commission on Audit) since this is a national government project. But even that is not possible because we realized that the structure cannot hold anymore due to termite infestation,” Hagedorn said.

Airport manager Eduardo Lansang said that while the capacity of the terminal is only for 100 persons, they have been dealing with twice the volume of passenger traffic every day since the summer season began.

Local ATO personnel blamed the central office for funding problems.

“Our visitors get a bad impression the moment they experience the crowding in the arrival area. They get a reprieve once they experience the city and its attractions. But they leave with a negative impression again after they spend time inside the pre-departure area waiting for their flight out,” Hagedorn said.

Mitra accused the DOTC of having “a very poor absorptive capacity” in implementing projects such as the upgrading of the Puerto international airport, which has been stalled since the beginning of this year due to funding problems.

“There is a budget for this, from the general funds and from the Malampaya money but still there are problems. The DOTC's absorptive capacity is very disappointing,” he said.

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