

OPINION & FEATURES



So what's in the agenda?

EDITORIAL

PRESIDENT Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo will meet with President Barack Obama in Washington DC on July 30, the Department of Foreign Affairs has confirmed on July 12. This will be the first meeting between the two presidents since Obama's victory in November of last year and during Arroyo's final months of being the Philippine Chief Executive for nine years.

In a statement from the White House, the meeting is expected to be a venue for the two heads of state "to discuss ways to enhance US-Philippine cooperation on critical global issues including counter-terrorism and climate change, as well as further the traditionally strong alliance and bond between our nations."

Seemingly ambiguous, the said statement has been a topic of dispute between various sectors who are abuzz with speculations,

criticisms, opinions and suggestions on what may be the possible agenda between the two leaders.

According to Press Secretary Cerge Remonde, "President Arroyo will discuss our poverty alleviation and economic resiliency programs, good governance, counter terrorism efforts and its contribution to peace and stability in the region, and is an affirmation of the strong partnership between the two countries."

Sen. Francis Pangilinan said that Arroyo should bear in mind that America's interest in the Philippines is based on "their concern about the growing economic and political strength of China."

"We must be careful not to be used as an unwitting pawn in the struggle between two giants," he said.

Sen. Manuel Roxas II believes that "the US concerns over the Philippines is confined to security issues and combating terrorism," given the recent visit of CIA Chief Leon Panetta in the country.

Sen. Cayetano advised Pres. Arroyo to push "for the rights of

Filipino veterans and find ways to help Filipinos working in the US who are greatly affected by the financial crisis."

The leaders of the House of Representatives suggested that Pres. Arroyo "should make a pitch for increased military assistance and strengthened economic partnership with the US."

Meanwhile, United Opposition and Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay thinks that the meeting may be instrumental to secure Obama's support for Cha-Cha, in exchange for the return of the US bases in Philippine shores.

Lawmakers from the opposition are emphasizing on the Visiting Forces Agreement since it has affected good relations between the two countries.

The list could go on and on.

But whatever the agenda may be, everyone unanimously agrees that Pres. Arroyo should have one thing foremost in mind. As succinctly stated by Senator Pangilinan, "Pres. Arroyo should ensure that the country's interest would be primordial in meeting with President Obama." (*AJPress*)

Can she do it?

WILL she do it? Yes. Can she do it? No.

For the first time in a long time, I'm getting more and more optimistic about this. It won't be for lack of trying. But President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo will fail to stay on for the following reasons:

One is the momentum being created by the presidential election. Like I said before, this is the first time I really haven't minded premature campaigning, even among those candidates who have been advertising themselves on TV in not particularly subtle ways. The public can always choose to ignore them, or make it a point to not vote for them if only for that. Add to this the various candidates proffering themselves as presidential alternatives, giving whole new meanings to the phrase "the more the merrier." The more the campaign goes into high gear, the more the anticipation among the electorate grows. And the more the effort that will be required to stop it. The longer it takes, the better it will be for the presidential election.

Two, the "psychological setting" for emergency rule is not there. Before Marcos declared martial law, there were the massive rallies, the activism on the campuses, the growing rebel movement dramatized by the landing of arms from MV Karagatan, the near-biblical July-August floods that devastated Central Luzon, the spate of bombings presaged a year before by the vicious Plaza Miranda one, the constant barrage of propaganda



THERES THE RUB
Conrado de Quiros

from government about the country lapsing into chaos. When Marcos declared martial law, many parents actually felt relieved that order was restored.

Can the same thing be manufactured? Well, the bombings are there, but not much else. There is no sense or general impression that things are spinning out of control. Arroyo suspends democratic processes, the public will be in no doubt about why she is doing so.

Three, and this is the part that hasn't been there in some time, the public anger is active. It was passive in the past, registering in surveys but accompanied by the willingness to wait out her term. On July 14, you ask people who used to be apolitical or indifferent what they would do if Arroyo extends her term, and you get responses that may not see the light of print. It confirms my belief that the apathy and passivity of the past also had to do with the attitude that she would be gone anyway, all you had to do was wait. The equation changes completely when their waiting is thwarted or turned in vain.

Four, Washington isn't pleased with the current occupant of Malacañang and probably can't wait to deal with her successor who will be more stable and whose word can be counted on. It is an open secret that the First Family is being investigated by various US agencies tasked with not giving safe haven to pillagers, notably because of

their mishandling (to put it charitably) of money from the American taxpayers, a secret that became open probably through their own agency. I wouldn't be surprised if the message Arroyo is currently getting from American officials is "Cut, and cut cleanly." She sticks on dirtily, there will be the devil, who has been known to wear a long striped hat, to pay.

Five, her allies are in a quandary. All of them are probably giving her a thumbs-up sign, but she can never really be sure what they will do. Most of them probably have an exit plan of their own. Including Ronnie Puno: He did not survive all the way from Marcos' time by showing loyalty over and beyond the call of self-interest, or betting on the wrong horse.

The congressmen, in particular, are bound to ask themselves where the gain lies in backing someone whose continued rule is going to be unstable and who will very likely rely more on the people with arms than on them to prop her up. The congressmen can be bought to approve Charter change, but they will be the first to bail out when the storm comes. If their current patron continues to be the ruler, even under a restored civilian rule, she will not be their future patron. She will be the military's future patron.

Six, the military itself will be in a quandary. Unlike Marcos, Arroyo does not control it, only a few key people there. True enough, the rank-and-file goes by the chain of command, but this will be one chain of command which, if not completely broken, will be very badly frayed at the top. It is

one thing to obey a commander in chief whose illegitimacy remains arguable, it is another to obey one who is not.

Seven, if Arroyo has been a "lucky SOB" in the past, as one ally put it, she has been an unlucky SOB lately. Two incidents in particular cannot augur well for her. The first is the coup in Honduras because its president tried to extend his term. However that has turned, the important thing is the precedent it sets, particularly for the military. That coup "articulates" things, it makes things real, particularly for the military. Where the ruler does something patently illegitimate, the chain of command is left in shambles.

The second is, well, the leak in the dike, to borrow the title of a fable. Or if you don't like allusions, the real source of Arroyo's quarantine. That may be laughable, but it has no laughable consequences for her. Things like that do matter in our culture. It's the small things that kill you. More than anything else, that is probably the issue that demolishes her in the public eye. It gives an exceptionally vivid image to falseness, deception, lying. I can only imagine the placards that will greet her when she delivers her Sona later this month. Indeed, I can only imagine the comments that are bound to greet her efforts to present a solid front. I can only hope those placards and comments are more witty than coarse.

But it can't be easy declaring a state of emergency when people think they are as much in need of an emergency as a woman does bust repair. (*Inquirer.net*)

Navigating Life

FROM the onset of life — and actually, through more of it than we realize — one goes through the motions, caught up in life's whirlwind directions. More often than not, we end up acting in a knee-jerk way, responding to its various unpredictable whims.

As one gets older and wiser, one begins to see patterns. One begins to be keenly aware of weaknesses and one begins to see opportunities for growth.

That's when one begins to learn how to navigate.

My current formula for navigating life:

- Don't get sucked in. I've recently



FROM THE HEART
Gina Lopez

noticed how my BlackBerry "sucks" me in. My computer, too. And work as well. It's like I can't live without my smart phone within my grasp. In the past few days I have tried making a conscious effort not to reach for it first thing when I wake up and I have found my morning meditation time is much deeper.

I don't work on my BlackBerry or watch TV before I sleep; that way my sleep is deeper and more restful.

I have found that if I am too energetically connected to my BlackBerry my life becomes totally astral: full of worries and concerns instead of feeling the

undercurrent of stillness and divine grace that actually makes work much better, perceptions much clearer.

Don't get sucked in. Let peace interlace your rhythm of life.

- Don't react! No matter what happens — don't be reactive. This is a lesson I still need to master as I am an intense person. But time and again my painful lesson is that once I lose it — once I rock the boat — it takes double my effort to get back on track. No matter how righteous you think you are or seemingly well deserved your reaction is — it just doesn't work, and it doesn't help. That's my experience, anyway.
- Schedule sojourns with nature at its purest. Feel the land energies. Let them give themselves to you. It is healing and cleansing. And the effect lin-

gers for days after. This is the blessing our country offers. Take it.

- Have a healthy lifestyle. Keep away from fried, synthetic or over-processed foods. Eat lots of salads, vegetables and fruits. Don't eat heavily late at night. Food really affects my well being. If I eat healthy, exercise and keep still — I feel invincible!
- Take time to center yourself. Work consumes us. Family consumes us. Where is the time for us to just feel like ourselves? Enter spaces where you can feel peace beyond the chaos. I would say this a must. It's the source of strength and vitality. It's worry that ages us, I feel.
- Do for others. Whenever I go to the esteros and see how people really live — I am actually filled with excitement

at the prospect of making life better for them. When I see hope dawning into their lives my own heart fills with light and love. It's an exhilarating experience.

- Rest. Don't feel you have to do everything. You will just burn out. I have found that if I tune in to the bigger force and rest it just carries me through. Rest! Relax. Let your will rest in the divine will.

The Bible says, "He that overcomes will inherit all things." Will, determination, and resonating with the divine is the path for me. If we can maneuver ourselves to a higher level of awareness, life can be quite wonderful and exciting.

We have this life. Let us make the most of it. (*Philstar.com*)



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