

# OPINION & FEATURES

## So what's in the agenda?



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 Ar-

royo 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 "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." (AJP/Press)

### EDITORIAL

## Maybe, just join the fun

ARE we Filipinos the most forgiving people in the world? Or the most forgetful? Or are we just plain hypocrites?

If you were to read the newspaper columns, follow the radio and TV commentaries and listen to the impassioned speeches of church leaders, civic leaders, media leaders, activists and intellectuals, we are a country sick and tired of the corruption and thievery around us.

We have been abused, cheated, robbed, fooled, beaten up, tortured and rendered impoverished and we've had it!

*Tama na! Sobra na! Abuso na!*

We abhor those who have enriched themselves in office. We want to kick them out without waiting for their terms to end. We want to rush out into the streets, wave our placards, brave fire hoses, defy police night sticks, storm Malacañang, kick out the rascals, exile them to parts unknown and throw their co-conspirators in jail, there to rot for their rest of their lives.

We want reform. We want honest officials. Competent public servants. Role models for the youth. A progressive Philippines, free of graft, corruption and crime.

Yes. We want all that.

But tonight, we're going to Imelda Romualdez Marcos' 80th birthday bash.

It's the social event of the year, and we wouldn't want to miss it. We want to march down the red carpet with Imelda in our finest gowns and coats. Show off our jewels. Buss each other on the cheek. Tell Da Ma'am how lovely she still is. Toast her with expensive wine. Then listen to her regale her audience with tales of her extreme poverty, having lost all her cash, her jewels and her property.

"My friends paid for this party, honest, *peks man*."

And we all laugh at this, agreeing with her that being poor can be so glamorous.

Oh, yes, we also want to run for public office on a platform of honesty, diligence, sincerity, discipline, trustworthiness and all the virtues of a Boy Scout. We condemn ostentatious living, especially if this is from ill-gotten wealth. We promise a new era for the Filipino people, where we can look at each other in the eye, as well as everyone else in the world and we can proudly declare, "I am a Filipino. Son



**STREET TALK**  
Greg B. Macabenta

(or daughter) of a noble race. Standing on equal footing with the great men and woman in the world."

Yes. That is how we plan to run for public office.

But, for tonight, we will join the lavish reception of Imelda Romualdez Marcos because, hey, how can we afford to be absent from an event where the Who's Who of the Country are present?

All of these confusing thoughts raced through my mind as I watched the media coverage of the 80th birthday party of the conjugal partner of the man kicked out of office by the heroes of the EDSA revolution.

What was her name again? Imelda Romualdez Marcos? Is she the same lady in her elegant *terno* smiling radiantly at her bejeweled guests and being kissed on the cheeks by them?

No, no, no, they couldn't be one and the same. That Imelda was a villainess, exiled, humiliated, cursed, called all kinds of unflattering names, her thousands of shoes becoming a favorite joke in the late night TV shows on US network TV.

This Imelda is far from being humiliated or degraded, certainly not cursed or called unflattering names, in fact, she's treated like a MegaStar!

And, hey, isn't that the crusading MMDA chairman, Bayani Fernando (the who would bring honesty and efficiency to public service if he, by some stroke of fate becomes president of the Philippines) gifting this Imelda with a pair of fashionable shoes, colored pink, to go with her *terno*?

Maybe I've been away too long (23 years in America). Maybe I've forgotten what it is that makes *Pinoys* the happiest people in the world, even if we're among the poorest.

Watching the Imelda birthday bash on TV forced me to accept the reality that all the sound and the fury that the church, civil society, media, the activists, the political opposition and the masses have

been displaying have really been all in good fun.

Nobody really means it. Nobody is really mad at anybody. It's all *palabas*.

We accuse public officials of *moro-moro* but we, the Filipino people, are all part of the *zarzuela* and we're enjoying ourselves. No wonder, it took almost four centuries before we could mount a serious revolution against Spain. And it took over two decades before Ferdinand Marcos and Imelda Romualdez Marcos (that one, not this one) could be challenged seriously enough to force them to step down.

No wonder Erap Estrada's popularity is still in the double digits and he actually has a good chance of winning the presidency if he's allowed to run.

No wonder none of the charges against Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, investigated by members of the Senate with full fanfare and showbiz touches has yielded any meaningful results. All have been shoved into someone's closet, there to remain until it becomes convenient to use them in the forthcoming presidential elections—assuming there is one.

No wonder nobody is really fuming mad over the way the House of Representatives rammed Resolution 1109 through. And nobody seems to particularly care if the Supreme Court actually sides with the Conmen and Asses pushing Con-Ass. And the rallies against Cha-Cha have ended and the revolutionaries have all gone home. No wonder people appear to have resigned themselves to an extended Arroyo term.

Where are the revolutionaries? Maybe they're at Imelda's birthday bash.

Yes, maybe I've been away too long. Maybe I should just go over and join the fun. Perhaps wangle an invitation to Imelda's next party. Or maybe Erap's next drinking spree.

Maybe I'm just kidding myself writing these critical pieces, as if anybody really cares. Maybe I should learn to laugh out loud at the sick joke of Bentot, that atrociously funny sidekick of Pugo.

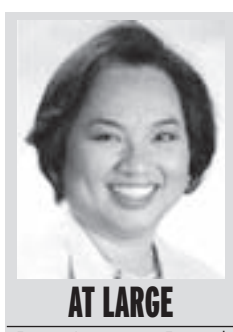
"Uy, you're all invited to the house. *Maraming tao. Masaya. Patay ang tatay ko!*" (*gregmacabenta@hotmail.com*)

## Baguio's object lesson

BAGUIO marks the centennial of its founding on Sept. 1, and everyone, from the city government to businesses to ordinary citizens, is planning a project or two to mark this milestone.

As far back as August 2005, a group of former and present Baguio residents began discussing the centennial and thought of putting up an honest-to-goodness museum. The group is led by Delia Albert, the Philippine ambassador to Germany (and former secretary of foreign affairs), who grew up in Baguio and studied in Baguio schools. The other members of the board have likewise either grown up, studied, lived or worked for many years in Baguio: Herminio Bautista of the University of Cordilleras; Ernesto Villaluna Jr., president and COO of Philex Mines; Artemio Disini, former president of Lepanto Mining Co.; Narda Capuyan of Narda's; Arturo Florendo, president of Union Galva Steel; Pio Caccam, retired mining man; Arturo Mori, mineral exploration manager of PNOG-EDC; Joan Orendain, PR practitioner who grew up in Baguio and is part-Kankaney herself; and Maribel Ongpin, civic leader whose family has long been based in Baguio.

As envisioned, the museum would feature the mining industry that built Baguio, the geology of the Cordilleras, the silver jewelry industry, the Baguio pioneers, the foremost civil institutions in



**AT LARGE**  
Rina Jimenez-David

the city—from schools like Brent, St. Louis University, public schools and post-war universities to hospitals like Notre Dame—and the growth of Baguio from a small mountain station to the city it is today.

The Baguio Historical and Mining Museum was registered in 2006 and hired the services of noted museum curator Marian Pastor Roces who conceptualized a virtual museum (in a PowerPoint presentation), including an open air geological garden.

From the start, it was determined that the museum would be a purely private, civic endeavor, with construction and upkeep to be funded by donations from mining companies, foreign governments, individuals and cultural institutions. All the museum board asked from the city was a site on which to house it. "We weren't even asking for ownership," says Ongpin, "just permission to use the site."

Negotiations with the Baguio city government began in 2007, the start of what the board members call "The Curious Case of the Baguio Historical and Mining Museum vis-à-vis the Baguio City Council."

The search for a proper site led to many false leads, until some residents mentioned Dominican Hill, a former monastery and vacation house of the Dominican order which was turned over to Baguio City in 2004 on condition that it would be used for an educational, cultural or tourism institution by April 2009.

Dominican Hill Monastery, a prominent landmark of Baguio, was built in 1914, one of the first concrete buildings there. It was built by Fr. Roque Ruano, who also designed the University of Santo Tomas Main Building. After decades of declining use, Dominican Hill was sold to faith healer Tony Agpaoa during the martial law years, and was used as a hospital for Agpaoa's "patients" who came from all over the world. When the faith healer failed to keep up with the payments, the Land Bank foreclosed the property and turned it over to the Ministry of Human Settlements. It was eventually taken over by the Presidential Management Staff.

After the city government petitioned to take over the largely abandoned complex, Dominican Hill was turned over to the city's supervision, subject to the above condition. And yet in the five years since then, the building was allowed to fall into ruin, looted of its remaining architectural features and exposed to the elements. A city councilor, Galo Weygan, started using the grounds for his religious group as a "prayer mountain," eventually moving into the building. The move, said Weygan, was on "orders" of God himself, even if it meant that public property was being used for private religious purposes.

Through numerous meetings with the councilors, whose approval is necessary before work on the museum site can begin, Ongpin says they have proven to be "indifferent at best, if not hostile to the idea."

This is certainly "curious," to say the least, since

any other local government would welcome a cultural institution which would be established and maintained without any cost to the government. Sure, the museum would be located on public property, but it is property that has been abandoned and for which the city has shown it doesn't have the resources or will to develop.

Word has it that some Koreans are interested in putting up a tourism complex in Dominican Hill, which may explain the hostility of some councilors. But turning over occupancy of the property to Koreans would mean that the council would be turning over development of the area to foreigners and not developing it themselves, as contained in their MOA with the PMS.

At some point, the council unilaterally "approved" the use of 1,000 sq m of the Dominican Hill property for the museum. The board did not request this, but whenever it brings up the subject of the museum with the city council, the latter points to this concession. This, even if 1,000 sq m is woefully inadequate for the museum's needs, especially if it would stand cheek-by-jowl with a tacky commercial tourist establishment.

Baguio's centennial is just about two months away, and already it is too late to present the city with a world-class, educational and comprehensive museum on Baguio's geology, history, culture and heritage. But judging from this experience, well-meaning citizens will certainly think twice before embarking on a civic project, impelled by nothing but civic pride and good intentions. (*Inquirer.net*)

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