

OPINION & FEATURES

No more martial law

MALACAÑANG reassured the nation on September 20 that martial law would not be imposed under the Arroyo administration. That the statement had to be issued on the eve of the 37th anniversary of Ferdinand Marcos' declaration of martial law is an indication that the nation is not yet completely free of threats to hard-won freedoms. The statement was issued a few days after a man described by the Armed Forces of the Philippines as a naval intelligence trainee was caught placing under surveillance the home of National Artist for Literature Bienvenido Lumbera.

The bungled surveillance could be laughed off, if not for the fact that Lumbera chairs the militant party-list group Alliance of Concerned Teachers and his home in Mapayapa Village, Quezon City serves as ACT headquarters. Lumbera was also among the National Artists who protested President Arroyo's choices for this year's National Artist awards. Village security guards caught Cpl. Hannibal Masura Mondido Guerrero taking photographs of Lumbera's house. Two of his companions fled. The AFP apologized to Lumbera and said the surveillance was part of Guerrero's training for a naval intelligence course. Guerrero was tasked to verify reports that Lumbera's house was being used for communist gatherings.

Using state intelligence resources to spy on suspected communist rebels is better than using them to spy on estranged common-law wives, but this is cold comfort for individuals like Lumbera. The National Artist accepted

the Navy's apology, but he said he did not buy the whole story and would file a complaint with the Commission on Human Rights.

His experience, occurring nearly four decades after Marcos imposed martial law, is a timely reminder that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. The 1987 Constitution has built-in mechanisms to prevent the return of the type of military rule imposed by Marcos, without diminishing the power of the presidency to deal with threats to national security. Yet those mechanisms have failed to allay fears, revived for the first time since the Marcos years, that the government might impose some kind of emergency rule to suppress political dissent and perpetuate national leaders in power. The statement from Malacañang on September 20 was meant to allay those fears, but these will be dispelled completely only after the nation sees a peaceful transfer of power to a duly elected new president on June 30, 2010. (Philstar.com)

GUEST EDITORIAL



Philstar.com photo

PCIJ at 20

THIS week the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) is celebrating its 20th anniversary.

How time flies. The past 20 years have indeed been colorful, dangerous years for this journalistic endeavor which is an Asian first and which continues to be not only investigative but innovative as well in its reporting and use of new forms of media technology.

Part of the celebration is a seminar for Asian journalists. The theme is *Peace, Human Rights, Good Governance: East Asian Democracies at the Crossroads*. Why this theme? In the next three years, PCIJ explains, a number of countries in Southeast Asia will witness strategic shifts in leadership through elections and parliamentary processes. General elections were recently held in Indonesia. The Philippines will hold its first automated

national elections in May 2010. Parliamentary elections in Cambodia are scheduled to be held in July 2011.

Thailand and Malaysia have recently witnessed changes in political leadership, while other nations in Southeast Asia continue their evolution into fuller, more stable democracies.

PCIJ hopes that the gathering would foster better understanding and engagement between and among independent and mainstream journalists, civil society groups, academe and development agencies about common concerns with protection and promotion of human rights, peace and good governance in both the restored and restricted democracies of Southeast Asia. It will provide learning sessions for journalists from Southeast Asia and in the process encourage cross-border reporting and cor-

respondence on these concerns.

Events are unfolding in Asian countries even as these countries grapple with common concerns: how to keep the peace and settle pockets of internal conflict, how to institutionalize, protect and promote human rights, and how to sustain reforms and democratic processes and uphold good governance. These critical issues are high on the agenda not just of governments but also of journalists, civil society groups, academe, business and the professions. These concerns are unfolding amid dramatic changes in media and technology, and media consumption patterns across the region.

PCIJ thinks that the reformed and young democracies of Southeast Asia have done very little to foster interaction and engagement among their peoples. To PCIJ, this is in stark, if sad, evidence in the paucity of media reports with a regional perspective, as well as the nearly total absence of cross-border reports on common concerns like peace, human rights and democracy, done by teams of journalists from across national borders.

Since its founding, PCIJ has produced about 450 investigative reports and other stories in major Philippine publications, produced five full-length documentaries, and launched over two dozen books and video documentaries. PCIJ has won many major awards, including nine National Book Awards, a Catholic Mass Media Award, and more than two dozen awards and citations from the Jaime V. Ongpin Awards for Investigative Journalism and a Ramon Magsaysay Award for one of its founders and executive director for many years, Sheila S. Coronel who now heads the Tony Stabile School of Investigative Journalism at Columbia University and who continues to serve in the PCIJ board.

Seasoned journalist Malou Mangahas, the present executive director, is pushing PCIJ to new heights and frontiers of investigative reporting. Other members of the board are David Celdran (chair), Howie Severino (vice chair), Dominick Danao, and me.

There are many individuals who were behind PCIJ's growth and becoming. It was founded in

1989 by nine Filipino journalists who realized the need for newspapers and broadcast agencies to go beyond day-to-day reportage, that is, to go deeper and broader, show the bigger picture.

While the Philippine press is undoubtedly the liveliest and freest in Asia, deadline pressures, competition and budgetary constraints make it difficult for many journalists to delve into the causes and meanings of news events. PCIJ provides opportunities for journalists to go beyond their daily beats. (This is not to say that the mainstream media are found wanting.)

PCIJ does not intend to replace the work of individual news institutions but encourages the development of investigative journalism and to create a culture for it. It believes that the media play a crucial role in scrutinizing and strengthening democratic institutions, that the media could—and should—be a catalyst for social debate and consensus that would redound to the promotion of public welfare. The media must therefore provide citizens with the bases for arriving at informed opinions and decisions.

PCIJ is now a byword in Asian journalism. It is an independent, non-profit media agency that specializes in investigative reporting. The center funds investigative projects for both the print and broadcast media. It publishes books on current issues and an online investigative reporting magazine—i—on its official website, www.pcij.org. It also publishes www.pcij.org/blog, a daily institutional news blog, and www.i-site.ph, a database and resource tool on Philippine politics and governance.

PCIJ is also a training center for journalists. It offers seminars for news organizations in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. It also tackles issues involving the media and access to information.

PCIJ reports have prodded government action on issues like corruption, public accountability and environmental protection. Some have triggered the transfer or resignation of senior public officials and justices, and formed part of the evidence in the impeachment, and eventual trial for plunder, of a Philippine president. (Inquirer.net)

Worst case scenario



STREET TALK
Greg B. Macabenta

AS the possibility of a presidential election in May 2010 becomes more believable, the strategists of the various camps must now be working out various scenarios for their respective candidates. This is an exercise in "What ifs."

Expectedly, the "what ifs" will focus mainly on the Arroyo administration and its candidates, particularly its presidential and vice-presidential bets, Gilbert Teodoro and Ronnie Puno. However, Rule Number One in framing scenarios is to never overlook the entire field, following the biblical adage, "He who is not with you is against you."

Note that these scenarios have to be framed in the context of an automated electoral process, appropriated by the Comelec, ostensibly to ensure an honest election. The first key consideration is that the computers will only count votes that are cast. So, let's have some what ifs in that respect.

1. What if tons of money will be used to literally buy the elections (and not by the administration candidates alone)?
Have they used up the agricultural budget already? But then, that's not the only source of election funds. Ask Mikey Arroyo. And as for the non-administration contenders, ask the Swiss banks and the traditional Sugar Daddies.

Needless to say, in this scenario, the votes cast will go to the most generous buyers. The Comelec computers will have to count those votes. Result: an accurate count of votes actually cast. But not necessarily an honest election.

2. What if the carrot-and-stick tactic is used on the voters, thus giving them a choice they

cannot refuse?

In some provincial areas that I am personally familiar with, voters are given such a choice: "You vote for our candidates or you stay home and don't vote at all. And, incidentally, here's some pocket money for your cooperation."

In many cases, unannounced visits are made to recalcitrants in the dead of night. That's bound to give you nightmares, if you were in their place. Less committed folks have been known to prefer the carrot to the stick. They stay home or they change their voting preferences. It's healthier that way.

Unfortunately, the Smartmatic computers are not programmed to identify votes that are cast under duress. Result: an accurate count of votes. But not an honest election.

3. What if voters who defy the stick and insist on voting anyway are terrorized?
Again, in some provinces that I am familiar with, an "example" is all that is needed to instill the fear of voting in some of the most courageous hearts. The example is usually by way of liquidating a particularly hardheaded oppositionist. Again, the computers will be counting votes cast—but only of those who have the guts to vote.

4. What if the list of voters is padded by several million Garcis (in case you haven't heard, that's a term connoting a ghost voter). For all the vigilance and militancy of the pro-democracy, pro-clean elections, pro-*boto mo i-patrol mo*, pro-moral force, pro-ako mismo do-gooders, do they really have an impact in the fiefdoms in the Ilocos, Northern Luzon, Southern Tagalog, Bicol region, Visayas and Mindanao?
This is the part where the votes cast will not be legitimate, but will the computers be able to know the difference if the names are in the "legitimate" database?

In case you haven't heard, that's what the turmoil in Iran is all about. Ghost voters and padded voter lists.

5. What if one or some of the candidates already

in the running decide that it is more profitable to do a Judas?

Remember the presidential campaign where third party candidate Rogelio de la Rosa suddenly announced his withdrawal in favor of Diosdado Macapagal? Poor Carlos P. Garcia, who was the incumbent, didn't know what hit him.

That, of course, is among the risks in a democracy. Everyone is free to vote as he pleases or to negotiate with the highest bidder as he pleases. Still, the votes cast may be legitimate but it will leave a bad taste in the mouth. Unfortunately, computers have no sense of taste.

6. Finally, what if the Smartmatic vote-counting system is pre-programmed to perform "dagdag-bawas"?

You don't think the Comelec will allow it? Then you must also believe in the tooth fairy. But assuming the Comelec does, in fact, not allow it. Does that mean it won't happen or it can't be done? If the computer geniuses at NASA can pre-program a command to a ship in outer space at a precise point in its journey, pre-programming subtle commands in a vote counting system can most certainly be done. And the Comelec commissioners don't even need to know about it.

Then comes the more interesting part in the framing of scenarios.

7. What if one or several of the above scenarios result in a Garcified (another electoral term) tally? What are the options?

The Batangueño Option - In 1949, the Batangueños threatened a violent uprising, claiming that Elpidio Quirino of the Liberal Party had cheated his way to victory over the Nacionalista Party candidate Jose P. Laurel of Batangas. In that election, the birds, the trees and the ghosts reportedly voted in Mindanao. Mercifully, Laurel prevailed upon his co-provincianos to sheath their balisongs, preferring defeat over anarchy.

The CIA Option - For the November 1953 presidential elections, the CIA reportedly got actively involved in the campaign to ensure the victory of Ramon Magsaysay who ran against a re-electionist Elpidio Quirino.

It was a classic campaign that saw the emergence of NAMFREL, the application of Operation Quick Count and the deployment of ROTC cadets to guard the polls. It may be assumed that The Company gave the Quirino camp fair warning against any hanky-panky.

The People Power Option - In the 1986 snap elections, 30 Comelec election tabulators walked out in protest over what they claimed was the rigging of the tally to ensure the victory of Ferdinand Marcos and his running mate, Arturo Tolentino, over Cory Aquino and Doy Laurel. That eventually led to the People Power Revolt that toppled the Marcos regime.

The Miriam Option - In the 1992 presidential race, Fidel V. Ramos garnered 5.29 million votes against 4.45 million for Miriam Defensor Santiago in a seven-cornered contest. Santiago protested the Ramos victory in every conceivable venue but could not prevent her rival from assuming office. She finally gave up.

The Macbeth Option - I got the name of this option from that famous soliloquy of Macbeth where he described life as being "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." This best describes what followed the Comelec-declared victory of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo over Fernando Poe, Jr. We all know what happened to all that sound and fury. Nothing.

Some pundits have also listed the Taruc Option, named after Huk Supremo Luis Taruc who, along with five others, won a seat in Congress in the 1946 elections under the banner of the Democratic Alliance. When they were barred from taking office because of their leftist affiliation, they took to the hills. In 1949, the Huks were virtually at the doorsteps of Manila, threatening a takeover. That was when the US State Department must have decided that the CIA needed to get more directly involved in Philippine politics.

The Juramentado Option - This is largely unconfirmed, but rumor has it that one prospective candidate for the highest office has vowed to organize "a band of 1,000 men who are ready to die," in case of electoral monkey business.

That could well be the worst case scenario. Heaven forbid. (gregmacabenta@hotmail.com)

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