

OPINION & FEATURES

The Great Equalizer

Thousands of families sought refuge on rooftops, braving inclement weather and surviving with no food and water for days. Floods, almost almost seven-feet deep, consumed and destroyed their homes and belongings. It was a test of human endurance and survival.

As of press time, 246 deaths have been reported and nearly half a million have been displaced from their homes. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has declared a state of calamity in Metro Manila and 25 provinces in Luzon to enable the government to access emergency funds. But even after this resource has been exhausted, the typhoon victims are still left wanting.

According to National Disaster Coordination Council Director Anthony Golez, the government units are overwhelmed.

EDITORIAL

nating Council Director Anthony Golez, the government operations. (But) the system is overwhelmed, local

In a nationally televised briefing, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro appealed for international humanitarian assistance. The call for international aid will address the needs of Metro Manila and Region IV-A, places which experienced the worst of Ondoy's wrath.

The aftermath is enough to weaken one's knees yet, the victims, with their last ounce of strength and courage, have to remain strong in order to rebuild what was lost. But they cannot do it on their own.

In behalf of the devastated victims of Typhoon Ondoy, we would like to appeal for the kind generosity of our *kababayans* here in the US. Various organizations have already set up methods to send donations through their websites. Others are also accepting cash donations through toll-free numbers and bank accounts. Any amount, however small, will be a big help to our *kababayans* in the Philippines.

Moments like these make us realize that we are all equal in the face of a natural disaster. We realize our human frailty and that we can only overcome life's adversities through the spirit of *bayanihan*. For us Filipinos living here in the United States, this is perhaps, the best time to show our sense of humanity. (AJP/Press)



Philstar.com

Identified

WE have seen communities flooded before—although perhaps not in the scale and swiftness we saw last Saturday, Sept. 26, when Ondoy dumped the most rain in the shortest time ever.

FIRST PERSON

Alex Magno

Of this calamitous event, however, have to be the thousands of vehicles devastated by rising waters. Some of our main thoroughfares were clogged by cars that have stalled or were abandoned. In many areas, cars were swept by the fast currents and dumped one on top of the other.

Among the most dramatic images we have seen the last couple of days, apart from that heart-rending shot of a bunch of children being swept down the Marikina River, are scenes of vehicles being dragged by the raging waters, one into a

large excavation and another of a woman at the UERM struggling to the roof of her car.

Over the next few days and, more likely, weeks, this mass of stranded vehicles will have to be cleared. In the first day after the calamity struck, authorities had problems identifying vehicles abandoned in the middle of the road, those washed downhill and submerged and those stacked on sidewalks. Car owners, whose vehicles were washed aside had problems locating them after they were towed away.

In the tragic aftermath of this deluge, we all wish we had more efficient ways of doing things: more efficient weather forecasting that anticipates amounts of rain forthcoming, more efficient rescue and relief organizations, more efficient communications, and, yes, more efficient means for identifying vehicles clogging streets after floods have subsided.

Strangely, a few days before Ondoy hit us, there was brewing debate over an electronic vehicle identification system the Land Transportation Office wanted immediately installed.

The new system is called Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) and it involves a small sticker with a chip that emits a radio signal. From within a small radius from the vehicle, a law enforcer with a wireless device could intercept the signal and identify the vehicle by instantly downloading vehicle registration data from a database.

The installation of the device will require a one-time fee of P350. That will cover a usable period of ten years, the average life of a vehicle. The average annual cost to the car owner of the high-tech ID system will be P35.

That sounds pretty cheap for a system that facilitates identification of vehicles—especially during personal emergencies or large-scale calamities such as we saw this weekend.

For the price of P35 a year, the authorities think they will have a system that makes car-napping obsolete and ensure quick police response to road accidents or crimes involving the use of getaway vehicles. It will compile a digital file that will hasten processing of car

registration and make more efficient the often tedious bureaucratic process of transferring vehicle ownership or even changing the color of a car's paint.

I suppose this system will be an improved version of that electronic sticker put on goods in some of our shops. The sticker will set off alarms when shoplifting happens. The device can only be deactivated at the cashier's desk, upon payment for the commodity. That more primitive version of this technology has made shoplifting obsolete in the shops that use them.

As in every case where new technology to improve the efficiency of governance is introduced, there will be Luddites who will reflexively oppose it.

Although the RFID has no GPS capability and can only be used by law enforcers issued a hand-held device where every transmission is on record (therefore accountable), some people are protesting that the new technology involves invasion of privacy. They overlook the fact that the RFID merely makes more efficient the old process where law enforcers ask erring drivers to produce a vehicle's registration papers

(with little means of verifying them through some reliable database).

I do not get the point of this objection on the grounds of protecting privacy. It is an objection made by people who very likely use credit card and are aware that each time they use these devices their purchases are put on record and the data studied closely by retail analysts who want to be sure they will be selling us what we are disposed to buy.

Without a reliable electronic means for verifying a vehicle's ownership, we have had many tragic incidents in the past where innocent car owners were shot on suspicion they were driving stolen vehicles. We have criminal syndicates proliferating because of the inefficiencies of our car registration system—thereby allowing them to steal cars in Luzon and re-document them in the Visayas.

I remember when, in the 1990s, we tried to establish a digital national identification system. That was indispensable to subsequently building the complex infrastructure of electronic governance that includes, among others: an internationally reliable electronic

passport system; an efficient public health insurance program; probably a system for electronic voting where every citizen can vote from where he conveniently finds himself in on election day; and a more transparent government process accessible to all citizens from electronic kiosks.

Luddites opposed the electronic national identification system, causing our e-governance to lag behind everybody else and our government to remain as inefficient as ever. Today, the same Luddites are opposing digital identification of vehicles which would create tremendous efficiencies in managing our chaotic transport system and decrease the volume of crimes involving use of vehicles.

There are, to be sure, costs and benefits to the use of new technologies that enable us to do things more efficiently. In the debate over the prescription of RFID for all vehicles, we can look at the costs (including the unfounded fears over loss of privacy) but also look at the benefits. The chaos of stranded vehicles in the aftermath of a calamity should help enlighten us about the benefits of a better system. (Philstar.com)

Still, flood

DR. Prisco Nilo, head of PAGASA, says people should stop watching soap and start listening to news. As early as Thursday, Sept. 24, he said, PAGASA was airing warnings of possible flooding and even raised storm signals the following day.

Well, the advice is sound, but not for the reasons Nilo adduces. People should really stop watching soap and start listening to news—to improve their minds. Not to get wind of the weather situation. The only thing that has become more fickle than the weather in this country is its weather forecast. People would be heeding PAGASA's warning more if the sun did not shine on days it predicts will be stormy, thereby sending hordes of kids on holiday to Trinoma and SM North, and thereby adding to the Ayalas' and Sys' coffers. And if rains did not lash on this earth on days it predicts will be agreeable, thereby stranding kids at school who are hard put to find a ride home, and thereby getting their bedraggled working parents in a worse state of bedraggled waiting for them.

Didn't PAGASA report some months ago that the rainy season had officially begun only to see

some of the hottest days visit the country for weeks on end? And didn't PAGASA say the dry season was making a comeback only to see the rains barging in? Maybe folk listened to the news and heard only the boy who cried wolf. "Weather-weather lang 'yan" doesn't just apply to this country's politics, it applies to its weather, too. Or its weather forecast.

It cannot help improve PAGASA's credibility that it says things like "Ondoy" dumped more rains on this country than "Katrina," a thing Arroyo has been citing all over the place to suggest that Metro Manilans should blame God and not she for their travails. I don't know if that's true, but even if it were, what of it? What caused the flooding in New Orleans was not the volume of rain, it was the fury of the tempest. Lest we forget, Katrina was a hurricane. Its force, which gathered strength as it neared New Orleans (Al Gore would point to it as a strong case for climate change, the storm's wind velocity jumping wildly as it encountered warm air) was such that it broke the levees and sent tons of water tumbling into the place. That was what caused the floods.

There was no such gale last Saturday, Sept. 26. Only one unrelenting downpour for a whole day, which is nothing compared to the 40 days and 40 nights of rain that poured on Luzon in July and August of 1972. For it to have caused the catastrophe it did, we do not have heaven to blame for that. We have Le Cirque to blame for that.

We have the billions that should have gone to improving Metro Manila's drainage system and shoring up its dams but which have gone instead to feeding insatiable appetites, which is not entirely figurative, to blame for that. We have the billions that should have gone to procuring rubber boats and other rescue vessels to save lives and give relief during dire times but which have gone instead to flying public officials to watch Manny Pacquiao fight in Las Vegas to blame for that. We have the billions that should have gone to disaster preparedness but which have gone instead to preparing a lame candidate carry out a disastrous campaign to blame for that.

But PAGASA has a point when it says global warming has made the weather a lot more unpredictable, even if that very argument cannot augur well for its continued existence. The weather has become unpredictable, which is of tremendous concern for everyone of us, not just government. The best government may not spare us of its effects, however it may drastically lessen their direness.

Before Ondoy hit, I was just telling someone the weather was scaring the hell out of me. It wasn't just that summer, or what used to be so, brought torrential downpours and the rainy season, or what used to be so too, brought infernally hot days. It was also that in one single day you would have winds blowing like crazy on a warm sunny day, which was perfectly all right with me, followed by lashing rain and humidity hours later, which was perfectly maddening for me. I made the mistake of leaving my umbrella in my car coming home one late afternoon to the first

and going out in early evening to the second.

Weather may be fickle, but it's never been this fickle. Certainly not so on a sustained basis. Looking back, the floods last Sept. 26 were an accident waiting to happen. Infanta was buried in mud and rock in December 2004 from rainfall that loosened a mountain, just a week or so before a killer tsunami flattened Aceh and environs. A super storm ripped through Albay three years later turning the place into a wasteland, leaving only the roofs of houses peeping out in some places. A lot of folk have left, the ones that have remained are in constant fear at the first sign of rainfall that the volcanic ash at the foot of Mayon would turn into a putrid flood and overrun their dwelling places again. Why should we imagine that Metro Manila would be spared these devastations?

It is no small irony that Odette Alcantara died earlier last week, before the floods hit Metro Manila. She had been an ardent campaigner for the environment, warning of the dangers we courted with our continuing deafness to the cries of Nature. As Saturday abundantly showed—to residents of Metro Manila, if not to those of Infanta and Albay—that is not just the concern of people who have nothing better to do than hug trees. That is the concern of everyone. Doubtless we cannot solve global warming alone, but neither can others do so that way. Being poor is no excuse to not do our part. As Saturday showed, there is nothing better to do than to save the planet. There are worse things than being poor. Being poorer is one of them.

Being dead is another. (Inquirer.net)

The views expressed by our Op-Ed contributors are solely their own and do not necessarily reflect the predilection of the editorial board and staff of Asian Journal.



Main Office:
1150 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90017-1904
Tel: (213) 250-9797 • Fax: (213) 481-0854
e-mail: info@asianjournalinc.com
http://www.asianjournal.com

Manila Office:
Suite 208, The Manila Bank Corp., Bldg.
6772 Ayala Ave., Makati City 1226
Tel.: (632) 893-1720 • Fax: (632) 813-8746

New York and New Jersey:
5 Penn Plaza, Ste. 1932, New York, NY 10001
Tel.: (212) 655-5426 • Fax: (212) 655-9241

Northern California:
841 San Bruno Avenue West, Suites 12-14
San Bruno, CA 94066
Tel.: (650) 583-6818 • Fax: (650) 583-6819

Las Vegas Sales Office:
3700 W. Desert Inn Road
Las Vegas, NV 89102
Tel.: (702) 792-6678 • Fax: (702) 792-6879

2500 Plaza Five, Harborside Financial Center,
Jersey City, NJ 07311
Tel.: (201) 484-7249 • Fax: (201) 484-7201

ROGER LAGMAY ORIEL Publisher & Chairman of the Board	CORA MACABAGDAL-ORIEL President & Executive Editor
BELLE M. SISON Executive Vice President Los Angeles Asian Journal	MONETTE ADEVA MAGLAYA Senior Vice President Los Angeles Asian Journal
IVY MANALANG Vice President - Marketing	
MOMAR VISAYA Editor-in-Chief	JOSEPH PERALTA Associate Editor
SHARON ANN BATHAN Features Editor	MARIA LOURDES HALILI Advertising Editor
DANTE SAMBLAY Art Director	ANDY TECSON / TED TALAG Photographers
BANDER LAW FIRM, LLP Legal Counsel	

ADVERTISING AND ADVERTORIAL POLICIES

Asian Journal Publications, Inc. ("AJPI") reserves the right to refuse to publish, in its sole and absolute discretion, any advertising and advertorial material submitted for publication by client. ("Client's Material")

Submission of an advertisement or advertorial to an AJPI sales representative does not constitute a commitment by AJPI to publish a Client's Material. AJPI has the option to correctly classify any Client's Material and to delete objectionable words or phrases.

Client represents and warrants that a Client's Material does not and will not contain any language or material which is libelous, slanderous or defamatory or invades any rights of privacy or publicity; does not and will not violate or infringe upon, or give rise to any adverse claim with respect to any common law or other right whatsoever (including, without limitation, any copyright, trademark, service mark or contract right) of any person or entity, or violate any other applicable law; and is not the subject of any litigation or claim that might give rise to any litigation.

Publication of a Client's Material does not constitute an agreement to continue publication. Client agrees and covenants to indemnify AJPI and its officers against any and all loss, liability, damage, expenses, cost, charges, claims, actions, causes of action, recoveries, judgments, penalties, including outside attorneys' fees (individually and collectively "Claims") which AJPI may suffer by reason of (1) Client's breach of any of the representations, warranties and agreements herein or (2) any Claims by any third party relating in any way to Client's Material.

AJPI will not be liable for failure to publish any Client's Material as requested or for more than one incorrect insertion of a Client's Material. In the event of an error, or omission in printing or publication of a Client's Material, AJPI shall be limited to an adjustment for the space occupied by the error, with maximum liability being cancellation of the cost of the first incorrect advertisement or republication of the correct advertisement.

Under no circumstances shall Asian Publications, Inc. be liable for consequential damages of any kind.

ASIAN JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS, INC. publishes the Los Angeles Asian Journal, published twice a week; the Orange County and Inland Empire Asian Journal, Northern California Asian Journal, Las Vegas Asian Journal and the New York / New Jersey Asian Journal which are published once a week and distributed to Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, Orange Counties, Northern California, Las Vegas and New York and New Jersey respectively.

Articles published in this paper do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the publisher. Letters to the Editor are welcome. Letters must contain complete name and return address. The materials, however, are subject to editing and revisions.

Contributions and advertising deadlines are every Mondays and Thursdays. For advertising rates and other information, please call the L.A. office at (213) 250-9797 or the Las Vegas Sales Office at (702) 792-6678 or send us an email at info@asianjournalinc.com