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## CORRUPTION: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Over the last few years, Metro Manila's traffic and gridlock has gone from bad to...not just worse, but intolerable.

We find ourselves in daily monstrous traffic jams that have translated to serious daily economic loss for the country. Recent estimates put the nation's economic loss due to Metro Manila's traffic at P3.5 billion a day.

Shouldn't this gargantuan economic loss alone be sufficient to capture the attention and urgency of the powers in government?

Apparently, it hasn't!

We are now two years into a new administration that ushered in renewed hope for relief of our traffic woes. At the start of this administration, its agents boasted their credentials and competence; pledging to resolve the traffic crisis.

To date, to quell public fury, these government officials have offered a lot of talk, buttressed by cosmetic actions and pie in the sky promises.

All this was initially received by the hopeful public with guarded optimism.

However, reality has now set in. Over the past two years, we have had to helplessly endure these officials' empty actions, promises and their repeated resetting's of their self-imposed deadlines. This performance has seriously eroded public confidence in their competence to address the exacerbating traffic crisis.

The officials who were entrusted to manage the inherited traffic mess have clearly overrated their own competence, misread the enormity of the crisis, lacked the urgency to resolve the issues, and undervalued the public's temper over the continued incompetence to provide crisis relief.

They have failed to actually do something tangibly productive to address the crisis. The inaction to resolve or at least temper the crisis has not only caused public inconvenience but compounded the economic losses for the country. Government can ill afford to further burden its citizenry with more unproductive debt.

Successive government efforts over the past administrations have tried to address the traffic crisis. But none have delivered the results they promised. It's because they continue to focus on symptoms and are not addressing the root causes of the traffic crisis.

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es of the traffic crisis.

They were the problem!

Their efforts have, instead, fueled suspicion and speculation that government actions and projects initiated on their watch to address the traffic crisis were just mere politics. It also presented the suspected opportunities for the graft that taxpayers ultimately carry.

Politics in the guise of public good was their key motivator for their project proposals and design. Unsuspectingly and anxious for a solution, we all bought into the projects to address the traffic crisis; we now realize that their public good project line was only a marketing ploy. They were carefully crafted to win public and media support for the projects.

Consequently, being seriously affected by the unbearable daily traffic situation, everyone from all walks of life and trade have offered their views and opinions on what should be done to address the traffic crisis.

Some proposals are outright dreams or far from reality solutions. Most are just Band-Aid solutions in the form of various volume reduction schemes or routing plans that may offer temporary relief. Others, who see the bigger picture and the need for a long-term solution, have taken a more permanent and economically productive view to resolve the traffic crisis. All support and agree that there is an urgent need for serious review and rebalancing of our mass transit infrastructure.

They even go further and pray that government will see the wisdom to have these key infrastructure project privately managed. So as to assure quality service, public safety, proper maintenance that is delivered at a level consistent with the projects' design, service life and management.

This is all well and good but we all know that infrastructure projects of scale will take time and money to mature.

Not to undervalue or take anything away from the various offered solutions to address our traffic crisis, but we have to admit that it will take more time than we can afford to put them in place. We urgently need to identify, agree, vet, fund, award and finally start on them soonest. They are projects that are all long past due.

Meanwhile, with so many proposed solutions, why is there still no relief to the traffic crisis? The public is fast losing its patience and our economy is taking a beating. Urgency for immediate actionable solutions is demanded.

Maybe it's because we have accepted as norm how government operates and it has become a fact of life in the Philippines, that's why we continue to ignore or fail to discuss the root of our traffic problem. When addressed, I believe that it will provide immediate and tangible results.

\* CORRUPTION

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## CORRUPTION: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

The elephant in the room is... corruption!

To this end, I have full confidence that if President Duterte wills it, it can be realized...cut the politics and address both the public and private sector corruption in the transport industry, if addressed, it will deliver immediate and lasting relief to the commuting public and our economy.

But to be successful, serious political will must be put in place. We must investigate, identify, hold to account, prosecute and address the corruption that we have long talked about in hush tone but dare not speak about openly.

The corruption that plagues the transport industry from end to end involving both the public and private sector must stop.

For starters, even the past administrations had publicly admitted that at least half of the public transport on the road today is operating illegally (colorum), not possessing a valid franchise. As an indicator of its effect on traffic, whenever LTO puts serious effort to strictly implement the laws, although fleeting, we immediately feel the positive effects on traffic due to the reduced number of public transport vehicles on the road.

Clearly the existence and tolerance of these illegal (colorum) vehicles that are key indicators of the presence of corruption and graft would not be possible without the neglect, tolerance and connivance of government personalities. Our traffic situation would also be more tolerable if only the personnel, who are tasked to keep the traffic moving, would not tolerate and patronize the obviously illegal public transport that stop to pick-up a passenger in the middle of the road as well as establish illegal terminals on major intersections that clog the free flow of traffic.

There are other areas for quick-wins to ease traffic congestion; win driver cooperation to be more considerate and disciplined, enjoin public utility companies and operators to take

up their responsibility to discipline to hold their drivers to account in support of compliance, adherence to traffic rules and regulations. This may be difficult but doable when government wins public trust and confidence to deliver on its traffic management responsibilities.

Consistent and committed enforcement will ensure public respect for traffic rules and laws. It will promote and institutionalize public cooperation for the greater good in place of the now standard every-man-for-himself rule of the road.

Most importantly, it will have immediate, lasting and positive effect on addressing our traffic problem by holding to account and weeding out the corrupt in government. Doing so will usher in a new era of respect, public trust in government and the rule of law.

We have all experienced at one time or another various forms of corruption at the hands of traffic enforcers. In fact, it has long been speculated that instead of focusing on keeping the traffic flowing, the traffic personnel focus their attention on apprehensions to meet their daily graft quotas to keep their superiors happy.

To address this practice, command responsibility must be extracted not only from frontliners but also from their superiors. Accountability must be adopted, consistently promoted and enforced as a norm in government.

Further, intervention in any form by officials and politicians who are not directly involved or supervising the personnel or office must be transparent or it be considered an attempt to corrupt a

**FROM B3-2** public official and be

equally held to account. This is to ensure that the laws of the land will be enforced consistently to all.

Let's all hope and pray that someone of authority will finally do something to alleviate the suffering and the gargantuan economic loss the traffic crisis has caused.

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