

Maintain QC Circle's integrity as park and heritage site

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In so many ways, Quezon City Memorial Circle is to many people north of the Pasig River what Rizal Park in Manila is to those who live south of the river. Both have open spaces where people living in crowded noisy areas gather on weekends to enjoy the quiet and the fresh air.

Rizal Park has 58 hectares on Manila Bay at the center of which stands the monument of the national hero Jose Rizal. The QC Memorial Circle has 27 hectares with a mau-soleum containing the remains of former President Manuel L. Quezon.

The QC Circle was in the news last week when QC Mayor Joy Belmonte stepped in to stop construction work on the Metro Rail Transit (MRT-7) from San Jose del Monte, Bulacan, along Commonwealth Ave. to the QC Memorial Circle, then along North Ave. to the proposed common station for the Light Rail Transit from Manila via Rizal Ave. and Metro Rail Transit-3 along Epifanio de los Santos Ave. (EDSA).

The mayor said the MRT-7 project appeared to be encroaching on a large part of the QC Memorial Circle. An area of 4,997 square meters had been set aside for the MRT-7 station at the circle, but the contractor's building plans had five times this area. Environmentalists and historians charged that the project was encroaching on the circle's integrity as a national heritage park.

Talks are now underway with the Department of Transportation and the private contractor, San Miguel Corp., and with other stakeholders. Mayor Belmonte said she wants the National Historical Commission and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts to have a say on the matter. She acknowledged the importance of MRT-7, one of the mass transit projects of the Duterte administration, but it must not encroach on the circle's integrity.

Much of the project, including the rails and the MRT-7 station is to be underground.

Construction work on that part of the project will continue. It is only the construction above ground that must be restricted so that Quezon Memorial Circle remains both a park and a heritage site.

It must remain the hallowed ground where Quezon's tomb lies, along with museums containing presidential memorabilia and items on the history of Quezon City, with three pylons representing Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao rising above it all. And it must remain a park – one of the few open spaces in all of Metro Manila – where people can enjoy a rare quiet weekend.