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CITY WITH A PURPOSE

EVER since 1976, Quezon City has been muddling along looking for a purpose. While every president, from Quirino (who proclaimed the city the capital of a newly independent republic) to Macapagal (who vainly sought to restore order to the planning of the city), was content to have the city as the capital, Ferdinand Marcos couldn't stand the idea and decreed the restoration to capital status of Manila.

Yet Quezon City remains the administrative capital of the country in all but name, with the majority of governmental offices located there, and with the House of Representatives holding its sessions there. Ironically, Manila, the official capital, has only the Supreme Court and Malacañang within its territory, the Senate opting to hold office in Pasay City.

Quezon City in the past has been an example of everything wrong with this country, a city more obsessed with politics than with development—and with politics of the worst sort at that. Mired in mediocrity, rocked by scandals, plagued with man-made and natural disasters, the city meant to be a haven for the working and middle classes has become a city of squatters, of decay, of urban blight.

The victory of Feliciano Belmonte was a victory, in many ways, for the middle-class, working-man's dream that Quezon City was supposed to represent all along. His election to the mayoralty marked the rolling back, at least for a time, of the cynical machine politics that had ruled the city since the time of Adelina Rodriguez. A city that seemed irredeemably mired in bankruptcy and inefficiency is at last showing signs of being reborn—perhaps not as a city with aspirations to being the once and future capital of the country, but at least as a city that functions.

It is a sad testament to reality that the city has been reduced to pining for efficient and good government, never mind the prestige and grandeur of the past. By all accounts, there is a dynamism at City Hall that has been sorely missed. The next few years will tell if Quezon City will stop being merely about the politics of addition, and start being a showcase for the revival of the dream of providing an affordable haven for the workingman.

★



Photo: ROBERT VIÑAS

Fifteen-minute talk: Powell meets with Mrs. Arroyo and Ople: "I didn't know that someday I would be dealing with tuna"

•FOREIGN RELATIONS

FISH TALKS

State Secretary Powell comes to discuss a limited range of subjects • but faces a complaint about the US slapping tariffs on Philippine tuna

By Nati Nuguid

THE press raged. Jesus fish-smelling Christ! Two Filipinos had been blown to bits by a Hamas suicide bomber in Israel, and here in Manila the highest official of the Philippines was talking about tuna. It does take tuna to tango.

"I did not know that someday I would be dealing with tuna," US State Secretary Colin Powell said after meeting with President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Imagine the general who scared Saddam Hussein's million-man army into surrendering by the divisions in the 1991 Persian Gulf War being bothered by the Philippine president about tuna. He came to Southeast Asia to sign an antiterrorist agreement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and here, in Manila, his precious time was taken up by complaints that a new US trade law was giving preference to Andean tuna exports to the United States and slapping tariffs on Philippine tuna!

"Our unequivocal commitment to a partnership with the [United States] in the war on terrorism was not without political risk," Mrs. Arroyo said. Admittedly, President Bush asked Congress for $25 million in military assistance for the Philippines, and Congress approved $55 million. That would be good enough, at least for now, to scare the Abu Sayyaf into shifting to another career and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to apply for integration into the military. And for Mindanao fishermen to think 10 times before joining al-Qaeda for losing to their Andean brothers in selling tuna to America.

Powell just could not embarrass the United States' leading partner in the war on terrorism by skipping Manila on his weeklong trip to Southeast Asia. He had to put in an appearance and say thank you for the Philippine cooperation with the US show of military might.

His real purpose of concluding a Mutual Logistic and Support Agreement between Washington and Manila had been scuttled by widespread opposition to the proposal by leftists and nationalists, which forced a rewrite to ensure that the United States would not build new military bases here.

Palace sources were evasive about making public a copy of the draft agreement, but the opposition claimed it had a first draft, a second draft and even a third draft. The FREE PRESS got what it was made to understand was the Senate draft. If originally, the draft was going to be an agreement between higher officials, it was the downgraded one between the defense departments of both countries, as the title indicates: Mutual Logistic Support Arrangement (RP-US-01) between the Department of Defense of the United States and the Department of National Defense of the Republic of the Philippines. The purpose: to establish basic terms and procedures to facilitate the reciprocal provisions of logistic support, supplies and services as the terms are defined in Article 4 of the agreement.

The agreement had by this time become the elephant described by a group of blind people. Each had a different perception of the beast, depending on which part of it he touched.

Was it a treaty therefore needing ratification by a two-thirds vote of the Senate? Or a mere agreement, maybe an executive arrangement that may be signed by the tertiary level of officialdom? Will it allow the Americans to set up military bases again in the country? Will financial aid to the country from the US Congress depend on the signing of the agreement?

National Security Adviser Roilo Golez may have erred when he told the press that American forces would be allowed to build permanent structures anywhere in the country for their use under the proposed agreement—runways, helipads, barracks and roads. Although the United States will turn the facilities over to the Philippines, he said, the US forces can use them whenever they are in the country.

Golez corrected himself the next day, however, saying that he was referring to structures built during the just completed Balikatan exercises in Basilan and Zamboanga, not to the agreement. The war games were "about supplies and not structures that American forces would build in the country."

Nobody paid much attention to denials from US officials that the US intends to set up bases in the country—from Adm. Thomas Fargo, commander in chief of the US Pacific Command, who attended the closing ceremony of the war games, to Powell himself, who said the US is not looking for bases or permanent presence in Southeast Asia.

The Kilusang Bagong Lipunan, the Communist Party and militant groups were tearing the agreement to pieces. Denouncing the agreement, the rallies took place before Powell's arrival and threatened major disturbances despite the National Police's warning that its men would use their batons where necessary. Defying the "no permit, no rally" rule, the protesters gathered at several major streets—Chino Roces Avenue near Malacañang, and UN Avenue and Roxas Boulevard—intent on storming the Palace and the US Embassy. But they could not get to within a 10-foot pole of both targets, because the police kept them at a safe distance.

When it was all over, three policemen (including Police Officer 1 Robert Resurreccion, who was wounded in the hand) were visited by President Arroyo in the hospital, and 10 protesters were the "only" casualties.

Powell, arriving at about 9:30 p.m. on August 2, noticed the protesters and read some of their anti-US placards. He had expected them all along. What surprised him, however, was the applause that greeted him as he entered the Peninsula Hotel in Makati, where he and his party had put up for the night. And he didn't even have to do a song and dance act for it unlike at Brunei Darussalam, where he had sung a parody of "Some Enchanted Evening" at the close of the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Trojan horse. To Kilusang Bagong Lipunan Rep. Imee Marcos of Ilocos Norte, the agreement was no elephant, but a Trojan horse the country should be wary of.

Approval by the US House of Representatives of a supplemental budget of $29 billion for the war against terrorism, $55 million earmarked as military aid to the Philippines, made her suspect that Washington was dangling the military aid in exchange for the agreement.



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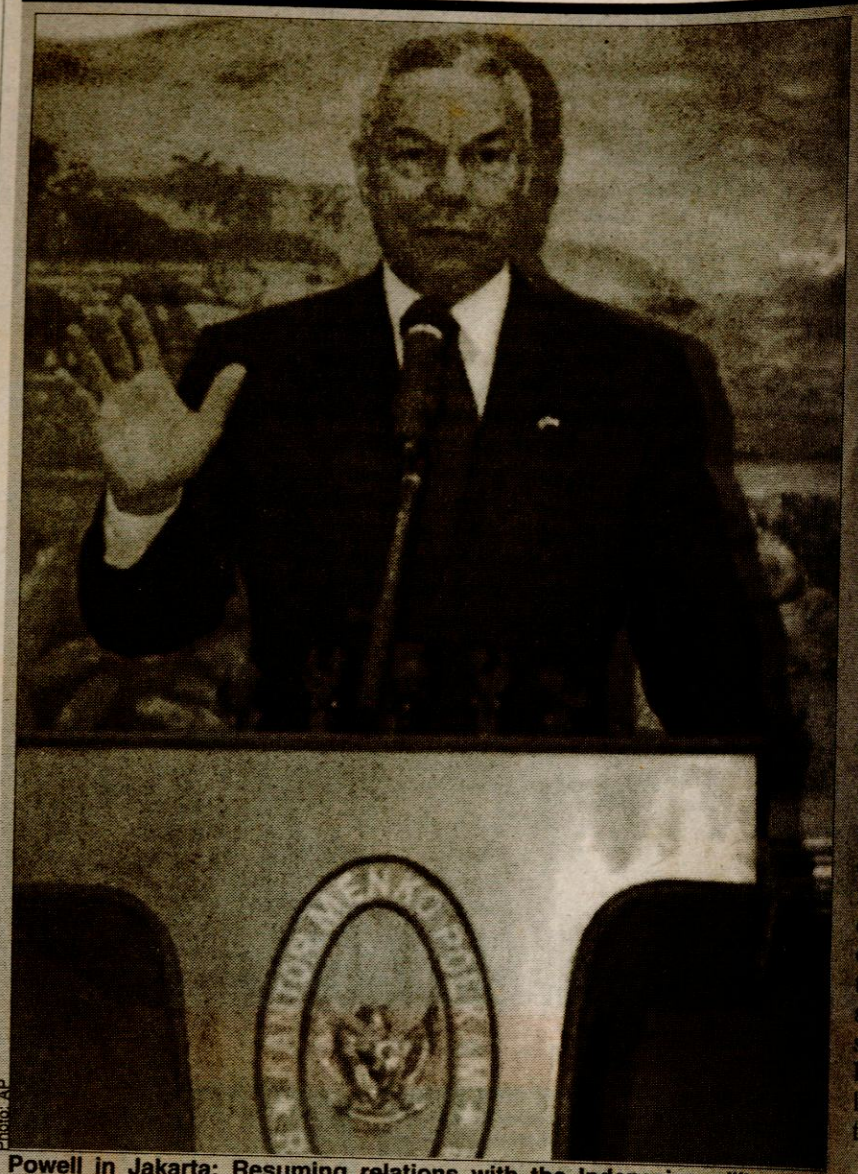

Photo: AP

Powell in Jakarta: Resuming relations with the Indonesian military

AGAINST TERROR

Colin Powell clinches counterterrorism agreements with Southeast Asian nations

TERRORISTS can be attacked only from "the highest moral plane," US Secretary of State Colin Powell said at the conclusion of a security meeting of Pacific Rim and Asian nations in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, on August 1. There is no contradiction between the Bush administration's war on terrorism and a continuing US commitment to human rights. "The United States feels strongly about these sorts of issues," Powell said, "and believes that if we are really going to prevail—over this plague on the face of mankind—then we have to do it in a way that respects human dignity."

Concerned that Southeast Asia's Muslim-majority nations provide fertile ground for the growth of terrorist organizations, the Bush administration has been eager to establish closer security and intelligence ties, particularly with Malaysia and Indonesia. The United States has criticized both countries for repressing political dissent and abusing human rights.

Powell signed agreements with the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on increased cooperation and intelligence-sharing with Washington and among ASEAN members, as well as stepped-up diligence against terrorist financial networks. "The goal," a senior State Department official said, "is to squeeze out the groups that are here and to make sure this area doesn't become a haven for terrorism."

Indonesia, the penultimate stop on Powell's eight-day, eight-nation Asian tour designed to bolster counterterrorism cooperation, is seen as key to that effort. Although it is thought to be the headquarters of various militant groups, including the Jemaah Islamiah organization, which has been linked to al-Qaeda and is accused of plotting to blow up several Western embassies in Singapore, Indonesia has failed to arrest militant leaders, saying it has no evidence against them.

Restricted aid. Malaysia and Singapore have urged the United States to resume military assistance to Indonesia to help bolster its antiterrorist actions. The United States restricted aid in the early 1990s because of human rights abuses, and Congress cut it off altogether in 1999, after the Indonesian military's violent campaign in East Timor.

Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, and President Megawati Sukarnoputri faces political constraints in moving against Islamic groups. Elections are scheduled in 2004. The country gained new importance after September 11, since extremist groups based there were found to have ties with al-Qaeda. Since Jemaah Islamiah surfaced earlier this year, the Bush administration has been eager to restore military ties and stiffen Megawati's spine. And on August 2, at the end of his visit to Jakarta, Powell announced that the United States would begin restoring military ties and provide more than $50 million to improve Indonesia's ability to wage war on terrorism.

The bulk of the aid will go to counterterrorism training for the Indonesian police. But $4 million, from a newly created Defense Department fund unrestricted by a congressional ban on more traditional training programs, will go to the military. "Indonesia has that threat [from terrorists], the United States has that threat, and we all need to work jointly against these kinds of organizations and these sorts of individuals," Powell told a news conference in Jakarta before leaving for the Philippines.

The level of threat by terrorists in the region, and the zeal with which it is being combated, vary widely by country. Singapore and Malaysia received kudos from Powell for their arrests of dozens of Jemaah Islamiah members, including some Indonesians, with alleged ties to al-Qaeda and radical groups in the region thought to be part of its international network.

The Philippines, which also has made arrests, is at the top of the US list of cooperative nations. On July 31 more than 1,600 US troops completed a six-month exercise that included counterterrrorism training and assistance to Filipino forces pursuing Abu Sayyaf bandits in the country's southern jungles. Powell's stop here on August 3, the last stage of his Asian tour, was largely a pat on the back of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's government, although he announced the congressional approval of $55 million in aid for the local war on terrorism. Washington and Manila are preparing to conclude a logistic agreement that would enhance their cooperation in the war against terror. The controversial agreement, however, was not discussed during Powell's meeting with Mrs. Arroyo. The meeting lasted just 15 minutes. **Karen De Young, *Washington Post*, with Robin Wright, *Los Angeles Times*/NYTNS**

"We welcome the assistance," Marcos said, "the training and the dream of peace the Americans offer. But let us be wary when gigantic vessels of war are launched in pursuit of peace, when great fleets or foreign men bearing weapons arrive in our midst to restore law and order. Beware of a Trojan horse."

By this time, talk was already floating about that China was poised to shoot guided missiles at Taiwan and that some of the missiles were aimed at the Philippines. It was expected that the United States, friendly with Taiwan, would not let that happen. The need therefore for a nearby country that would allow the US to bring over armaments to retaliate against China or at least to serve as a deterrent to attacks against Taiwan.

As vice chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Relations, Marcos had asked US Ambassador Francis Ricciardone for a dialogue with Powell on the agreement. But her request was turned down, without even an apology. Powell had not come to discuss the agreement.

Limited talks. Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye stressed that the talks would be limited to trade, tourism and the plight of Filipino war veterans and undocumented workers in the United States.

Marcos and the House Committee on Foreign Relations would have to content themselves with a hearing set for August 14, to which Secretaries Angelo Reyes of defense and Blas Ople of foreign affairs have been invited.

By then, it may all be to no purpose. Ople has said that the executive committee finalizing the draft agreement—composed of himself, Golez, Reyes and Justice Secretary Hernando Perez—had arrived at a final draft that has been submitted to Washington for approval. It contained amendments that considered Vice President Teofisto Guingona's comments when he was still secretary of foreign affairs.

Party-list Rep. Loretta Ann P. Rosales of Akbayan, chairman of the House Committee on Civil, Political and Human Rights, looks at the $55 million aid as a gift thrown down the gauntlet: "There is no way we can see any benefit from this secret military agreement except that it promises $55 million upon its approval. Yet this amount is to be defined by the US in line with its access operations here in the Philippines. It is added military hardware and facilities mainly for the general use [of the Americans] and not for the [Filipino] people's benefit."

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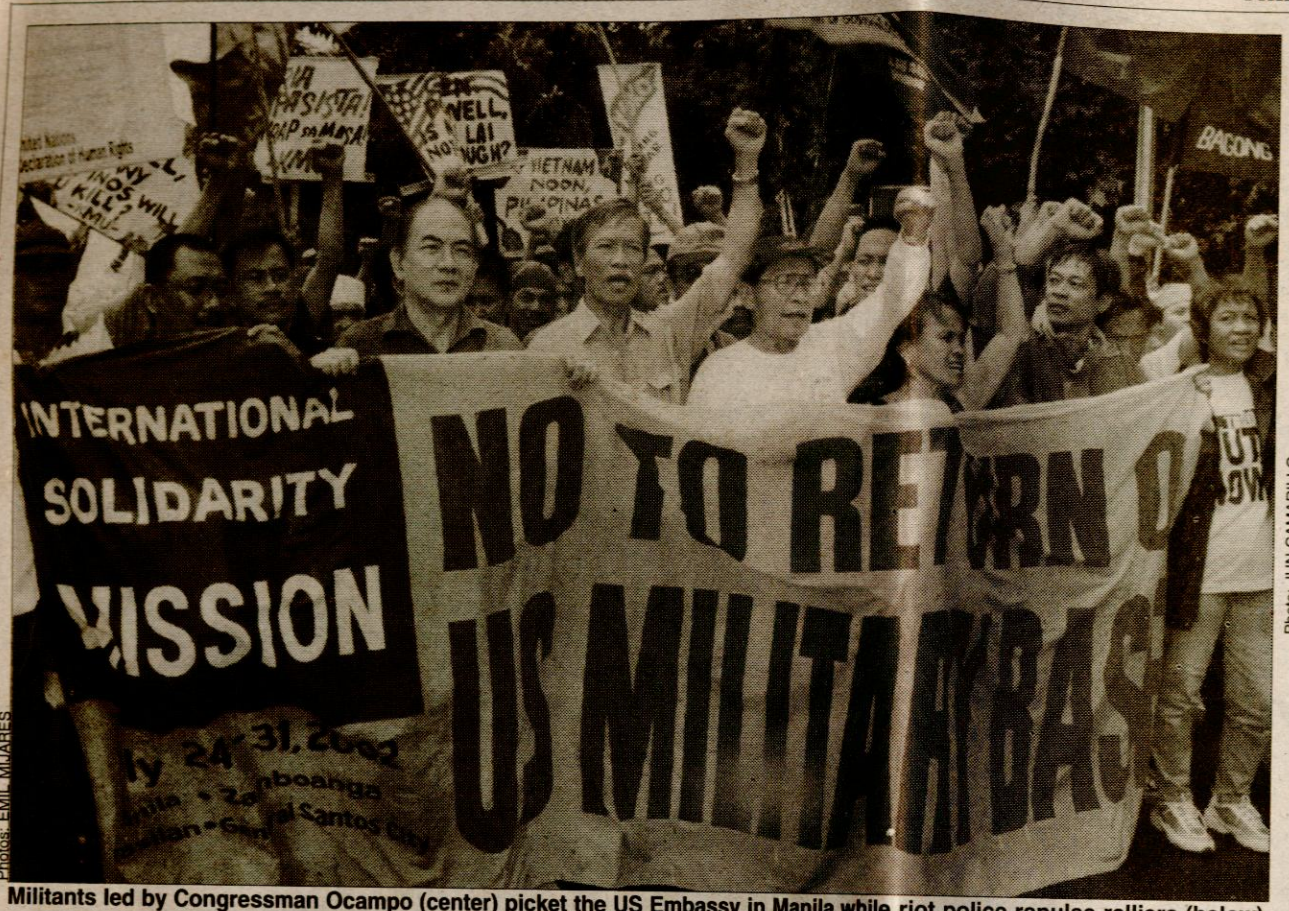


Photos: EMIL MIJARES

Militants led by Congressman Ocampo (center) picket the US Embassy in Manila while riot police repulse ralliers (below)





Photo: JUN CAMARILLO

Rosales: MLSA violates the Charter

She cited provisions in the Constitution that would be violated if the agreement was approved. Article 2, Section 8, she pointed out, pursues a policy of freedom from nuclear weapons in Philippine territory. Like the Visiting Forces Agreement, the Mutual Logistic Support Agreement gives the US military forces and vessels access to any part of the country at any time. The Philippine government does not inspect such vessels for nuclear weapons. Rosales stressed that giving US military forces access to Philippine territory (air, land and sea) at their discretion violates the Constitution.

Considering the policy of government "neither to confirm nor deny" suspicion that the vessels are carrying nuclear weapons, Philippine territory is endangered by nuclear weapons that can explode or leak and devastate the people and their environment.

Rosales also cited Article 18, Section 25 of the Constitution, which is very explicit about the expiration of the Military Bases Agreement: "Foreign military bases, troops or facilities shall not be allowed in the Philippines except under a treaty duly concurred in by the Senate and when the Congress so requires, ratified by a majority of the votes cast by the people in a national referendum."

Rosales noted: "The [Mutual Logistic Support Agreement] provides for storage facilities that can stay in Philippine territory anywhere from six months to several years. This already violates the above provision that prohibits the construction of facilities whether for storage or for other purposes."

Basing rights? snorted former senator Francisco S. Tatad. While in the Senate he had cosponsored the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), which, he said, together with the logistic agreement, could allow US forces, if they are so minded, to operate in the country without need of formal basing rights. So, what is there to debate about?

Tatad wrote: "Now President Arroyo and the United States have apparently decided to hold exercises continuously. And the Supreme Court finds no distinction between permanent and transient forces in its October 10, 2000, ruling on the VFA. Even before the VFA and after the bases closure in 1992, US forces had been coming for military exercises under the Mutual Defense Treaty. The VFA was put in to define the conditions under which [the exercises] may continue. By making no distinction bwtween permanent and transient forces in the VFA, the Court in effect gave the US forces a license to overstay. This is not basing rights, just as the MLSA is not basing rights. But the VFA and the MLSA together could be used to allow the US forces to operate freely as though they had basing rights."

To all of which, Defense Secretary Reyes replies with equanimity. He downgraded the agreement as nothing unusual, saying the US has such agreements with about 50 nations all over the world. He made the statements over radio and television, which could be used against him should circumstances prove that he was talking through his hat:

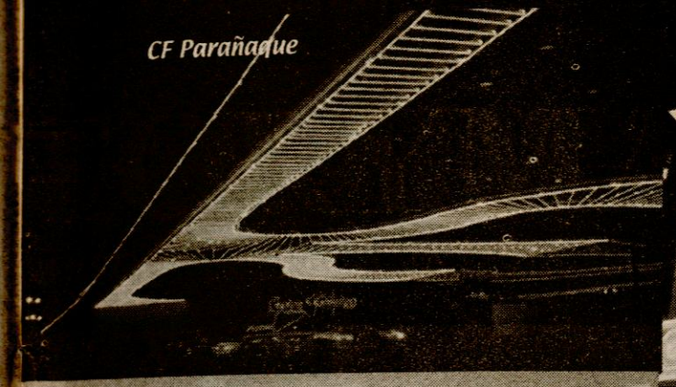
"The opponents of the MLSA are barking up the wrong tree. The MLSA is largely misunderstood. It will not give the Americans basing rights nor are the Americans coming back [as when they had the bases in Subic and Clark Field]. That will not happen. The Constitution does not allow it. There will be no permanent structures. The MLSA is nothing but an agreement authorizing reciprocal logistic supply and logistic arrangements. Fears that the MLSA will result in basing are unfounded. Any activities talked about [that will be needing permanent structures] will require a treaty."

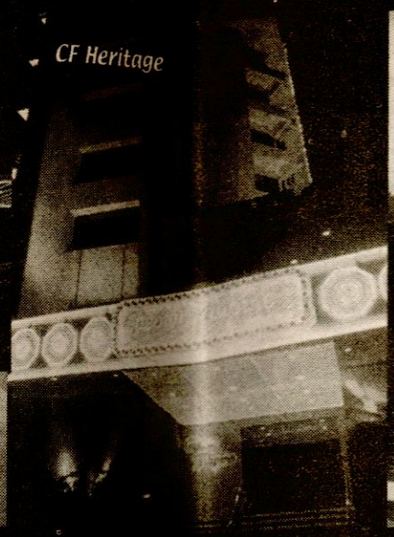
Reciprocity. He admitted that airports and seaports would be used in the war against terrorism. But he said there would be reciprocity in cases where American equipment is left behind in Philippine territory as well as when Philippine structures are used. These will be paid back in cash or in kind, depending on how the parties agree.

Will the people ever get to see the draft agreement? Reyes replied: "It is not a case of having a draft. It's a mutual agreement being tossed back and forth. The MLSA does not authorize anything. Should the US require something that the Philippine side would rather not accede to, all we need to say is 'no.'"

The problem is, with or without some sweetener being dangled before her, will the lady ever say "no" to Uncle Sam?

★











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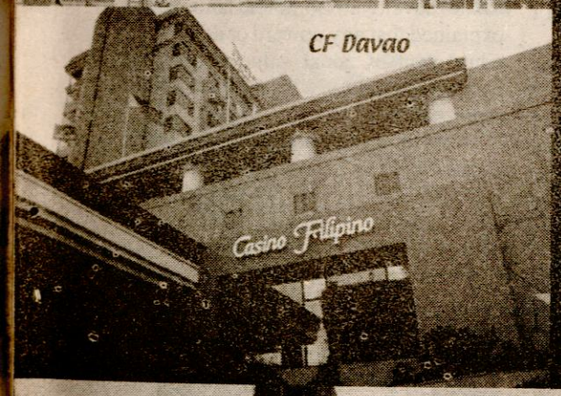



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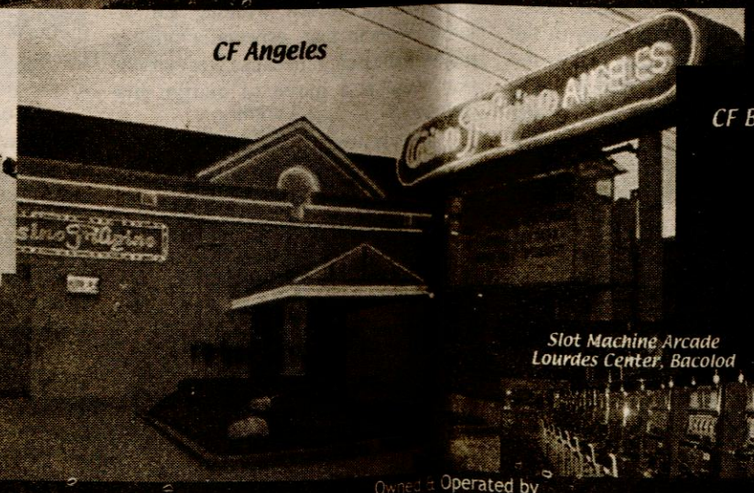



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•SCANDAL

WILL THIS GO ANYWHERE?

So now lawmakers are planning to conduct yet another investigation into tax fraud cases involving billions of pesos. The jaded public, however, has seen this movie before

By Mar-Vic Cagurangan

THE government is likely to hit a deficit of P170 billion to P200 billion this year way above the P130 billion projected by the administration. The growing deficit, as in the past, is being blamed on the graft-ridden Bureau of Internal Revenue for its (perpetual) failure to collect taxes efficiently.

This year's tax collection shortfall was estimated at P33 million to P35 million. But this time, according to Lakas Rep. Aniceto Saludo of Southern Leyte, the shortfall can be attributed to a cause more serious than simple tax-collection failure. It involved what he described as "dirty and utterly despicable deeds." And for which, Saludo said, BIR Commissioner Rene Bañez was directly responsible.



Photo: ROBERT VINAS

Under fire: Accused of tolerating tax evaders, Bañez finds an ally in Mrs. Arroyo

Describing Bañez as the "country's top tax fixer, plunderer, economic saboteur and an evil most foul," Saludo accused the revenue chief of conspiring with executives of real-estate and telecommunication companies to defraud the government of billions of pesos through tax fixing.

In a privileged speech two weeks ago, Saludo named a string of tax scams at the BIR allegedly involving Bañez.

Billions. First, the waiving of P6 billion in taxes in favor of the Fort Bonifacio Development Corp (FBDC), a subsidiary of the Metro Pacific Group of Companies, headed by Manuel V. Pangilinan and for which Bañez had worked as tax director and vice president.

Second, the reduced zonal valuation of land at the Fort Bonifacio project from P100,000 to P30,000 per square meter—which is even lower than the P33,000 that Metro Pacific bid when it won the Fort Bonifacio bidding.

Third, the reduced taxes paid by the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) and Smart Communications Inc. despite their record-breaking billions of pesos in profits last year. The two companies were allegedly taxed only P950 million, which was way lower than what they were expected to pay for last year's income.

Fourth, the special allotment release order showing how P1.18 billion of taxpayers' money was used to pay for the documentary stamp tax liabilities of issued for book purposes only. The release order was intended to condone documentary stamp tax liabilities.

Saludo alleged that Bañez was the author of all these anomalies. Because of these criminal acts, the congressman added, the bureau recorded a record tax collection deficit of more than P33 billion for the first six months of the year.

There are reasons to believe, he said, that Bañez, Pangilinan and other FBDC officials are "guilty of plunder for having caused the loss of billions in government revenues carried out by manipulating implementation of collection policies at the BIR to favor obviously his clients, principally PLDT and FBDC—a gigantic conspiracy to defraud the government."

Economic sabotage. "This tax scam is economic sabotage at its vilest and most wicked form," Saludo said. "The awesome gall and audacity of the perpetrators of this tax scam merits the ultimate test of public trial. And, expectedly, because of overwhelming evidence at hand, the penalties prescribed from such a crime—not white- or blue collar but a shameful black crime. One that defies color coding as it springs from the most evil of intentions."

Several House members agreed. They set to investigate the tax scams and urged Malacañang to give Bañez his walking papers. They are backing nongovernment organizations that are preparing to charge the BIR chief with plunder and economic sabotage.

While welcoming the House's planned investigation, Malacañang appealed to the lawmakers to go easy on Bañez.

"I'm sure that the BIR commissioner will be prepared to present himself before the congressional body," Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said. But he told critics of Bañez that before pursuing their actions against him, they have to consider the "condition of the country." He didn't explain what he meant by that.

Perhaps, he added, those persons threatening actions against Bañez might have been the same people the BIR chief had hurt in his cleanup drive at the bureau. After all, Bunye added, Bañez "has always been known both in the private and public sectors for his integrity."

At the 98th anniversary celebration of the BIR, President Arroyo expressed full confidence in Bañez. "I have directed the BIR to pursue these evaders using the full force of the law without fear or favor. Without fear, especially on the part of Rene Bañez, because you can see that there is a move to malign his integrity."

After her speech, Mrs. Arroyo gave the floor to Bañez so he could defend himself against Saludo's accusations.

"Pure lies," the BIR chief said of Saludo's allegations.

Rebuttal. He followed it up with a point-by-point rebuttal to the allegations.

He said the case involving FBDC and the Bases Conversion Development Authority (BCDA) was the subject of an unsuccessful plunder case filed against him by a group of revenue district officers last year. The Ombudsman dismissed the case last month.

The documentary stamp tax liability of Fort Bonifacio and BCDA was set on November 27, 2001, by virtue of a release order issued by the Bureau of Treasury in the same amount to settle this obligation of a government agency, he said.

Bañez also denied that he had assisted the PLDT and Smart in getting their tax returns. "If you look at the tax system in the Philippines, it's a self-assessment system. If you earn an income, you're obligated by law to declare that income and complete your tax. Now in the end, we will validate whether you in fact correctly declared your income and then afterward, you're scheduled for an audit. Now, how can I intervene in the filing of income-tax returns of those corporations?" asked Bañez.

On allegations that he had a hand in the nonappeal of two tax refund cases filed by FBDC, he noted that the cases were filed by the taxpayer with the Court of Tax Appeals and that the BIR was just a litigant in the case.

As for allegation that he had connived with Pangilinan, his former boss, to reduce the zonal valuation for the developed Bonifacio land, Bañez explained that any upward or downward adjustment of zonal value is assessed by a BIR committee with a private-sector representative.

Monumental cases. Meanwhile, Lakas Rep. Oscar Moreno of Misamis Oriental, chairman of the House Committee on Economic Affairs, urged Malacañang to zero in on the "monumental" tax-fraud cases and not on minor tax cheats in its effort to go after tax evaders in the face of the government's falling revenue collection.

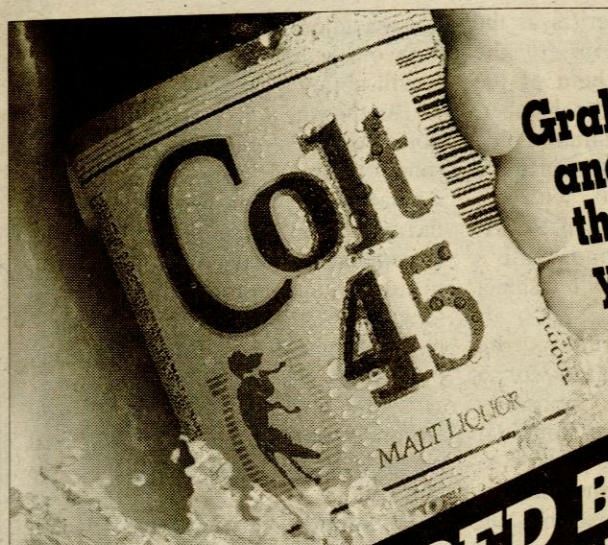
"Why can't the government go after the big tax-fraud perpetrators and recover billions of pesos that belong rightfully to the people?" Moreno asked.

He remembered the P5.3-billion tax-credit scam involving the Chingkoe Group of Companies, which was investigated by the Task Force 156. The perpetrators of this scam have been identified.

But whatever happened to that case? It seems to have faded into oblivion like the several other investigations into tax evasions and tax fraud conducted by Congress and task forces in the past. To date, the government has yet to send one big tax scammer to jail.

So now they're planning to conduct yet another investigation into tax fraud cases. A skeptical public has seen this movie before, however, and isn't holding its breath waiting for the filing of cases against big-time tax evaders and their crooked accomplices in government, let alone their improbable conviction.

★



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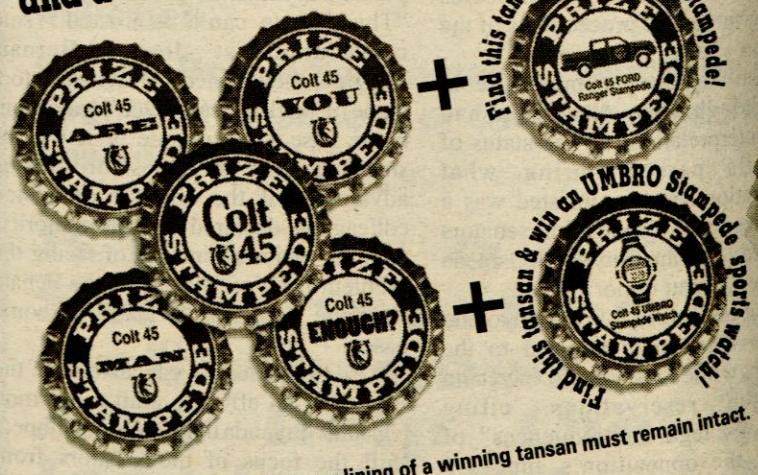

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Force to reckon with: The opposition may be outnumbered but refuse to be ignored

• POLITICS

FRAGILE PEACE

Sensing the public's mounting anger and disgust, the senators agree to stop their silly antics and squabbling. But for how long?

NO man," according to the American poet Walt Whitman, "can look into what we call party politics without seeing what a mockery it all is."

Those who patiently followed the latest circus in the Senate couldn't agree more. One senator stands up to speak and says nothing. No one pays attention. Then everybody disagrees.

For over two weeks, the senators traded barbs and accused one another of trying to protect individual interests. Opposition Sen. Edgardo Angara, according to Sen. Joker Arroyo, wanted to sabotage the administration, by blocking administration bills, in preparation for his presidential bid in 2004.

Resign all. Sen. Robert Barbers came up with the most sensible suggestion. He said all the senators should resign and the Senate abolished.

Not only would that require constitutional amendments; none of the other senators, of course, would want to quit.

"I hope that the institution is given the chance to settle down and given a chance to work," said Angara, adding that "if we follow [Barbers's suggestion], we will be abandoning our office and our job."

After hours of closed-door talks last week, the squabbling senators finally forged a truce and decided to buckle down to work.

What was the fight all about?

The issue had to do with the question of validity of the June 3-6 session by opposition senators presided by then opposition senator (now Foreign Affairs Secretary) Blas Ople. The session passed four Malacañang-certified bills—the absentee voting bill, the measure creating the Department of Housing, the Chainsaw Act and the Free Patent Act—supposedly as part of the opposition's compromise with administration senators. The opposition's action, however, raised a legal issue.

The administration bloc refused to acknowledge the opposition's June 3 session because Senate President Franklin Drilon and six other senators had decided to adjourn "due to lack of quorum." Any business after that was invalid, Drilon said. Therefore, the bills passed during that session, though already transmitted to the House of Representatives, were invalid, the administration bloc argued.

But the opposition had questioned the "premature" adjournment of the session, saying that Drilon and the six senators did not have a quorum to amend the legislative calendar.

Opposition Sen. Rodolfo Biazon conceded that the administration senators could proceed to outvote them, but the minority senators would resist efforts to nullify the measures they had passed.

The whole affair was sparked by the leadership crisis at the Senate owing to the precarious hold of the majority on the chamber. The administration bloc eventually regained its edge, 13-10, with the defection of Sen. Robert Jaworski and Ople's acceptance of a Cabinet post.

On Monday, the Senate geared for a showdown. Opposition Sen. Vicente Sotto III expected the session to at least give the minority the chance to put on record that it once was the majority when Sen. John Osmeña joined the 11-man bloc on June 3.

Compromise. Now with a relatively solid position of the majority, the senators eventually decided to do what they had to do. They struck a compromise by adopting a resolution late last week, capping an eight-hour standoff over the validity of the opposition's June 3-6 session that passed several bills.

Twenty-one senators signed Resolution 391, in which they agreed to approve three of the four bills already passed on third reading during the June3-6 session. Left out was the absentee voting bill, which was recalled for further amendments. In the same session, the senators also ratified trade agreements between the Philippines and Lithuania, Slovenia, Cyprus, South Africa and Egypt.

Also, the administration bloc agreed to incorporate into the Senate records the transcripts of the proceedings of the opposition's June 3-6 session.

It wasn't an easy compromise to reach, though. The resolution had elicited interpretations on the status of four bills passed during what administration senators insisted was a "rump" session by opposition senators who seized a slim majority when Osmeña joined the 11-man minority bloc.

Majority Senators Joker Arroyo and Francisco Pangilinan objected to the resolution, while Sen. Renato Cayetano manifested reservations, citing "ambiguous legal consequences" of inserting the opposition's June 3-6 session into the records.

"The best thing to do now is for us to vote on the journal of our June 3 session adjourning sine die. As long as we avoid the June 3 session adjournment, it will not end," Arroyo said.

But the vote didn't take place. Drilon noted Arroyo's objections, but just the same, "in the absence of a motion for a votation," he approved the journal of the opposition's June session. Finally, Pimentel acknowledged that the majority-minority agreement contained in Resolution 391 signed by 21 senators past midnight Monday last week already provided a way out of the impasse.

"All's well that ends well," said Drilon, mouthing the trite, hackneyed phrase. The man knows his clichés, give him that.

Unsettled. But the issue of which session was valid—that of the seven administration senators or that of the 12 opposition senators—remained unsettled.

"We'll leave that to the court," Drilon said. (But who's going to court?) "We merely acknowledged that the opposition's June 3-6 session happened. We cannot deny that."

Nobody says it didn't happen. Anybody can hold a session. Why, even Estrada is said to hold his own "Cabinet meetings" every now and then, complete with his Chinese cronies. The question the majority lacked the guts to force an answer to was: Was that session valid?

The minority senators welcomed the compromise. They knew that with a strong leader, the majority could have forced the issue and handily outvoted them.

The compromise means the administration senators "already agreed to recognize our journal," said Angara. "It's a win-win situation; they recognized our journal, we recognized theirs. As to which is valid, we leave that to historians."

Right. Like, Ronald Lumbao recognizes Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo as president, and Dante Ang recognizes Joseph Estrada as president. Then future historians will decide. It's a win-win situation.

What matters, Angara added, is that "if the squabbling between us continues, we will all sink together because we are in the same boat."

Quite right. A thoroughly disgusted public was demanding to scuttle the boat. "This Senate can't be trusted," said constitutionalist Joaquin Bernas. Imagine, they turned the Senate into a game of "kick the can." Don't leave your home base for a minute or it will be snatched away. The opposition—taking advantage of the absence of a sick colleague—declared itself the majority. And the majority, instead of facing the problem head on, stayed on the Senate floor the next time to guard its home base.

Drilon will call a caucus before the session in an effort to craft a common legislative agenda that would, it is hoped, shift the focus of the senators from divisive feuds to the real task of lawmaking.

It's about time. **Mar-Vic Cagurangan**

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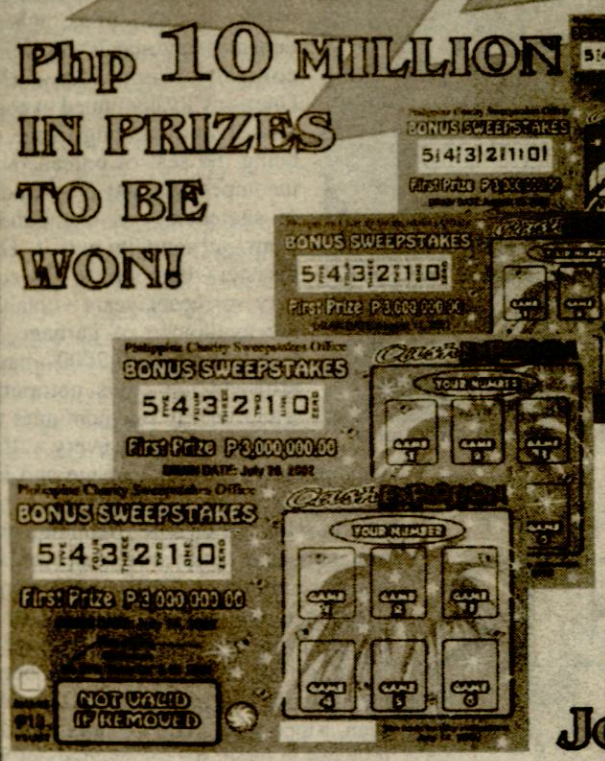

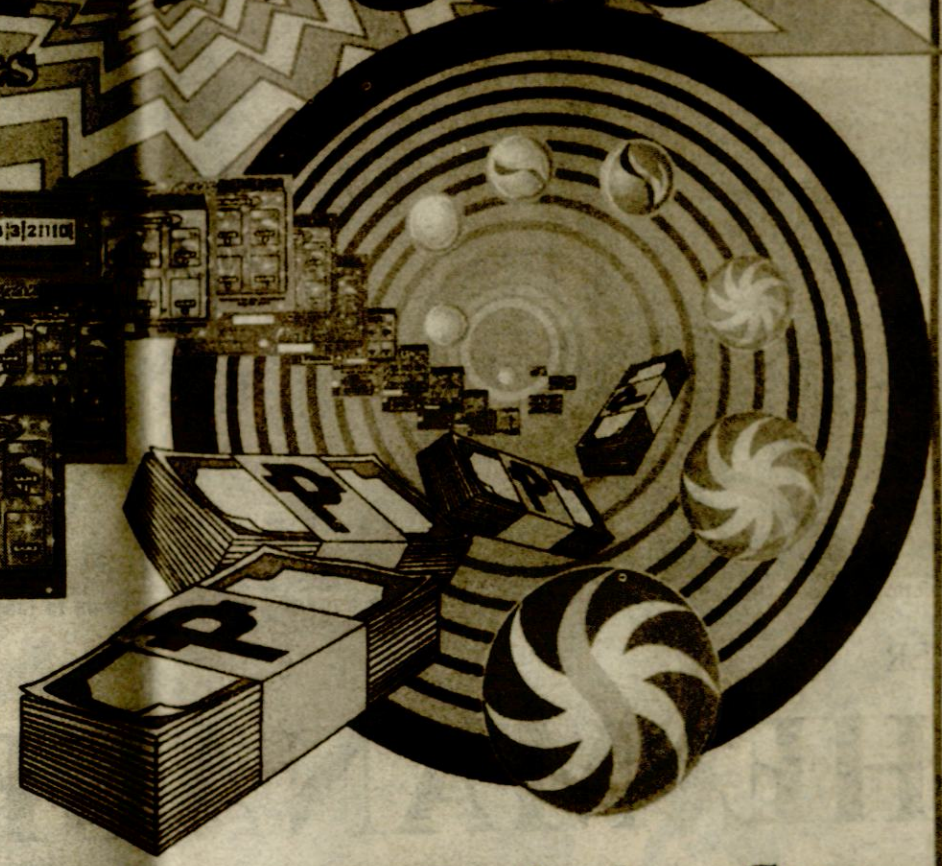

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Man of action: "I love this city," Belmonte says. "There's a dynamism here that I want to lead to several directions"

•COVER

THE MANAGER

Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr. applies his talent for order on the rock-and-roll world of Quezon City

By Ricky S. Torre

FOR a city that is relatively young, unlike centuries-old Manila, Quezon City is a place with character. In its heyday in the Seventies, the Juan de la Cruz Band paid tribute to Quezon City's rambunctious working-class scene with the impish song,"Project" (just as the band had also celebrated "Divisoria"), and it is an affirmation of the city's glorious, chaotic humanity that it had been romanticized by the most important band in Pinoy Rock, as everybody loves to call the genre.

Old souls. Incidentally, Pepe Smith is a fixture in Quezon City himself, just like the old home of his grandmother on Kamuning. So are Joey Ayala and Lords de Veyra, and so were the late rock impresario Dodong Viray and, of course, *Jingle*, the legendary underground magazine whose office on P. Tuazon was once raided by the police.

But going back to the rest of Quezon City's humanity. It stands on E. Rodriguez Avenue, defying the sun, prowls the alleys of shopworn Cubao, or scrambles for a jeepney ride on tattered Aurora Boulevard, while being watched over by the movie billboards that mark the boulevard. Yet even amid the rowdiness of that scene, one can sense a stubborn dignity on the faces of the people who live in or always pass by Quezon City, many of them nameless workers for whom the city was built, and virtually all of them old souls like the city itself.

In many ways, Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr.'s home on E. Rodriguez Avenue looks just like Quezon City, apart from the palatial estates like La Vista and Corinthian Gardens where other government officials live. During breaks from our long interview with Belmonte, we looked at the chests and cupboards that occupied the terrace and the adjoining living room, a sepia-colored setting that could have been hauled out of the reel images of a 1960s Filipino movie.

The mayor's home was also crowded with paintings. Besides an exquisite nude by Manansala and a famous contortion by Onib Olmedo, Belmonte owned some Mabini paintings, betraying an utter disregard of the snooty standards of the culturati (which certainly wouldn't validate the loud colors and delicious tackiness of those billboards on Aurora Boulevard).

"You know, I love this city," Belmonte said, resuming the interview. "There's a dynamism in Quezon City that I want to lead to several directions."

After a year at City Hall, Belmonte has begun to carry out projects that are intended to change the perception that the bureaucracy's presence is hardly felt in Quezon City, despite its being home to several governmental agencies. But before the city government could step out and reach its constituents, it had to shape up first. Thus, Belmonte spent his first year "putting the city's financial house in order," a priority that needed his renowned management skills.

Years of managerial work in business and government have earned Belmonte the reputation of being one of the country's top administrators. That distinction was further underscored by his role as manager of the prosecution panel in the impeachment trial of Joseph Estrada. Rationalizing the city government's finances and enforcing an efficient system of tax collection, however, were different challenges, which demanded the mayor's full-time concentration. Meanwhile, Quezon City continued to cope with the unflattering image of being the seat of bureaucratic incompetence and the "cradle of snatchers," as one pundit from Quezon City puts it. The disasters that struck Quezon City in recent years—notably the avalanche of garbage in Payatas on July 10, 2000—have affirmed the city's notoriety, which at any rate continues to be emphasized by every traffic jam, by every pile of garbage and by every petty crime in the city.

Cleanup. To be sure, Belmonte has not neglected these problems even as he concentrated on fiscal management. "Traffic is still one of Quezon City's biggest problems, along with garbage," he admitted. "But Cubao has been cleaned up, as you may have already seen. Since traffic and vendors usually go hand in hand, we removed about 50 vendors there. You can now move freely in that area, because the obstructions that were partly responsible for the decline in business in Cubao [have been removed. Shopowners there] are very satisfied, and have reported an increase in sales."

Cubao is one of three or four areas that "make up the face of Quezon City," said Belmonte. "The others are Manggahan, Novaliches and, to a certain extent, Balintawak. What people see or experience in those places becomes their impression of Quezon City. For instance, if you drive along Commonwealth Avenue and reach Manggahan, you'd find only one or two passable lanes in that area. How did that happen? The vendors, about 1,800 of them, used to occupy not only the sidewalks but even the lanes next to those sidewalks—in other words, beyond the street signs, which were supposed to mark the boundary of the sidewalks. But that was before. Today, the vendors have been relocated, and all 10 lanes of Commonwealth Avenue are accessible to

motorists. I hope I could take you there and show you around that place."

The mayor did serve as our tour guide later that day. It was an early Saturday afternoon, and as expected, traffic along Commonwealth was predictably light. Belmonte's driver stopped at an overpass, where we got off to take a look at the new plaza and police station being built there, beside the Commonwealth Elementary School ("the biggest public elementary school in the country, with 13,000 students," noted the mayor).

After that stopover, we made a U-turn to inspect the other side of the avenue, particularly the neat public market facing a steel overpass. "This market was built during President Ramos's time," said Belmonte. "But nobody really made use of it until now. In the first place, it was built on the wrong side of the avenue, where pedestrians and motorists pass on their way to work. Everybody told me that it couldn't be done, that I couldn't transfer the market activity on the sidewalks to its proper place. But now it's here, the market is in business."

Belmonte also takes pride in the "first steel overpass in the Philippines. It cost about 35 percent less than a concrete overpass," he said, "and I put it up as a facility that should complement the marketplace. Eventually we will build more of these overpasses. They're easy to put up. I would say in about two to three weeks, they're there. And they can be transferred to another place if necessary. You just unscrew the whole thing and move it elsewhere."

'Litmus test.' Back in the car, Belmonte explained to the FREE PRESS the political importance of a humble place like Manggahan. "That's the litmus test of Quezon City mayors," he said, as we drove to Novaliches. "If you can't put some order in Manggahan, you have no business being mayor. At least that's the perception."

In Novaliches the car paused before an intersection that Belmonte said used to be a mess during rush hour. "We're quite happy with what we did in that area," he said, pointing at the intersection. Yellow ropes dangling on neatly arranged poles now barricade the sidewalks, indicating where pedestrians should walk and where vendors shouldn't do business. "Vendors used to take up the sidewalks, so people were forced to walk on the road. Compounding that situation was lax enforcement, plus buses stopping wherever they wanted. But that's changed."

Quezon City, however, is still a big headache in many ways, as the mayor himself would openly admit. As we passed North Fairview, Belmonte talked about a new problem in that locality that was a rather unflattering topic for his administration. "Land-grabbing syndicates operate here," he said. "They're protected by some people in the military, who sell fake titles to squatters. I've taken up the matter with the military."

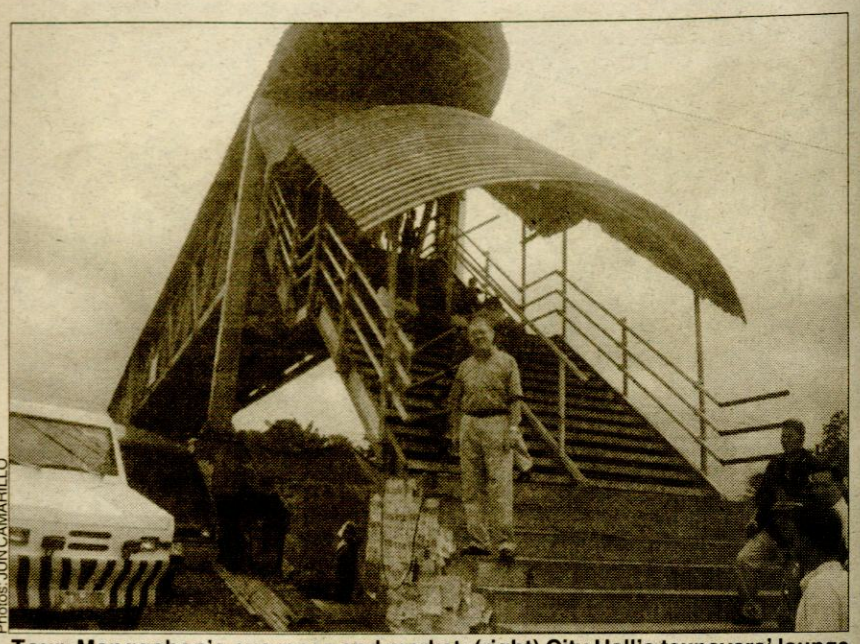


Challenged by the job: Belmonte visits the Payatas dump (top) and the city's poorer sections (above)

Later we passed by a sidewalk that was blocked by a wall—a ridiculous eyesore that the mayor brought to our attention.

Then we were on Mindanao Avenue, an unusually neat path that Belmonte took pride in. Then we were headed for Morato, toward the heart of Quezon City's nightlife, with its uneven sidewalks occupied by cars instead of pedestrians. "Many things should be changed here," said Belmonte. "But we're encountering resistance from the clubowners. They're threatening a backlash, and to think that they only contribute about P7 million to the city government."

The tour was almost over. It was time for a late lunch at Casa Alba. But before that, City Hall. "You know, the back of City Hall used to be a marketplace," said the mayor. "Imagine, a marketplace beside City Hall. But we had the vendors relocated." Just as the squatters near Agham Road, which we passed on our way to Commonwealth Avenue, have been transferred. At City Hall we broke for coffee at the taxpayers' lounge, a wide, air-conditioned room seating 140 and having two vending machines that dispensed free coffee. Not every room in City Hall, however, has an atmosphere



Photos: JUN CAMARILLO





Tour: Manggahan's overpass and market; (right) City Hall's taxpayers' lounge

of cozy efficiency. "There's still red tape in the other offices here," he admitted.

In other words, Quezon City, like any other city in Metro Manila, has achieved much progress but is still burdened by classic problems. Garbage collection is one of them, although "it is constantly being refined as we go along," Belmonte said.

Garbage problem. "When I became mayor, there were piles of trash everywhere. Quezon City was really the garbage capital. But I think we have reduced that problem considerably and saved money in the process. For instance, there were 429 trucks contracted in Quezon City when I took over. I reduced that to 230, which inevitably resulted in less padding of trips, and somehow the city became cleaner. Because we were monitoring the collection of garbage and we had dismissed those who did not do their job. Also, we adopted a new system, just this month, of assigning companies to specific areas. So, the system is no longer on a per-trip basis. And if the residents in a particular community are not satisfied with the collection of garbage, then we simply assign a new group."

The mayor is also pleased with the disposal of garbage in Payatas, the internationally notorious dump. "The recycling effort there is good," he said, "although not all of it is done in a healthy way, to be sure. Nevertheless, we have also improved turnaround time in Payatas, thereby reducing the cost of garbage collection. Our budget for that is P60 million—which is considerably lower than before—apart from the P80 million we spend to manage Payatas. There are now managers there, and I also had the place cemented. Before, it took half a day just to unload the garbage. But now it takes only 15 minutes to go there and dump the trash and then come back. That means we're able to do two trips instead of just one trip a day."

Belmonte agrees that the Payatas dump must be closed eventually. "But the big question now is where to throw the garbage," he said. "It's good there's now an alternative in Montalban that we could avail ourselves of soon. But for the meantime we're trying to reduce the garbage in Payatas. It may be a bad symbol for the country, especially for Quezon City, but at least we're now trying to keep the place safe. No more people being buried by mountains of trash. The dump is constantly being flattened. I've also entered into a contract with the [Philippine National Oil Co.] to study how it can get the methane out of that area."

A more complex problem than garbage is, of course, maintaining peace and order. Quezon City, as the mayor himself knows, is full of crime stories. Belmonte's own candid assessment of the city's peace-and-order situation is hardly reassuring to either his constituents or the pedestrians and motorists who can't avoid a big country like Quezon City. "We have to accept two things: snatching of cell phones is prevalent here and, for a while, jeepney holdups," he said. "Index crimes have gone down [elsewhere] except probably [in this city]. Another thing we are notorious for is carjacking, but the incidence has been reduced considerably. But it's hard to contain crime in Quezon City or in any other city in Metro Manila. Remember, the break-in at Sonny Parsons's home. That happened in Marikina, which is supposed to be the dream city."

Belmonte attributes crime in Quezon City to some of its inherent disadvantages. The sheer size of the city is one factor. "The Quezon City government is practically one of the largest landowners in the country—vast expanses of government land, much of it unprotected. That makes the city attractive to squatters and, inevitably, to other [elements]. Also, that we're wide open on all sides. Manila here, San Juan there, San Mateo, Marikina, Caloocan—all of them have common boundaries with Quezon City. People coming from Caloocan, for example, and passing by Quezon City may commit a holdup right here."

Another reason for the rising incidence of crime—a valid one—is the lack of policemen. "There are more policemen in Manila, taking care of a population much smaller than ours, in an area that is one-fourth our size," lamented Belmonte. "But having said that, we could, of course, always stand improvement, and we really should improve the situation."

Such a statement may sound like an admission of failure, but it suggests a mayor who is candid enough to identify a problem so he can deal with it properly.

"In the past, there was a survey on the Philippines' 10 biggest cities. It was a competitiveness ratings survey, I think, and Quezon City came out No. 10. We want to reverse that, and there's really no reason why it cannot be reversed, because for me, if you look at Quezon City, it's the city with the biggest potential."

That goes for the people of Quezon City, with whom Belmonte holds a dialogue every Monday to listen to their complaints, to get their feedback on the city government's performance, and also to see how they could help in the city's development. The mayor is pleased with their impression of him. "People say, 'When we talk to politicians, we get the feeling that we're just being sweet-talked.' But you're straightforward."

Some residents, however, are turned off by Belmonte's candor and "*señor* attitude"—characteristics that may be likened to his ally, President Arroyo, a renowned manager herself.

No bullshit. To be sure, these residents include friends of casuals who were fired in the course of Belmonte's cleanup of City Hall. And in any case, the mayor can't please everybody all the time. The FREE PRESS's own impression of Belmonte is that of a man who speaks with an emphatic voice, and who doesn't mince his words. "I don't bullshit," he told the FREE PRESS. "And I don't make promises easily." A straightforward man, as his constituents say.

Yet his own critics must wonder why a former bank official, CEO and congressman, with the typical impatience of a doer, should leave the national arena where he established himself in order to seek a not-so-prestigious job like managing a decaying city. "Looking back at 2001," Belmonte explained, "I could have run for the Senate because we were fairly well known at the time. But then I figured, what happens after that? I'll run again for senator and that's it. Well, I'd rather be here. I'm enjoying this job, despite all its problems. I'm challenged by the job, and I love some action." Which the city has plenty of, as the man on the street knows too well. ★

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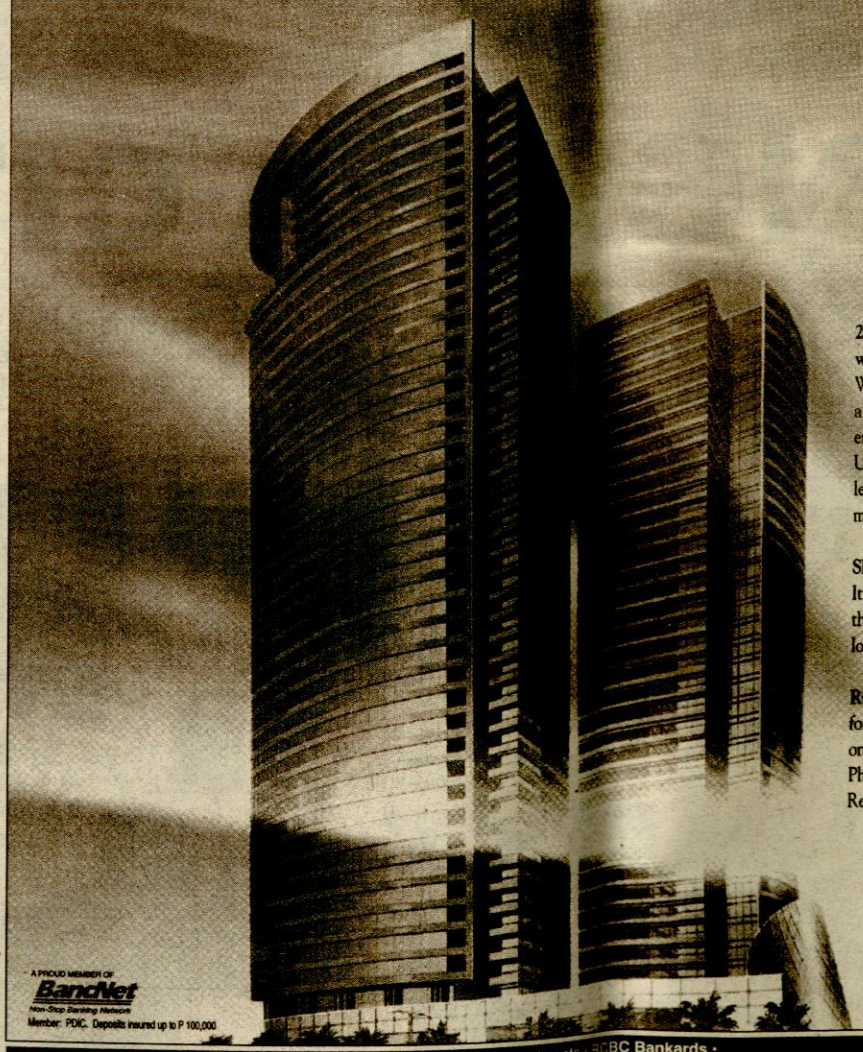

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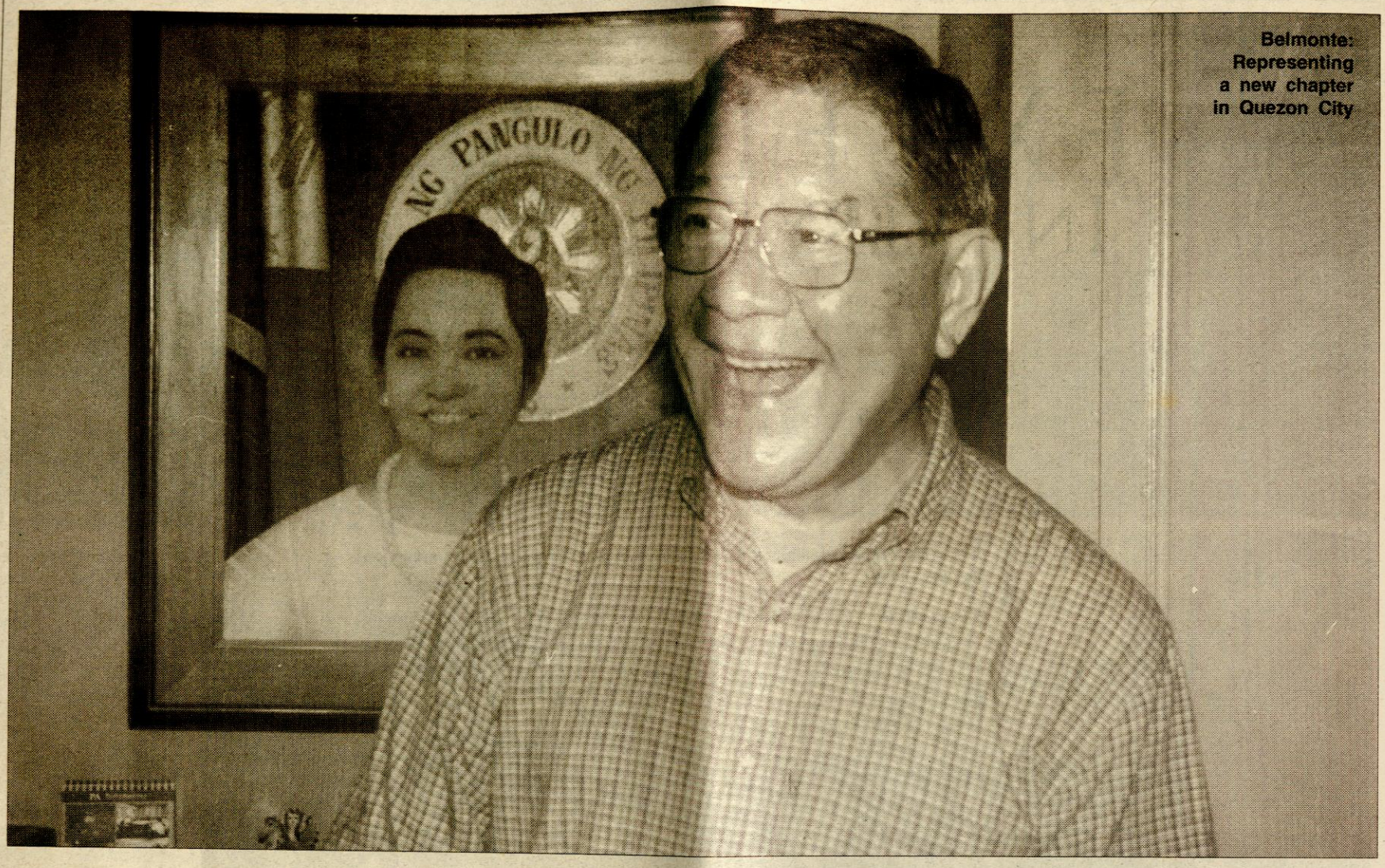


Belmonte: Representing a new chapter in Quezon City

CLEANING UP A CITY

FELICIANO Belmonte Jr.'s mayoral bid, which led to a considerable victory in last year's elections, marked a new chapter in Quezon City. As a congressman, Belmonte had served the city's fourth district for three consecutive terms. But now he's the mayor of the entire city, a position he has occupied for one year and counting. Having a new administrator is always an opportunity for a fresh start. For one thing, there is the bright possibility of his introducing new approaches to Quezon City's problems—all of which have created an invigorating and optimistic outlook for the city

A city with a potential for greatness (think Hong Kong, Singapore or even a slum like 19th-century New York), but which before, never seemed to fulfill its promise, Quezon City may yet face a more progressive future in the hands of an administrator like Belmonte, whose renowned managerial skills have served him well in both his corporate and political ventures, notably his participation in the impeachment trial of Joseph Estrada.

Being basically a manager, Belmonte started his term concentrating on fiscal management. "The first thing I wanted to do was put Quezon City's financial house in order," he said. "I took over city hall [on June 30, 2001]. That was a payday. But it took several days before the employees could be paid, and that highlighted the dire straits of Quezon City. Our general fund was overdrawn by P10 million. We had a bank debt of P1.25 billion, and we had various payables of about P1.4 billion. That shouldn't have been the case because local governments are supposed to operate on a cash basis. You're supposed to spend what you earn. Many of the claims were not appropriated for, and were not even recorded in the books. That's the reason why one of the first orders I made was to give a deadline within which substantiated claims must be filed, after which the claimants have to go to court to get paid."

In trying to restore order in City Hall, Belmonte



Stepping out of his office in City Hall to get his constituents' feedback



had to make some unpopular moves. "It's well-known that among my first decisions was to reduce the number of casuals," he said. "That was a heart-rending decision, which was very difficult to make until I actually had to do it, because it wasn't part of my inaugural commitments. But I figured, if I didn't do it, then two things will happen. One, the drain on money will increase. And worse than that, there will still be so many people doing nothing, moving around, miling around City Hall, giving the place a market atmosphere and at the same time making discipline difficult. So many people with time on their hands. A lot of them ended up being fixers."

By rationalizing manpower, the city government was able to save up enough money to even grant a 5 percent increase in the salaries of City Hall workers. Restoring fiscal order also meant aggressively pursuing measures to improve tax collection. "Thus, while the national government is reeling from the effects of declining tax collections, we at Quezon City are seeing our revenue collections dramatically rising," said Belmonte. "Take for instance the collection of real estate taxes, which we were able to increase by about 40 percent without changing the tax rates. All we did was apply the carrot and stick approach. If the taxpayer pays in advance he gets a 20 percent discount. If he doesn't pay, or if he has been accumulating his taxes, then we revive the system [provided] by law, which is to sell his [property] at a public auction. So we have had two successful auctions already, February 27 and July 30 or 31, just recently."

The mayor also reported a significant increase in the collection of real estate transfer taxes, although the number of transactions has hardly changed. "So that means better collection and less hanky-panky now, because this is the tax that lends itself to hanky-panky, being a 'one time only' tax. A guy who's getting his land transferred, once he gets his Torrens certificate of title, he forgets all about it. He doesn't bother to find out if he paid the right taxes. And that situation is true not only in City Hall, but also in the BIR. But we've changed that and, in the process, reduced the number of fake receipts."

Business tax rates, on the other hand, have increased during Belmonte's administration. "That adjustment is being challenged legally, and we're fighting it all the way to the Supreme Court. But even if we [lose in that case], in the process, we'll lose only about P300 million, because the loss will be more than made up for by our increase in gross collection of about P1.5 billion."

Increasing the business tax rates is only logical, said the mayor. "Our figures had to be aligned with Metro Manila and other cities, because Quezon City had the lowest business taxes of all. Here is an indication of how bad our situation is. In 1980, Manila had 1.6 million people. Quezon City had 1.1 million. Today we're about 2.2 million, or about 700,000 more than the population of Manila. Many people from the provinces who go to Metro Manila choose to stay in Quezon City, thereby increasing the number of our urban poor. Yet, we have the lowest tax rates. Now, how can we support a development program when we are chronically underfinanced?—which, incidentally, had been a facet of Quezon City over the last 10 years."

But even as he considered that factor, Belmonte also had to make sure that the sectors affected by the business tax would have an equal share of that obligation. "You will see in our analysis of the business tax that manufacturers top the list of sectors doing business in Quezon City," said the mayor, as he showed us a report by the Office of the City Treasurer. "So Quezon City is still a manufacturers' city, and manufacturers imply machinery. Yet Quezon City hardly collects anything



The mayor regularly goes around the city, at times accompanied by the President and other guests





Inspecting the Payatas dump (above) and monitoring Quezon City's water supply

for machinery, which are taxable for real property purposes."

It had occurred to Belmonte that his involvement in the Philippine Daily Star (the newspaper founded by his wife, the late Betty Go-Belmonte) showed how much Quezon City was missing out on its well-deserved taxes. "Remember that we own a printing press [in Manila]. One day, some assessors visited us, and overnight our bill for machineries quadrupled. That has not happened in Quezon City. I don't mean to charge quadruple, because I want to do it very slowly. But still, it has to be done. Last year's collection for machinery alone was less than P1 million."

In that regard, the city government has issued Ordinance No. 1148, which provides a tax amnesty on undeclared machineries. "If you declare your machinery for the first time, on or before September 20 this year, you won't have to pay taxes until next year," explained the mayor. But whether or not manufacturers will be enticed by this accommodation, the ordinance, which is posted at the city's main streets, emphasizes that, "after the deadline, the city assessor will conduct a massive reinventory and reevaluation of all real properties."

As for retailers, who rank third among the sectors doing business in Quezon City, Belmonte has provided a discount "to cushion the impact of the increase in their taxes," he said. "This year the discount is 60 percent, and it will go down to 40 percent next year, and so forth. I actually had expected the economy to improve last year, which is one of the reasons why [I increased the business tax to include the retailers]. But since [the economy didn't do that well], I gave them a discount. Otherwise, the retailers would be affected more than anybody else."

For Belmonte, it is just as well that the city government has gotten the ball rolling on tax collection, since the city's internal revenue allotment alone could not help fulfill its development requirements. "There has been a dramatic increase in the number of cities, and so the pie is now cut in thinner slices," Belmonte said of the IRA. "There are other sources of income, like the sweepstakes, but I would classify that under the IRA and others. At any rate, the IRA used to be the No. 1 source of income of Quezon City. Now we are making it No. 3, behind business and real estate taxes, as it should be. Because if it's still the No. 1 source of income, then Quezon City would appear like a third-class province." The mayor also regards the city's trust fund, which is provided by the four congressmen who represent Quezon City, as an incidental if valuable income source.

"So, all told, the most important thing in the first year of my administration is strengthening the city's financials," he said. "And our figures have considerably improved. Just seven months into the year, our gross collections have reached P4.7 billion, a leap by P1.5 million from the gross collections last year. We have managed to pay P580 million of accounts payable we inherited from the previous administrations, while keeping current with out own bills."

A metropolis as big as Quezon City has tremendous demands for infrastructure. It is Belmonte's objective to link major roads through a network of interconnecting streets so that Quezon City becomes one large, highly interconnected area, where people and commerce can move briskly and easily. As a major step towards meeting this need, the city government has allocated about P800 million worth of public works for this year. "That amount isn't borrowed money," emphasized Belmonte. "We have already bidded out about P500 billion worth of projects, and by October, we will bid out another P300 million. Incidentally, I was able to bring in P200 million worth of public works projects when I was speaker [of the House of Representatives]. And now, as for the P300 million, it's just a question of choosing which projects to approve."

The city government has formulated an infrastructure committee to evaluate and approve all proposed projects. "Among the reasons for that committee's being is to discourage the practice of *palakasan* when it comes to choosing projects," Belmonte said. "So that's it. The projects for which the P500 million have been used were all chosen by that committee, so that the entire city can make the most out of its money.

We are applying various other creative approaches to manage the City's needs, which maximize use of resources while maintaining prudence in spending. One of these is a development corporation taht we are trying to set up as a means of improving the capability of our government to finance housing and urban development needs, without being bogged down by the usual bureaucratic channels. The corporation will bring together technical, financial managerial and urban development talents to produce cost and space-efficient dwelling areas that can cost only P100,000 per condominium-type unit, aside from various other projects.



Squatters abound in Quezon City, and relocating them without affecting their welfare is among Belmonte's challenges

The same innovative approach is what we are applying to ease the problems of poverty in our City. I feel that a more effective response to the poor's need for shelter is not the rewarding of lots, because this will dissipate our land, a resource which is costly and finite. A better response is to provide them dwelling units in four of five-storey buildings that are decent enough for them to live in, but not too beautiful that they will be tempted to sell these."

The government has also formed an Anti-Poverty Committee that will consolidate and maximize the reach of the City's P546 million worth of programs that can alleviate the plight of the underprivileged.

Like other Metro Manila mayors, Belmonte has been confronted by the more complex problems of traffic, garbage and criminality. His managerial skills, which is what those formidable problems really need, have served Belmonte well. But his resources are limited, and he is candid enough to spell out all the factors affecting his city.

"Traffic is still one of Quezon City's biggest problems, along with garbage," The mayor said. But still, he cites the cleanup in Cubao, particularly the removal of obstructions and relocation of illegal vendors from that area, as an effort by the city government that has eased traffic and thus reversed the decline in business there.

Cubao is one of three or four areas that "make up the face of Quezon City," Belmonte said, the others being Manggahan, Novaliches and even Balintawak. After the interview, the mayor volun-



The Quezon City mayor, joined by other city officials and private sector representatives, launch an anti-drug campaign

REVIVING NATURE IN THE CITY

POLLUTION in the Philippines is said to be at its worst in Metro Manila.

Despite this, the Quezon City government is not yet about to give up its beautification program in a bid to offset the damaging effects of pollution among its residents.

Imagine seeing 10,000 trees planted in the city's 10 major thoroughfares, 70 parks and playgrounds and 90 open spaces within the next three years.

Or better still, the transformation of the most often neglected center islands into well-maintained greenbelt areas.

The undertaking seems to be a tall order for the city government.

But Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr. is quite optimistic that with sheer determination and a sense of ingenuity, Quezon City residents may soon find themselves breathing fresher air, which to date can be considered a luxury commodity for most of us living here in the metropolis.

While it may take some time for the trees to fully grow and mature, the trees, in their youthful form, could provide a lush of greenery to the environment.

Already, a memorandum of agreement between the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the city's Parks Development and Administration Department has been prepared for the grant of 10,000 varieties of trees needed for Quezon City's tree-planting program.

A survey of existing trees along major thoroughfares, parks and playgrounds and open spaces has already been conducted by the city's Parks Department to determine the kind of trees to be planted and transplanted.

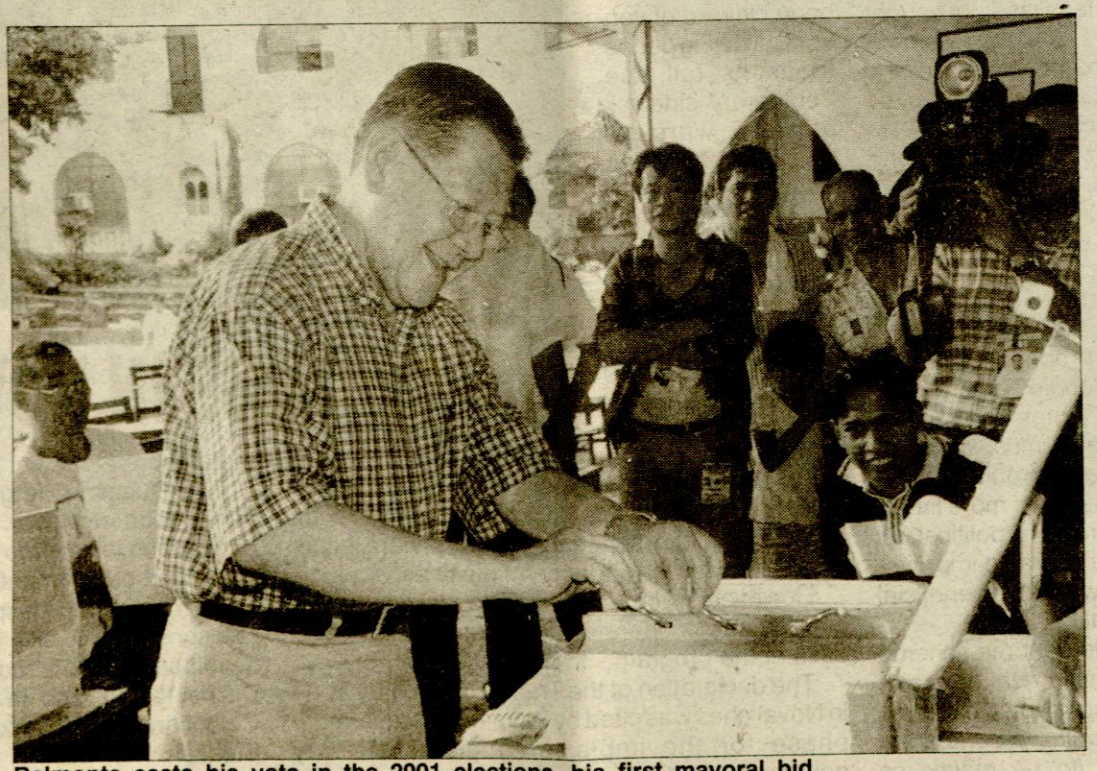
PDAD chief Arch. Zaldy dela Rosa said planting activities has began last month at Toro Hills and New Haven Parks in Project 8, formally signaling the start of the city government's massive beautification program.

Alongside the city's tree-planting activity is the launching of the city's "Save the Center Island" program.

Most of us fail to recognize the true value of the center island, except its being used as a dumping ground and a suitable site for the installation of signboards and billboards. We never realize that center islands, if properly maintained and rehabilitated, could enhance the beauty of roads and thoroughfares.

The city government's "Save the Center Island" program started early this year, calls for the levelling of the center islands which shall be utilized for the planting activities.

Dela Rosa said every center island would be planted during the rainy season and they are expected in full bloom this coming December to add luster to the Christmas season.



Belmonte casts his vote in the 2001 elections, his first mayoral bid

For this year, the city's beautification program will cover the following areas: East Avenue (Edsa-Elliptical Road), Elliptical Road center island, all intersections along Elliptical Road, Visayas Avenue (Tandang Sora-Elliptical Road), Congressional Avenue (Tandang Sora-Edsa), Mindanao Avenue (North Avenue-Quirino Highway), North Avenue (Elliptical Road-Edsa) Commonwealth Avenue (Elliptical Road-Jordan), Commonwealth/University Avenue, IBP Road (Commonwealth), IBP/Commonwealth Interchange, Kalayaan Avenue, A. Bonifacio Aveue, Fairview Entrance and Balara Development Project. ★

NEED A PERMIT? READ ON

TODAY, applying for business permits in Quezon City will no longer be a grueling experience for taxpayers.

Gone are the days when taxpayers had to wait and queue up for hours and even days when they apply for permits.

Recently, QC Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr., in a determined effort to make Quezon City a business-friendly and quality community, ordered a structural overhauling of procedures in the granting and issuance of business permits in the city.

This means it will now take only two days for operators of city-based business establishments to secure their permits to operate in Quezon City.

"This is a breakthrough," Mayor Belmonte said. "What we will be implementing is simplifying the processing time for the issuance of business permits to allow taxpayers to proceed with their business here in Quezon City without delay."

To deliver a business permit within 48 hours, a minimum requirement attitude shall be adopted by the city's business permits and licensing office. This attitude requires goodwill on the part of the taxpayer and good faith or trust on the part of the city's BPLO, headed by Pacifico Maghacot.

Goodwill, for taxpayers, entails the accomplishment of all the requirements mandated by national laws in putting up a business establishment and the submission of all applications for clearances and certificates issued annually by the city government.

Once the requirements are properly accomplished, it is now the PBLO's turn to show good faith to the taxpayer by accepting the acknowledgement receipt form that has been submitted.



The mayor goes to the Quezon City portion of the beltway EDSA to establish some order

An acknowledgement receipt form is a BPLO document where all the different agencies stamp the date when an application for clearance has been received, duly signed by an authorized personnel.

Apart from the acknowledgment receipt form, taxpayers renewing their business permits are also required to secure from the BPLO application forms for a business permit, locational clearance, fire safety inspection, electrical inspection, sanitary permit, cultural and tourism affairs office clearance and clearance for specialized businesses.

However, documents that will be formally submitted to the BPLO will only include the application form for a business permit, the acknowledgement receipt form, accreditation documents, documents for the use of space for business and barangay clearance.

The grace period granted to the applicant for the submission of the clearances shall be written in the business permit document.

The release of business permit and registration plate shall be made upon submission of proof of payment.

For those applying for new business permits, the BPLO shall be adopting the same procedure except for the immediate submission of fire and electrical clearances.

Meanwhile, business establishments with pending cases will be granted a grace period to resolve the case. A temporary permit maybe granted by the BPLO while the case is being resolved.

Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr. hopes that with this simplified procedure initiated by the city government, taxpayers will now pay their taxes more religiously and promptly which in turn translates into accelerated delivery of basic services.

★



MLQ's DEATH ANNIVERSARY. Quezon City Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr. leads city officials during a Holy Mass marking the 58th death anniversary of President Manuel L. Quezon at the Quezon Memorial Circle Mausoleum. The Mayor rallied city residents to live up to the ideals of the city's founding father. Shown with the Mayor after the mass and the wreath-laying ceremony are from left: Councilors Almario Francisco and Antonio Ariel Inton, QC Parks Foundation Chair Charito Planas, Councilor Elizabeth Delarmente, Industrial Relations Office chief Ignacio Santos Diaz, Cultural and Tourism Affairs Office head Eden Villanueva, City Treasurer Dr. Victor Endriga and officials from the National Historical Institute

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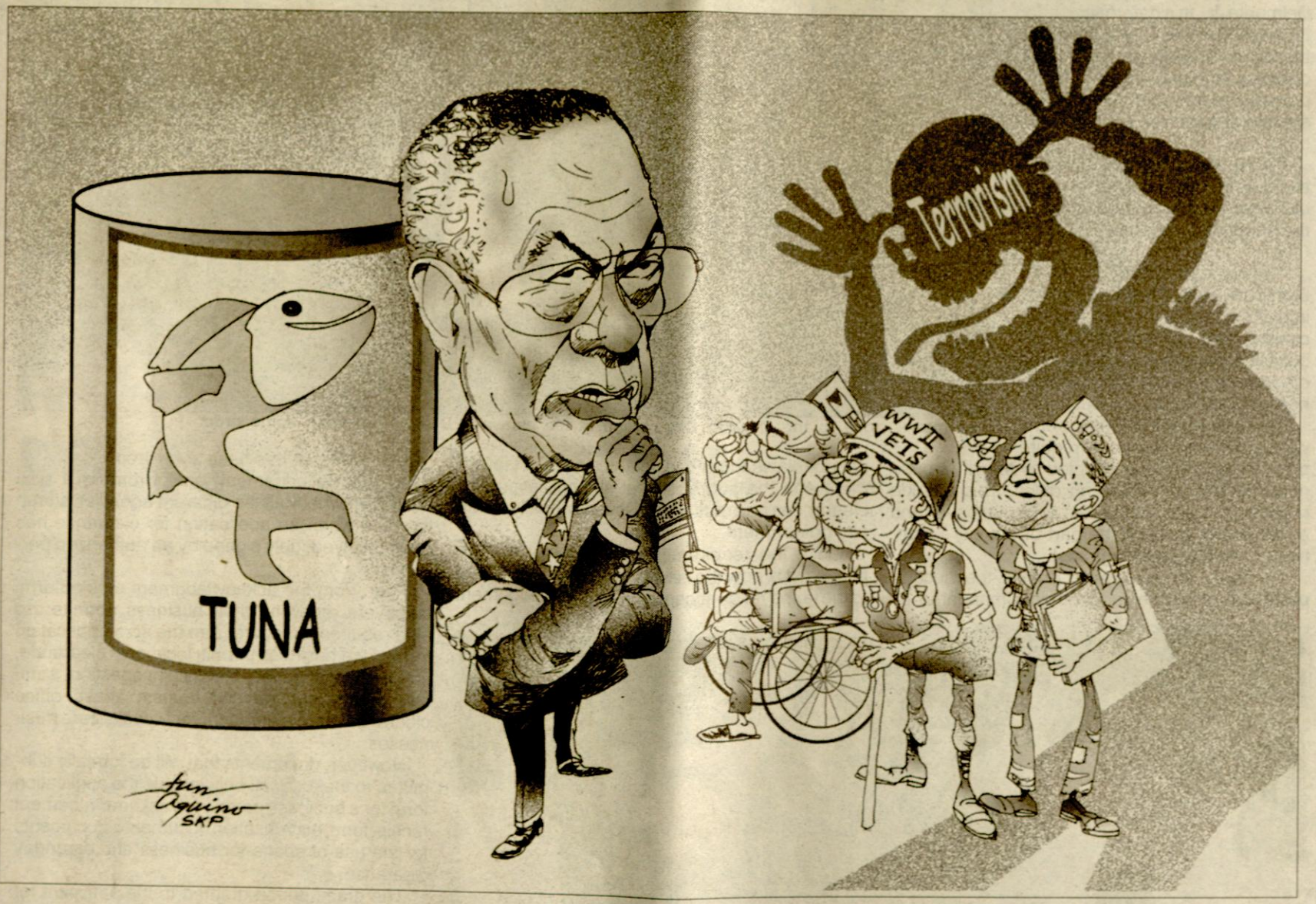

TIN CAN DIPLOMACY

AMERICANS have always been frustrated and puzzled by Filipino leaders, and we suspect Secretary of State Colin Powell was no exception. Badgered and harangued during his recent visit to Manila with demands for all sorts of things—including, as he ruefully admitted, appeals to give the Philippines' tuna exports preferential treatment—the chief proselytizer of the crusade against terror found himself having to face the politics of the shopping basket.

In truth, this is what much of diplomacy is about: unexciting but highly important questions such as trade issues and long-festering problems such as compensation for Filipino veterans of World War II. These are the real concerns of the country; and while they may seem immaterial to the lofty agenda of Powell, they are what matter to Filipinos.

Still, what was brought up during a hurried meeting in Malacañang's Music Room took away from the issue at hand, as far as Powell was concerned: the war against terrorism. And one prepared to deal with a particular issue cannot do much when a totally unrelated issue is suddenly thrust in his face.

Powell made polite but puzzled noises, and the Palace probably found satisfaction in catching him off guard. But it seems to us that there is a time and place for everything. Tuna could have been brought up before a trade delegation or on a lower level; time could have been used to tackle the issues the Americans wanted to deal with, leaving them inclined to face Filipino concerns during the proper time and place.

The President's meeting with Powell was mired in the politics of the immediate, instead of the diplomacy of ideals. This may have had short-term political benefits, but probably resulted in neither the long-term issues nor short-term goals being properly handled. A secretary of state unprepared to handle an issue cannot be counted upon to deal with those issues; a secretary of state denied the satisfaction of talking about what he thought he'd talk about does not a good ally in Washington make. ★

THE RECUSANT | **Patricio N. Abinales**

COMMUNISTS, TERMITES AND REPUBLICANS

Part 2

IF the communists occupy the left extreme, at the other end there is the Council for Philippine Affairs (COPA).

There is something quite odd with this small group: it claims to know about national politics but rarely goes beyond Manila. Like a proverbial hermit sitting on top of some hill in the imperial capital, it surveys the lowlands, the outer limits and the frontiers, and makes its pronouncement of either progress or gloom. And when it does, it declares that hard times are ahead, predicting with a confidence that seems to say, "history and power are on our side."

COPA admits that it is merely a small cog in the People Power 2 wheel, but it makes up for its smallness by the influence and resources it claims to possess. And by the network it claims to nurture. Tiny COPA can be everywhere— negotiating with would-be-plotters, setting up the parameters of tactical alliances with the communists, pushing for People Power 2's agenda inside government, and explaining to the media the realities and possibilities of politics.

So size is not the issue; it is political finesse combined with whispering the right words to the right ear at the right time. This is the kind of public posturing that COPA is well known for. It helps that you have a generally and extremely indolent, impressionistic, and tabloid-like media to deal with—a vital asset that you tap to reinforce this sense of being important.

Thus COPA loves to hit the radio waves and talk shows with its *primero* nattering nabob, Pastor Saycon acting as the grand political clairvoyant—warning of coups abrewing, of people power reviving, and of impending resignations happening. His swagger suggests that the public must take his group seriously, for they are not only at the helm of "civil society," they are also its most legitimate.

But if you just set aside the media plug-ins, the headlines and columns, and simply look at what COPA had and had not done, you will be surprised at how much the group is really nothing but a media creation.

It has no mass base and no record of ever being able to mobilize people on its own. While it may legitimately claim to have contributed something important during People Power 2, its involvement is merely one of many during the first-quarter stormlet of 2001.

Its size is actually not the issue; the more important one is its composition. COPA's membership is elitist and middle class and thus speaks only for a small segment of the population (unless of course it has illusions of also being the nation's spokesman).

It counts as one of its founders one of the biggest landowners of Luzon and the fiercest opponent to any legal attempt to democratize rural wealth. And it is managed on a day-to-day basis by someone who was suspected of shady financial dealings in the past and whose history of managing electoral campaigns has been extremely amateurish.

But most important of all, COPA has never presented us with a coherent political, economic and social agenda save motherhood-and-apple pie statements about the "Spirit of EDSA" that its Goebbels—Saycon—loves to mutter. Its political statements are sometimes admittedly well written, but they suffer from lack of substance. At a time when the national political debate sorely needs to focus on programs, policies, and issues, COPA offers us only its conspiracy talk of departing cabinet officials or disgruntled military men, or its latest sound bites.

What lies behind COPA's politics, then? The hint is given to us by President Arroyo herself when she described Saycon as a termite.

And the analogy may be correct. Termites are tiny insects that prefer to make their mark on their domicile (a tree, a house, anything of wood) by boring their way until the foundations break down. Termites are unobtrusive, preferring the silence and the conspiratorial nature of their work. They prefer this hush existence lest larger insects and animals that enjoy them for viand take notice.

Termites make up for their diminutive size by prominent legacies

Continued on page 32

DOUBLE TAKE | **Benito J. Legarda Jr.**

PATRIOT AND FREEDOM FIGHTER

HE occupied an office higher than that of the President—"Office of the Patriot," according to Sen. Ralph Recto, referring to former Rep. Bonifacio H. Gillego of Sorsogon, who passed away at 81 on Thursday, August 1, after a career dedicated to the service of his country and his people.

Gillego had led an eventful life, which included eluding a dragnet put out for him by the Marcos dictatorship detention in a Malaysian jail, and working at humble callings to make a living while an exile in the US.

A philosophy graduate from the Far Eastern University, his first government job was teaching in elementary school. But World War II supervened, and he became a young infantry officer in the resistance. Later he was a platoon leader in Korea, where he met a young correspondent with whom he was to work many years later in the anti-Marcos movement, Ninoy Aquino.

He was an Armed Forces scholar at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, and served as military attaché in Burma, later retiring with the rank of major.

Turning his talents and energy to larger national issues, he was elected a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1971. But when Marcos declared martial law in 1972 and hijacked the convention, Gillego, with his libertarian and socially progressive ideas, became a wanted man.

He entered the most sustained and prolonged struggle against tyranny in his life, which earned him the title of "freedom fighter." Unable to operate legally, he tried to make his way out of the country by the southern back door. His first effort failed. He had booked a stay at Zamboanga's leading hotel, only to find that it was the meeting place of some of Marcos's roughest military enforcers.

He hied back to Manila, alarming his associate in the resistance who thought he was safely out of the country. On his second try he was more discreet, staying at more inconspicuous lodgings in Zamboanga, then moving on to Jolo (under the assumed name Marcial Andres).

From Jolo, he went by pumpboat to Sitangkai, the last Philippine island before Malaysia, disguised as a trader. When I met him in the US years later, I asked him how he had eluded detection. With wry humor and self-effacing modesty, he said, "I got through because I have a very ordinary face," which enabled him to blend easily into any crowd.

When he got to the Malaysian shore, however, he was detained, ironically, on suspicion of being a spy for Marcos, because while he claimed to be a trader he carried no goods, only books. He was not permitted to use the telephone to contact Raul Manglapus in Washington, who worried about his disappearance.

Fortunately he had befriended a Malaysian lady co-passenger on the trip from Sitangkai, and this woman turned out to be connected to the chief of police on the Malaysian side, so through his good offices he was able to call Manglapus, who arranged for his onward passage.

In the US he had to take any job he could get to support himself, such as being a filling station attendant and a security guard. This was quite contrary to the image of the "steak commandos," a verbal sneer that Marcos's journalistic lackeys assiduously tried to propagate. A member of the Movement for a Free Philippines, he was credited with exposing, after painstaking research, the falsity of the Marcos war medals, causing a major erosion in the dictator's credibility. The Manila paper that dared to publish the article was forcibly closed and its publisher and staff jailed.

When the Marcos regime fell, he was among those who tried to save what was in the townhouses in New York, but they arrived too late to reach more major paintings. However, the movers had left the labels on the walls, so these were circulated in the art world as possibly being of doubtful ownership. They have not surfaced, but he showed me a list of other articles retrieved.

With the restoration of democracy, Gillego returned home, and after being officer-in-charge of his province's governorship, ran for Congress and was elected in 1987, and again for two more terms in 1990 and 1993. Unlike so many other politicians who acquired luxury vans and cars, he contented himself with an old 1985 Mitsubishi Lancer.

As a legislator he distinguished himself by his advocacy of social justice and land redistribution. He chaired the House committees on human rights and agrarian reform.

Gillego was a man of strong convictions but gentle manners, and despite the strong stands he took made no enemies. Those who did not go along with all his ideas, including some friends, never doubted his sincerity. He was a man of simple tastes and unpretentious lifestyle. All his actions were directed to the public good rather than to personal gain. Sen. Ralph Recto has called him "the conscience of the nation." Now that he is gone, is there another one to take his place?

★



Photo: AP

Photo-op: President Arroyo presents to journalists arrested highway robbers, three of whom are policemen

• CRIME

SHE'S ON A ROLL

President Arroyo presses her drive against crime, but she draws flak for her hands-on style

By George T. Amurao

EXCEPT for US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who breezed by on August 3, Malacañang has been getting strange visitors recently: captured criminals being paraded by the police in perp walks before television cameras as President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo watches. It has attracted public attention and raised questions about the administration's intensified drive against crime.

Malacañang, some people observe, is a place for receiving dignitaries, not for presenting captured rebels, kidnappers, drug traffickers and other felons. The presentations, which have been getting frequent since Mrs. Arroyo, in her State of the Nation address to Congress on July 22, vowed to crush crime, demean the Palace and waste the President's precious time. Does the FBI bother President George W. Bush by presenting to him captured terrorists in the White House?

She means business. Obviously, however, Mrs. Arroyo likes it. She has gone tough on criminals and the presentations send the message to criminals that she means business. But her critics see something else in the presentations' increasing frequency: Is she doing it to drive up her approval ratings, which have gone south since the public erupted in anger in April over her handling of soaring costs of electricity?

Although the strategy is hardly original to Mrs. Arroyo's administration—her predecessor Joseph Estrada started it in the early 1990s as crime buster—some groups are questioning the violation of the suspects' rights. The suspects are after all just suspects, but their being shown on the network news and in the newspapers the next day gives the public the impression that they are guilty. Who would right the wrong if some of the suspects are later found to be innocent?

The police couldn't care less. The President has made it clear that the sacking of seven high-ranking police officials in late June for failure to eradicate illegal gambling was a mere "dress rehearsal" for more dismissals if the police failed to stamp out more serious crimes. Police officials have since been pushing hard to produce, even bagging some of their own and taking them to the Palace to show the President that they are working.

One of the recent presentations at the Palace involved highway robbers, car thieves, and extortionists hauled in by the National Police commander, Director General Hermogenes Ebdane, on August 3 after Powell's call. Three of the suspects were police officers, whom the President called "rascals" who had tarnished the image of the police. There is no place in the police for criminals, she said, and ordered the police to clean up its ranks. A stern-faced Mrs. Arroyo posed for pictures with the suspects and the police team that brought them in.

The next day, the police brought in 12 men, allegedly members of a hold-up gang operating in Northern Luzon. Police said the suspects were responsible for attacks on banks, restaurants and buses in Benguet, Pangasinan and La Union. Never have robbers of this kind set foot in Malacañang before but with their posts at stake, police officials cannot afford to be choosy.

Last Monday, they presented cell-phone snatchers and pickpockets together with car thieves and restaurant robbers to the President, not in Malacañang but at the Department of Justice, where Mrs. Arroyo took her campaign by personally filing charges against a businessman, a ship captain, and two other people involved in the smuggling of rice in Legaspi City last year. Mrs. Arroyo took personal interest in this case because it involved a judge who blocked the government's effort to seize the smuggled rice. She ordered Justice Secretary Hernando Perez to file charges against the judge, who issued a temporary restraining order that allowed the vessel to get away. Mrs. Arroyo also ordered the prosecution of two other judges who frustrated the carriage of justice. One stopped the government from seizing smuggled goods discovered at the Subic Free Port last year and the other allowed six Chinese accused of drug trafficking to go free on bail earlier this year. Mrs. Arroyo also ordered the filing of charges against the prosecutor who did not object to the grant of bail to the drug traffickers.

Great. All felons, big and small, must be punished. But critics ask: Should the President be always photographed with them, in Malacañang or anywhere else? Couldn't she just growl and let the police do the job so that she could apply herself to other, equally important business of the state?

Although Mrs. Arroyo has a quick temper, she has yet to blow her top over criticisms like these. She doesn't have to, however, because even some of her critics defend her photo-ops with the suspects. "That sight comforts the public, who are reassured that their leader is really committed in bringing down crime," opposition Rep. Abraham Mitra said in a press statement. And with big business backing her hands-on approach to crime, anybody can carp about the photo-ops in Malacañang and elsewhere, the presentations will continue. Among the business groups that have pledged support for the campaign were the Employers Confederation of the Philippines, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Bankers Association of the Philippines, the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and leaders of Manila's hotel and restaurant industry.

No quick apologies to those who say they have been paraded by mistake. They first have to prove they are innocent. On August 2 Mrs. Arroyo arrived unannounced at NBI headquarters and joined a news conference on a money-laundering case at a Land Bank branch in Binangonan, Rizal. Acsa Ramirez, a cashier at the bank who claimed it was she who exposed the irregularity, thought the President was going to congratulate her but to her horror Mrs. Arroyo spoke of her as if she was involved in the P203-million scam. Ramirez's lawyer called a news conference on August 6 to help her explain her side to the public. Asked whether she was demanding an apology from the President, Ramirez replied, "That is up to President Arroyo."

Probe. Mrs. Arroyo ordered an investigation. NBI Director Reynaldo Wycoco admitted that the bureau had not known that Ramirez was the whistle blower but he said that the cashier had been invited for questioning because Artemio San Juan, the branch manager who had been charged with 17 counts of violation of the money-laundering law, had implicated her in the irregularity. Wycoco said the bureau would not apologize to Ramirez. That being the case, the President also has no reason to apologize to the cashier.

The incident, however, resulted in the introduction of legislation in the House of Representatives that would penalize officials for erroneously naming and presenting to the press as suspects people against whom charges have not been filed in the courts. Officials who would be found guilty would be dismissed from office and made to pay P500,000 to P1.8 million in damages to the aggrieved.

The bill filed by Bulacan Rep. Willie Villarama has a long way to go before it becomes law, but with the growing public opposition to the presentations of suspects in Malacañang, National Police and NBI headquarters, it is likely to pass.

Mrs. Arroyo is undaunted. Last Thursday she presented to journalists eight alleged kidnappers and said she would continue presenting suspects "to teach them a lesson by humiliation."

Humiliate suspects? What if they turn out to be innocent?

★

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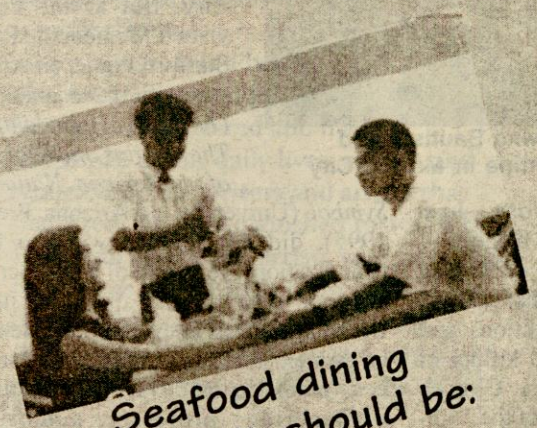

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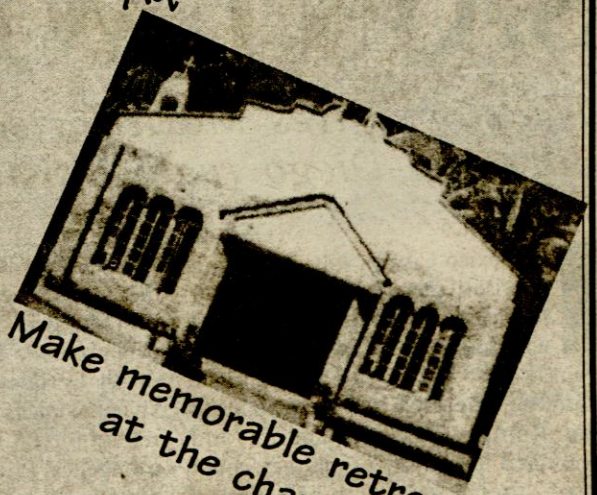

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Photo: AP

'Pious fiction': There's no historical evidence that Juan Diego actually existed

• RELIGION

SAINT WHO?

The Pope gives Mexico a saint, but did Juan Diego really exist?

IN Mexico City on July 31, during a lavishly staged mass that mingled flourishes from the ancient Aztecs with traditional hymns, Pope John Paul II made an emphatic appeal to the indigenous people who have abandoned the Roman Catholic Church and presented them with a saint they could call their own: Juan Diego Cuauhtlahtoatzin.

Identity. John Paul described Juan Diego, an Indian convert to Catholicism in the 16th century, as an important force behind the spread of the faith among the region's Indians, whose contributions the Pope repeatedly praised. Juan Diego, the Pope said, "facilitated the fruitful meeting of two worlds" in the wake of the conquest of Mexico by Catholic Spaniards, and "became the catalyst for the new Mexican identity."

This was more than a routine canonization, even though it was the 464th by this pope. It represented a signal moment in the Church's fight for its future in Latin America, where evangelical Protestants are increasingly making inroads, especially among indigenous people. And it stirred considerable debate in Mexico and elsewhere: about whether Juan Diego was a real man or a convenient marketing tool for the Catholic faith, and about whether the Church, in trying to court indigenous people, was actually offending them.

Some Indian leaders have rejected Juan Diego and the two lesser-known


Photo: AP

Beatified: A painting showing Bautista and de los Angeles at their shrine in Mexico City

Indians beatified by the Pope—Juan Bautista and Jacinto de los Angeles—as traitors, accusing them of having bowed to religious powers that scorned and suppressed native traditions and abetted the exploitation and killing of Indian people. When the Church unveiled its official portrait of the 16th-century Chichimeca Indian, racial pride turned to puzzlement and, for some, anger. The portrait shows a light-skinned, full-bearded man who looks more like one of the sword-wielding Spanish conquistadors who subjugated the Aztec empire.

"This is disturbing," said Fausto Guadarrama, a Mazahua Indian, author and devout Catholic. "First we win a moral victory. Then we get this image with Western features. Are they trying to conquer us again through this image?"

"The image of Juan Diego confirms the racist mentality of the Catholic Church," said Francisco Jimenez Pablo, leader of an indigenous group in the southern state of Chiapas. "It is more an affirmation of the conquistadors than of native people. In short, it is an act of discrimination toward us."

The criticism has put the hierarchy on the defensive. Cardinal Norberto Rivera, archbishop of Mexico City, now says the Church would be willing to endorse any other "dignified" portrait of Juan Diego on posters and icons distributed in Mexico.

The official image was chosen, Church leaders say, because it is a copy of the earliest known portrait of the saint. An anonymous artist painted the portrait in the 18th century based on oral descriptions handed down from Juan Diego's time. "During Spanish [colonial times], Indians were often painted to look European, to enhance their status," said Elio Masferrer, an anthropologist and historian. "That was racist thinking. The curious thing is that today's church hasn't corrected it."

It is Juan Diego to whom the Virgin of Guadalupe is said to have appeared in December 1531, and, when the local Spanish bishop demanded proof of the apparition, it was on Juan Diego's rough cloak that the heavenly lady miraculously imprinted her image, an image still displayed and revered in its basilica in Mexico City. But as the Pope visited Mexico, the Rev. Stafford Poole, an American priest and author of *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol* (University of Arizona Press, 1995), did not look forward to the canonization. He is one of a number of scholars who do not question Juan Diego's holiness. They question whether he ever existed. Juan Diego, Poole said, is a "pious fiction." David A. Brading, a Cambridge professor, author of *Mexican Phoenix* (Cambridge, 2001), a highly sympathetic study of the Guadalupe devotion, has said, "There's no historical evidence whatsoever that such a person actually existed."

None of these scholars deny the power of the Guadalupe story and devotion. Poole calls it "one of history's outstanding examples of the fusion of religious devotion and national identity."

Historical problem. Over the centuries, Guadalupe has been equally seized by the Creole Spaniards born in Mexico, by indigenous peoples, by royalists and by revolutionaries as a divine affirmation of their dignity. During his previous visit to Mexico in 1999, the Pope declared the Virgin of Guadalupe the patron saint of the Americas.

The problem for historians like Poole or Brading is that though the Guadalupe portrait and devotions surrounding it clearly date to the mid-1500s, it was not until 1648 that Miguel Sanchez, a Creole priest, published the elaborate account of apparitions, Juan Diego and his miraculously transformed cloak. The same story, told more simply and movingly in Nahuatl, the native tongue, appeared a year later in a book produced by a friend of Sanchez.

Ever since then, Mexican churchmen

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have been trying to fill this gap in the record. If these 1648-49 accounts were based, as some claimed, on oral traditions, why had not a single trace of them showed up in the huge mass of religious material, both in Spanish and in native languages, that had appeared in the intervening century?

Missing documents, especially earlier versions of the Nahuatl text, were hypothesized; various explanations were offered for their absence. In 1666, depositions were taken from elderly Indians and Spaniards. (The ages of four Indian witnesses were given as 100, 100, 110, and between 112 and 115.) Many people argued that the image, which unlike the Shroud of Turin has never been scientifically examined, could not have been created by human hands—and therefore was itself proof of the 1648 account.

Still, the questions and the controversies have persisted. Writing in *Commonweal*, a biweekly edited by Catholic laity, Poole stated, "More than 40 documents are said to attest to the reality of Juan Diego, yet not one of them can withstand serious historical criticism."

Obviously the Vatican officials conducting investigations for the Congregation for the Causes of Saints do not agree. But Poole considers their procedures "one-sided, slanted and bordering on the dishonest." No recognized scholars questioning the traditional accounts about Juan Diego were consulted, he wrote; he found out that his own book had been criticized but he was not given a chance to reply.

Other critics have been "demonized," he said in an interview, and accused of racism or heresy. In a book he is completing he calls the canonization "a sad and tawdry spectacle that does little service to the church's mission and credibility."

Brading is on a somewhat different wavelength. In *Mexican Phoenix*, he praises Poole and declares that the American priest with two other scholars has demonstrated that the 1649 Nahuatl account was based on Sanchez's 1648 Spanish text—"a devastating criticism," Brading writes, of all theories about some earlier Indian-language source.

Still, Brading is ambivalent about the battle over historicity. He is enamored of the theological creativity of thinkers like Sanchez who conceived of Juan Diego "as another Moses and the image of Guadalupe as the Mexican Ark of the Covenant," showing that God's own mother had founded Christian Mexico.

The Guadalupe tradition has a theological truth, Brading says, that cannot be discerned by "ill-judged questions about historicity," but only by thinking of the image the way Eastern Orthodox Christians think of icons and thinking of the story the way that Catholic theologians now regard many of the miraculous Gospel stories about Jesus' birth. So Brading, in a letter to the London *Tablet*, a Catholic weekly, ended up, on the one hand, calling the story of the Virgin and Juan Diego "a sublime parable" and, on the other hand, concluding, "To canonize Juan Diego makes as much sense, and as little, as to canonize the Good Samaritan."

That leaves some important questions. First, can what Poole calls "a pious fiction" be transmuted by centuries of devotion into what Brading calls "a sublime parable"? Second, can the Church really sidestep the problem of historical fact? Christianity, after all, is notorious for considering itself a history-based religion. **Peter Steinfels, Frank Bruni and Ginger Thomson, *The New York Times*, with Richard Boudreaux, *Los Angeles Times*/NYTNS**

THE RECUSANT

Continued from page 27

of their presence–the destroyed woodwork, and sometimes adjacent to it a distinct but modest termite hill. Or sometimes, there are the occasional wood grains that suddenly come out after you accidentally lean on or punch wooden wall. But other than these features, it is next to impossible to spot termites.

Transport the imagery to national politics, and you have COPA: silent, conspiratorial, but once in a while coming out in the open to spill out the "wood grains" byproducts of its influence.

Saycon, however, is not the original political termite. The notion of burrowing deep into the recesses of government leadership to infect people, offices, factions and agencies with one's brand of politics was first thought out loud by the secretive Nilo Tayag, former sidekick of the Filipino Ayatollah, Joema Sison, then mass base-builder of the dictator Marcos and the would-be small dictators of RAM and YOU.

Before he became thoroughly convinced that Marcos's Filipino Ideology was genuine, and at that time when he still had some sympathy for leftist politics, *Ka* Nilo posited that the more effective way of undermining Marcos was to "termite" your way into the edifice of the dictatorship. It did not work, but it was an interesting, kooky idea.

Now, like Napoleon Bonaparte's grotesque nephew Louis, Pastor Saycon and COPA have—perhaps unconsciously—resurrected the Tayag strategy. And very much like their precedent, they also show how bad they are as political gamblers.

Which brings us finally to the middle ground between these two extremes: the presidency and Republicanism.

★

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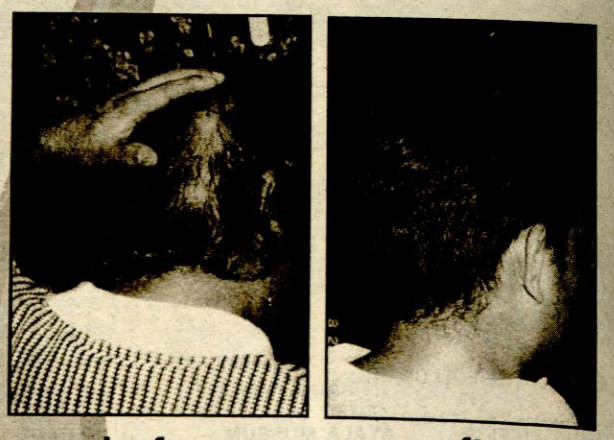

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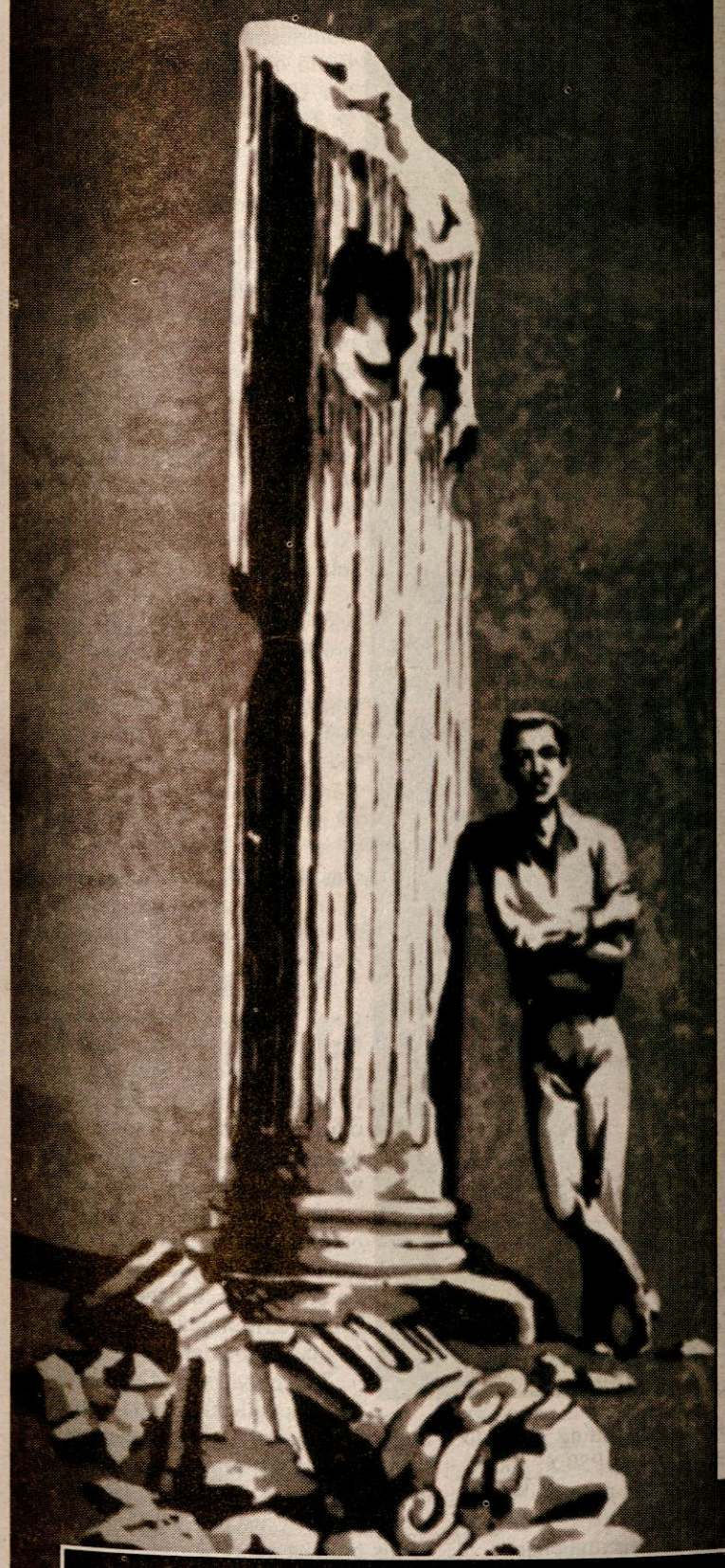

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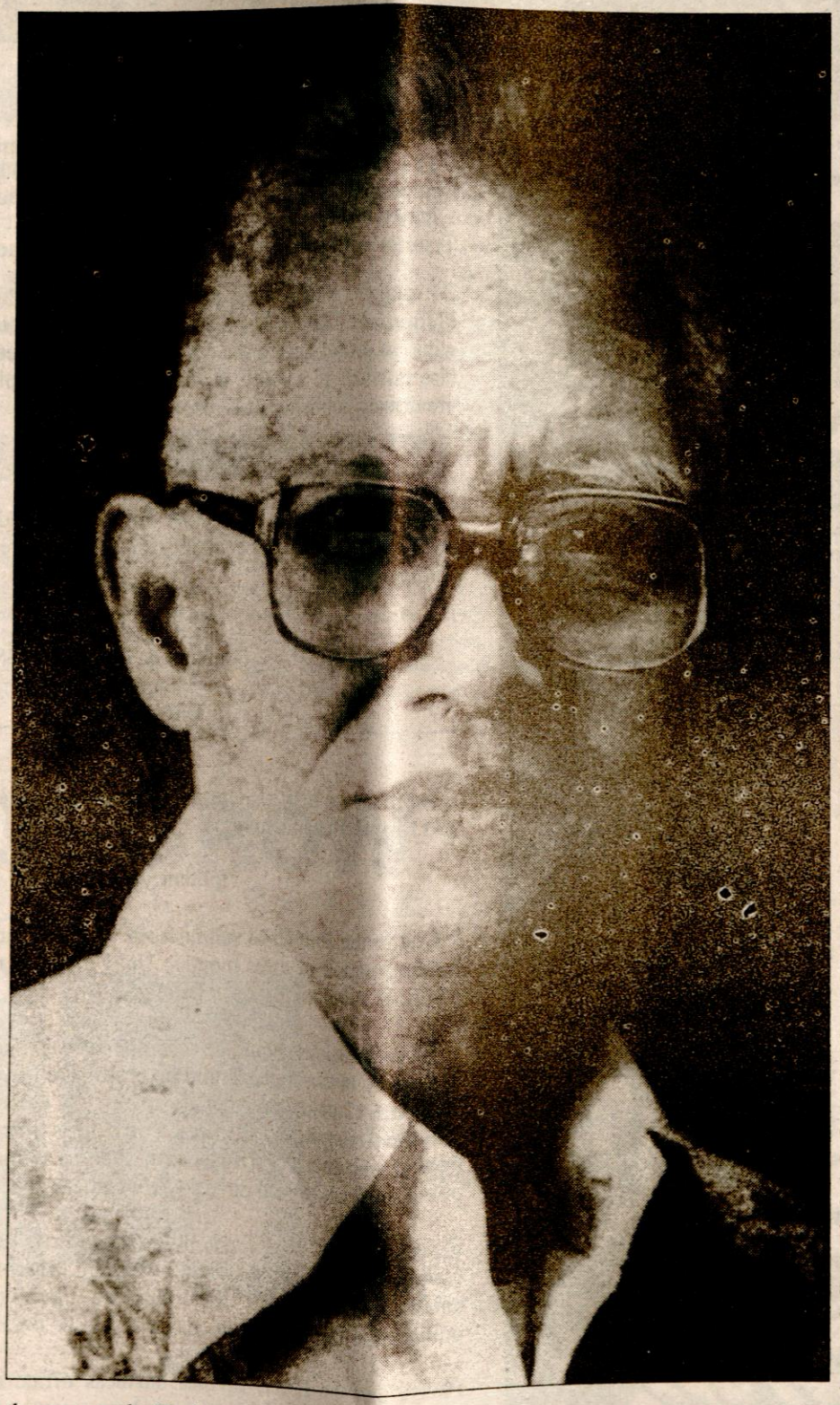
•PASSAGE

STORYMASTER

FRANCISCO ARCELLANA, 1916-2002

By Alberto S. Florentino



I MET Francisco Arcellana some 50 years ago when I attended the first Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature awarding ceremonies where he won the prize for his short story "The Flowers of May." At that time, 1951, *he had not published a book under his name*; not a sheaf of poems by the poet; not a trilogy of stories by the short story writer; not a pamphlet of literary essays or criticism by the literary historian or chronicler.

I published Arcellana's first collection, the first of 15 books by some of the country's best writers during the time. In the end (somewhere in the 1980's), I had published 21 titles by 6 or 7 authors who, 10 or more years later would be proclaimed National Artists for Literature, the highest literary recognition from the government and the incumbent President.

Selected Stories by Francisco Arcellana, the fourth title in my Peso Book series, was printed on the obverse and reverse pages of only two sheets of bookpaper on a flatbed letterpress in the University of the Philippines Printery in the basement of the UP Library. The two pages were fed by hand into the machine and manually folded, by mostly women printery workers, four times to make two 32-page signatures, in a 5 x 7 format, saddle-stitched and covered with a heavier stock of white board paper.

I reprinted 4 to 5 short stories that Arcellana had published in the latter part of his career, during his "postwar" years, in weekly magazines and literary supplements. I cannot specify the number of stories and the titles as I lost most of my library books in a fire.

Budgeted at P500 a title (my very first title was supported by a cash donation from a stranger, the painter Fernando Zobel de Ayala, Purita Kalaw Ledesma and Brigido Lobrin, a total of P400). I rushed the printing of Arcellana's peso book in only two weeks or 15 days because the author had second thoughts about coming out with his first book containing reprints of previously published work. He wanted me to hold (stop) the press and to wait until he had written new, original (in the sense of unpublished) short stories.

But before he could change his mind, I had printed his peso book and finished 5 to 9 other titles which Bookmark (President Bienvenido Tan, Jr. and office manager Eddie Makabenta) had offered to finance and distribute. The print run of the first 5 or 10 titles went direct from the press to the Bookmark warehouse.

The peso books were printed at a cost of 33 centavos each and priced to sell at one peso, with a royalty of 10 centavos to the author and the rest (57 centavos) to the financier, distributor and retailer. Somehow I forgot to pay myself through the 75 titles and two decades.

The inventory of the peso books stayed in Bookmark's warehouse and bookshelves for 5 to 10 years, their retail price pegged at one peso. The Philippine peso started at an exchange rate of two pesos to a US dollar, sliding down to P25:$1 in the 1960's to P50:$1 today. Thus, going by today's peso-dollar exchange rate, a peso book was selling at two red cents or a British tuppence.

Toward the end of the run of the first-and-only edition of Arcellana's *Selected Stories*, the book was remaindered at 50 percent off until the last copy was sold before martial law. In the late 1990's, during the annual Writers' Night at the UP Balay Kalinaw, I espied a collectible copy of the book selling at P100 and could not buy it because I had spent my last hundred on another title.

In 1990 Francisco Arcellana was declared by the president of the country as a National Artist for Literature. The basis of the recognition was, of course, the dozens of short stories and other literary works that he had published during his prewar years, from his first story in the 1930's "(The Man Who Would Be Poe") in magazines whose tattered copies could then be found only in musty libraries or museums; or available in old, out-of-print anthologies of the 1950's and 1960's.

The National Artist for Literature conferment for Francisco Arcellana was also based on the first book I published of his short stories and on the second book which I published 12 years later: *Fifteen Stories by Francisco Arcellana* (number 5 of the Storymasters Series). And also on *The Francisco Arcellana Sampler*, published by the University of the Philippines Press through the Likhaan Philippine Writers Series of the university's Creative Writing Center (of which Arcellana was the first and founding director).

The content of the *Sampler* was essentially the same short stories in the first peso book and in *Fifteen Stories* with the addition of a few more nonfiction pieces (essays, articles, columns) unearthed by researcher Afv Serrano. These pieces were included in the *Sampler* to add to its length, import and heft. It was the first clothbound edition of an Arcellana book. In short, it was Arcellana's first and last *real* book.

When Francisco Arcellana was given the title of National Artist for Literature, many people felt that he shouldn't have received it, or *not yet* anyway. There were other writers thought to be more deserving of the title—writers who were older, or younger, but "actively writing"—authors of books of full length work: novels, full-length plays, the heavier several-hundred-pages of text compared to Arcellana's 64-page, 10-ounce booklet.

But the value and worth of a writer's collected works and his literary life are not to be measured by the poundage of, nor by the count of the pages, in his few books. He could be measured by just the "baker's dozen" of his briefest short stories, or even a chapbook of poems, or a selection of essays.

Toward the end of an author's writerly life, he should be remembered and recognized not by the size of his legacy but by the quality of work he will leave behind.

★

TRIBUTE

THE man who was Franz Arcellana was quiet, practical and fierce. I first met that man at a tribute given to him by the UP College of Arts and Letters after he was conferred National Artist for Literature by President Corazon C. Aquino.

He seemed quite shy about the attention everyone was giving him during the event. But when he gave his response, out came the voice I imagined speaking in his poem "Prayer": "Close all open things, Lord. / Open all closed things."

Though I never had him as a teacher, I heard so many stories from friends and classmates: how he sometimes just stared into space for a few minutes before answering a question, how sharp his memory was when workshopping, how honest the comments came. He was patient with some students, but sometimes he would dismiss the pretentious poets who tried to impress him with very pragmatic advice: "Next time, just keep 'em rhyming." Looking back, I think this was why I avoided him. I was afraid he'd make me rhyme, and back then, I had a fondness for the word "orange."

I would exchange pleasantries with him whenever I saw him walking the corridors of the UP Faculty Center. I had so many questions but I was afraid he would find them so trite or silly, or worse, he'd throw back cryptic remarks that writers of his generation loved dispensing to amateurs and students.

But Franz was anything but cryptic. And he had no airs. At a Writers' Kwentuhan of the UP Creative Writing Center, I had the mistake of saying: "We would like to acknowledge the presence of our National Artist for Literature Francisco Arcellana."

Right there he confronted me: "Next time, DON'T you ever do that. Don't. Ever."

This issue we salute Franz with three short works. Alberto S. Florentino pays tribute to the man he published—the man who lived by the peso book and through it. Eduardo G. Geronia Jr.'s short story re-imagines the national artist as a founding settler of a planet in a galaxy light years away from Earth in a science fiction homage that takes off from Arcellana's 1935 story "Trilogy of the Turtles."

Lastly, we reprint Francisco Arcellana's last published poem, which appeared in the pages of the PHILIPPINES FREE PRESS and was later selected by poet J. Neil Carmelo Garcia for inclusion in the *1998 Likhaan Book of Poetry & Fiction*. "Before Tertulian, After Him" was sent to us by Prof. Nieves B. Epistola and first saw print in our September 12, 1998 issue, in time for the national artist's 83rd birthday.

Thank you, Franz for showing us the weight of words and how they affect us.

—Paolo Manalo

BEFORE TERTULIAN, AFTER HIM

1
If the body is withheld
then everything is withheld

If the body is not given
then nothing is given

For the body is not the Soul
and the soul is not all.

2
It is the body which does the dirty work
and the Soul which takes the rap

It is the body which plays the mastermind
and the Soul which plays the sap

For the Soul is ever the dupe of the body
and life is the body taking the soul for a ride.

3
Brutalize the body then, bully it
and break it, bring it down. Break
the body and its pride and then
drag it by the heel over the ground.
Break the Supple and Supplicant body
But leave the Soul alone, leave it
free. Leave the Soul, the Spirit be.

Sound of crashing and Sound of fall:
down went the body and its pride.

Now gather the fragments of the proud
proud body, the beautiful beautiful
spirit, and the lovely lovely Soul.

—FRANCISCO ARCELLANA

FRANZ ARCELLANA: THE PRIDE OF FICTION

NATIONAL Artist for Literature Francisco Arcellana passed away on August 1, 11:45 a.m., at the National Kidney & Transplant Institute.

At the time of his demise, the UP Institute of Creative Writing (formerly the Creative Writing Center) was preparing to hold its "Alay kay Franz" on August 16, at the UP Main Library. Franz—a professor Emeritus at the UP Department of English & Comparative Literature, and a member of the creative writing institute's board of advisers—was the first director of the Creative Writing Center from 1979 to 1982. The tribute will continue as planned.

Arcellana was born September 6, 1916 at Santa Cruz, Manila. His writing career was launched with the publication of his story—"The Man Who Would Be Poe"—in the *Philippine Graphic* when he was a 16-year-old high-school student. Two years later, he became the editor of *Expression*—a quarterly of experimental writing. Consequently, the venture gave batch to the Veronicans: "a radical coterie of 13 prewar writers whose bold works were rejected for publication by magazines at the time."

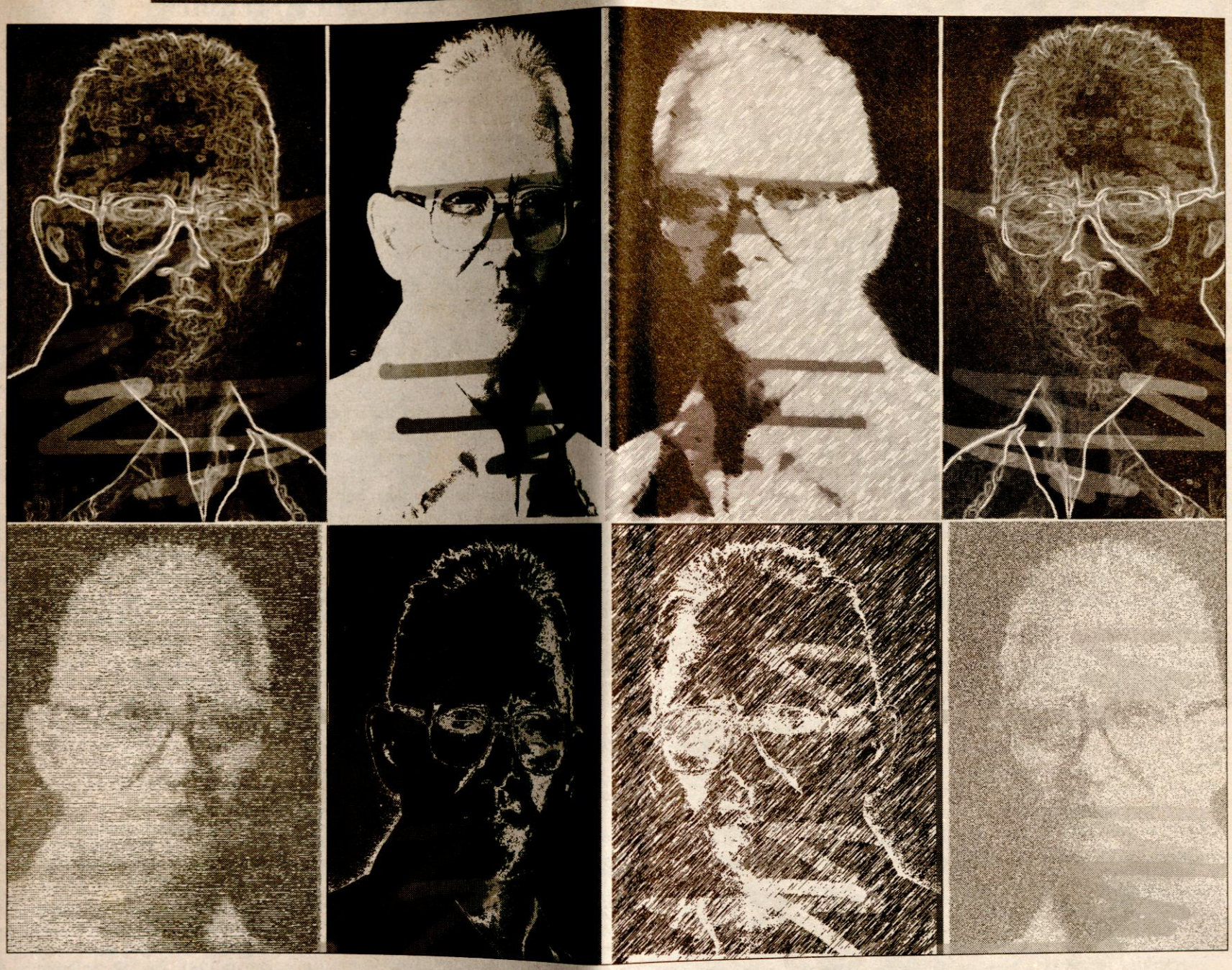
Arcellana steered parallel careers in journalism and literature for two decades. He had stints with *Woman's World* (1939), *Herald Mid-Week Magazine* (1939-41), *Acta Medica Philippines* (1941), *Philcross* (1945-53), the International News Service (1947-48) and *This Week* (1948-50), where he served as either writer, columnist or editor. In the meantime, he published the seminal short stories, poems and essays that formed the body of his work: "Trilogy of the Turtles" (short story, 1935); "The Mats" (short story, 1938); "Prayer" (poem, 1939), "Through a Glass, Darkly" (column, 1948-49); "The Flowers of May" (short story, 1951), "The Wing of Madness" (short story, 1953), "The Wing of Madness II: The Yellow Shawl" (short story, 1953) and "To Touch You," "I Touched Her, Yes" and "The Other Woman" (poems, 1953).

He joined the state university's English department in 1953. He started as an instructor and he retired in 1982, with the rank of Professor VII. In 1979, he was appointed the first writing center director—a post he held until 1982. He was a Rockefeller Foundation fellow in creative writing at the University of Iowa and attended the Breadloaf Writers Conference at Vermont, 1956-57. Aside from the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards and the FREE PRESS literary awards, he was a 1955 Smith-Mundt Leader grantee in the teaching of creative writing and received the Patnubay ng Kalinangan Award for Literature in 1981. The UP conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*, during the 1989 commencement exercises. He was declared National Artist for Literature the following year.

His books include *Selected Stories* (1962); *The Philippine PEN Anthology of Short Stories* (as editor, 1962); *Fifteen Stories: Storymasters 5* (1973); and *The Francisco Arcellana Sampler* (1990).

The tribute "Alay kay Franz" will entail an exhibit of his works and memorabilia, and a program to open the exhibit by way of honoring him. The exhibit will be mounted at the UP Main Library under the supervision of university librarian Salvacion Arlante. The Institute of Creative Writing is issuing a call for works, photos and other memorabilia not found in previous collections for possible inclusion in the exhibit. Poet and art critic Hilario S. Francia Jr. will make a personal tribute to Arcellana with his own paintings.★

FICTION



TURTLE IV

By Eduardo G. Geronia Jr.

LIKE many ancestors, Founding Settler Franz Arcellana had many stories about his homeworld to tell his descendants. But unlike most ancestors, his stories weren't accessed from memory implants and mnemosynic downloads. He made up his own stories by patiently encoding them in pre-Version 7.0 earthglyphs. He fondly calls this activity as writing. When we were younger, he taught us how to read those unmoving black symbols as it flashed in predetermined clumps on the holotron. We quickly learned the internal relationships between the symbols and it gave him a sense of unspeakable pride. We became one of the few children throughout the Shalath system who could encode and decode mindspeak in earthglyphs.

"By God," he would say, "the House of Arcellana is now a house of scholars."

Every time he mentioned God, we are reminded of the first earthglyph verse that we learned to decode. Its opening lines were: *Close all open things, Lord. Open all closed things.*

He heard us recite the entire verse from heart with our memory implants offline. It set him in one of his storytelling moods.

"Do you know what it means, little members of the House?" he asked us.

Concepcion, the most reticent member of the House, suddenly stood up and spoke in that soft voice of hers using a personal pronoun to refer to herself instead of the House collective. Her voice sounded like a Shalathian summer breeze cutting a swath through a lunar ricefield. "I think I may have an idea, Great Settler. It is a prayer well illustrated by one of your stories."

We were still in awe upon hearing her speak. But Lelong wasn't at all amazed. "So now you've decided to break your silence, little silent one. And what story is that, my dear? Your Lelong is over four hundred years old and he may have a little trouble remembering things."

Concepcion gathered the ruffles of her UV-shielded skirt then spoke again with her small pale mouth. "It is a story that takes place on one of Shalath's moons before it got its present name. In earthglyphs you call it by the name of 'Turtle IV.'"

"Ah, *that* story," the Great Settler said.

All that we could do was knit our brows.

With a slight chuckle, our ancestor continued, "So Concepcion, you have been rummaging through my old earthglyph media files."

"It was all by accident Lelong. I was searching for another story—the trilogy—when the seek engine retrieved the story from your media files."

The Trilogy of Turtles we were quite familiar with but we were unaware of a fourth story ever being written.

The Great Settler thoughtfully rubbed his chin then made an expression on his face that was a fair imitation of the one that he made when he first set foot on Shalath two hundred years ago. The Shalath landing was one of our favorite holoclips. He noticed the puzzled look on our faces.

"From the looks of it, only Concepcion has read the story. I just wrote it a few years ago. I didn't mean to show it to anyone yet. But since you are all here, would you like to listen to it?"

We all nodded.

Franz, the grand patriarch of the House of Arcellana, also known among the people of the Shalath system as one of the Great Settlers, rose to his full height. From a compartment in his steadi-cane, he produced a tiny glowing

caplet of Anti-Age and popped it in his mouth. "There's nothing like nemesh tubers for an old Shalath bison," he said as he thumped his chest. Then he walked up to the holotron and whispered a command to it. The machine fired up its holographic lasers.

"You can read the story on the holotron if you get tired of listening to your old man's voice," he said as the first page of *Turtle IV* displayed itself.

With these words he began:

Most of the people on Tortugal 4, Shalath's biggest habitable moon, never thought that the boy would be hit by the train. They said he was always too fast for anything and quick as lightning. He was swifter than any boy they had ever seen. During the time before the moon still had a flowing river, he would run alongside its banks to race the charging currents. The winds seemed to chase him but he hardly got caught in the eddies. He was seldom seen in one place. Except when he went to the hills past the maglev tracks, they never saw him stay put.

From the hills, he got some clay which he made into animals, sometimes heads of men—things that quickly moved. He never made figures of inanimate objects like trees, beacon towers and water pumps. These things were a great source of boredom for him. Not that the boy didn't have enough patience or a long enough attention span for cumbersome things. On the contrary, his favorite clay figure was that of a strange reptilian.

The people thought that the boy modeled this particular figure after seeing old educational holotron clips back from Earth. Or sometimes they dismissed it as a product of his very active imagination. He insisted that he often saw the creature on the shallow parts of the river bed. Sometimes he would see it alongside the maglev tracks.

No one ever saw the creature so they never believed the boy up to his last days when his silent unmoving body was found sprawled on the paddies beside the tracks of the maglev trains.

AT this point in the story, a wireframe of a maglev train appeared on the holotron. The maglev train utilized magnetic fields to propel itself along at incredible speeds. The like magnetic charges passing through the track and the coaches caused the train to magnetically levitate a few centimeters above the rails. We saw the holotronic cross-referencing as an opportunity to ask Lelong a question.

"Why didn't they believe the boy?"

He didn't seem to mind much our minor interruption. "Because there weren't any reptiles on Tortugal 4 much less turtles. The only animals that lived there were horse and dog-like mammals. They thought that the boy's restless imagination was at work again. The only place where they knew such creatures existed was 15 light years away—on my homeworld Earth."

A sense of longing was evident in his tone whenever there was a mention of his home planet. He loved Earth dearly and had very fond memories of it as we have read in his stories.

He stole a glance at the holotron. "Where were we? Ah, I was about to begin at this paragraph."

THE boy's face was barely recognizable and his body was crushed. Almost every bone in his frail body was broken. He had been dead for a few hours when they found him. Post mortem retinal eyescan revealed the last image he saw before dying: a blurry metallic green shape. Resolution enhancement of the image failed to show anything conclusive.

A witness to the boy's sad fate finally turned up. It was the Artificial Intelligence of a maglev freight train that visited the track earlier. The last to see him alive was also what had gotten him killed. The train was hurtling at 500 kph when the thermo-optical scanners detected the presence of the boy and an unknown object. The latter was right in the middle of the tracks, apparently struggling to move. Its scanner signature was roughly half-spherical in shape and had a very low core temperature. The AI activated the emergency brakes but the train didn't stop in time to avoid hitting the boy who was able to shove the thing off the rails.

Deaths were rarely mysterious on the Shalath moon. If there weren't any material witnesses, there was the ever-reliable coroner AI which could convincingly construct a highly plausible cause of death. The only thing which was completely shrouded in mystery was this physical aspect of death: where do the bodies go when they are set adrift on the Rethlon?

It has been a religious custom for the people to inter the bodies of the deceased in the great river. The floating burial pods are swept downstream to be consumed by the immense cataract where the Rethlon ends in a white swirling fury. What the river has given, the river will take away goes an old Tortugal 4 saying. All souls whose bodies aren't immediately swallowed by the cataract within a week are considered damned. Such were the beliefs of the boy's people.

They grieved at his fate very much for it was also a worse time to die. Because of a seasonal drought, Rethlon's waters were all dried up. There was no great cataract to speak of at this time of the year. In a few weeks the rains will come and Rethlon's waters will be flowing again but it will all be too late for the boy.

It was on the third day that it had come. It descended from the hills first looking like molten glass before revealing its true form in a burst of ethereal light.

"WAS it the turtle? Was it the turtle, Lelong?" we asked as excitement flashed in our eyes. We found it interesting that it might have possessed some sort of camo-cloaking ability. It would explain why the creature had remained unseen all this time.

He knitted his brows and then thought for a while. "Well yes and no."

"What was it then?"

"Patience children, patience. Shalath wasn't terraformed in a day you know. We're nearing the end of this turtle tale."

"Oh please do go on."

AT first the people thought that what they saw was a giant Earth turtle. But it wasn't. Its sheathed neck and round stumpy legs were covered with fine fur. It bore on its back a bulky carapace which was crammed with a curious array of circuitry and cables mounted on a metallic exoskeleton. The cables snaked throughout the head and the limbs, its ends embedded in the skin, hinting at a kind of bio-mechanical interface.

Before any of the boy's people could speak, they all felt a sudden gush of mental images and sounds. It was like being in a vivid dream while wide awake. They even felt the sensations that came along with the images.

LELONG paused for awhile, giving ample time for each word to sink in. Even the short silence made us grow uneasy so we ventured forth with still another comment.

"The creature was telephatically communicating with them using a sophisticated form of mindspeak," we guessed.

The initial mental images, shown from the creature's point of view, contained memory playbacks of its encounters with the boy and up to his subsequent death. Its camo-cloaking unit had suffered a malfunction, accidentally allowing itself to be seen by the boy who wasn't scared at all. The creature who didn't wish to be seen at first had befriended the boy when it sensed that he meant no harm. As the days went by, they gained each others' trust and talked openly. The boy mentioned the practices of his people. And this was how the creature learned about the Rethlon burial ritual.

On the day that the boy died, the Xitix (for it called itself that) was trying to go beyond the maglev rails. It was unaware that its metallic shell was magnetically attractive to the tracks. The magnetic fields were quite strong and the Xitix could not tear itself free. It sent a telephatic call for help to the boy for it was all that it could do. The boy quickly heeded the call for he was gathering clay from a hill nearby in time to save his friend but not himself when the maglev train whizzed by.

The boy gave up his life for the Xitix and there was no greater deed than that. For three days, the silent weeping that was inside the Xitix filled itself.

The people learned about the origin of the Xitix. It came from a star system that was over a hundred times as distant as the Earth. In that system lived a highly advanced race of what were once purely organic beings. From the minor mechanical prostheses that their race earlier used evolved complex mecha-organic life support systems which fused with their bodies. Eventually their mechanical parts took a life of it own.

Highly evolved as the Xitix was, the mecha-organic components carried on with its unexplainable need for self-modification and improvement. Xitix had three selves: the spirit, the flesh and the machine. And the machine didn't rest in the Xitix until it consumed both the spirit and the flesh. Rather than surrender to the machine completely, the Xitix found a way to deactivate the components little by little. But this also meant that without the life-supporting components, the Xitix won't survive. It was in Tortugal 4 that the Xitix choose to expire.

After the Xitix mindspoke to the people, it broke out into a song. A song that was the silent weeping inside the Xitix. They heard the song. The Xitix heard its song. The song reached the lunar sky, weaving itself deep in the womb of the clouds.

The Xitix. The song. The sky.

And when the three became one, the rains fell. For three days the rain was raining everywhere: water trying to become one. And when it became one, it became the waters of Rethlon.

The Rethlon was alive again. Alive in time for the boy and his friend. The Xitix died after singing its song. The boy's people put them in a single burial pod. And together they made their way to Rethlon's end where the cataract awaited.

LELONG deactivated the holotron. As the last page of Turtle IV slowly flickered into nothingness, Concepcion spoke to us. "Closing all opened things and opening all closed things. I think that was what the story is about."

Lelong just smiled and waved us to go to our beds. We wanted to ask him something before we slept.

"Is Turtle IV a true story?"

"As true as you want it to be children."

"Do you think what say about the Rethlon is true?"

"Let me put it this way. I can only use Anti-Age for a hundred years more. When the final day does come, I wouldn't mind getting my feet wet for the last time." ★

"Closing all opened things and opening all closed things. I think that was what the story is about."

• WHAT'S UP



GIRL SCOUTS PROMOTE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

IN the recently concluded 31st World Conference held on June 18-24 at Manila Hotel, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) launched the triennial theme for 2002-2005 "Our Rights and Responsibilities, WAGGGS Call to Action." The theme aims to help every girl and young woman to deepen their knowledge and understanding of rights and responsibilities; take action to safeguard or preserve rights for themselves or others; share the lessons they learn for the benefit of others and encourage to believe that they can make a difference.

Our rights, our responsibilities include six core messages: 1) the right to be me; 2) the right to be heard; 3) the right to be happy; 4) the right to work together; 5) the right to learn; 6) and the right to live in peace.

Activities on the 8-point challenge and other programs and projects of the Girl Scouts of the Philippines are opportunities for the girl scout troops and patrols to understand and promote the triennial theme.



STANFORD, MMC HOLD VIDEOCONFERENCES

THE warm ties between Stanford University Hospital and Makati Medical Center were not sealed overnight. For more than a decade now, the two institutions have been closely in touch with each other, exchanging notes through the telephone or fax machine about their second opinions on problematic patients.

Today, technology has enabled Stanford and Makati Med to meet once or twice a month through a sophisticated videoconferencing equipment. In these sessions, doctors can see and talk to each other—all in real-time, full motion video.

The project took more than 10 years of hard work and a lot of patience to reach its objective. At the center of this effort is Donald Marshall who played a key role in fostering the friendship between the two hospitals. Being a good friend of Makati Med doctors and an alumnus of Stanford, he brought up the idea of linking the two hospitals to share their knowledge and experiences in the field of medicine.

The recent videoconference session was very special for MMC because they held an awarding in Marshall's honor. Dr. Walter L. Arons, a doctor from Stanford, spoke of Marshall's untiring efforts to bring the two hospitals together.

"The first time I met Donald, he already had a vision of closer relations between Stanford and Makati Med. He never through the years backed off from that goal. His attention was incredible. His energy was tireless. His use of resources and time was amazing," he said. "I don't think it's exaggeration to say that over the past two decades, he has assumed the stature of a healthcare hero because of the impact he has had on patient care both in his home community and Makati."

This pioneering effort kicked off in 1991 when Stanford loaned its telemedicine conference system to MMC. This system allowed live consultation between colleagues of the two hospitals, the first Trans-Pacific linkage using ordinary phone lines to South East Asia. The doctors could hear each other and show medical images such as x-rays.

In September of 1997, MMC acquired a videoconference system that allowed the conferees to hear and see each other. With this improvement, the completely digital system network eliminated jerky images and remote manipulation of slides. The virtual conference is facilitated through a Pentium CPU with wireless keyboard and mouse, a user interface tablet, document cameras and high definition monitors held at the Doctor's Lounge of MMC at 8 a.m. Manila/ 4 p.m. California.

At the awarding, the videoconference topic "Mohs Micrographic Surgery for Skin Cancer" was given by Dr. Hayes B. Gladstone, director of the Division of Dermatologic Surgery in Stanford University Hospital. The session was participated in by Stanford, MMC, Singapore General Hospital and Chinese University of Hong Kong. Discussed were the epidemiology, risk factors, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of skin cancer. An open forum also followed, with MMC reactors Dr. Vicente Arguelles, Department of Surgery chairman, Dr. Sylvia Jacinto, dermatology consultant and Dr. Vermen Verallo-Rowell, Department of Dermatology chairman sharing their insights on the topic.

LABOR OFFICIAL SEES STIFF CHALLENGE POSED BY GLOBALIZATION

OVERSEAS, barbers know about the anatomy of the head and how it connects to the entire body. Here, it can't be said the same of barbers who were trained in the country's institutions and the whole issue of quality permeates all the occupational fields in the Philippines both from the blue collar and white collar type.

"Our struggle for quality requires a number of concrete and practical improvements both in the area of curriculum, training delivery as well as assessment," said Labor Undersecretary Lucita S. Lazo.

With training for global markets as the topic of her speech, Lazo explained before the 91st general assembly of the Foundation for Upgrading the Standard of Education (FUSE) that trends in globalization impose a challenge to the country's standard of education.

Recalling her stint as director general of TESDA, Lazo said graduates of maritime courses can get a certificate of competency from the "University of Recto" for a minimal fee. The document guarantees that a seafarer can board and work in a vessel.

The certification process, Laza pointed out, is one example that will show where the country stands relative to quality of education.

The certification is secured from TESDA-accredited assessment centers nationwide.

A study conducted by a British-based group revealed that there are a number of fly-by-night assessment centers which issue fake certificates of competency to seamen.

"In effect, what is happening is global standards of education that are now being followed is challenging our very own processes, first and foremost in terms of integrity. I think the integrity of the processes that we have in this country are being questioned. You can go to the 'University of Recto' and g et a certificate of competency," she lamented.

"One of our directors actually went to CM Recto and posed as seafarer and true enough, for a small amount he got his certificate," she added.

In November 2001, Lazo said they launched a certification drive for IT workers as part of President Macapagal-Arroyo's program to tap the expertise of country's skilled workers.

About 11,000 IT graduates took the test, but only 30 percent passed the certification examination. In the field of animation, for example, there was one exam that was administered by Japan and only 11 percent of the Filipino examinees hurdled the test.

"The minds of our workers are caught in a small box and I think we in the educational field will have to make some effort to globalize the outlook of our workers. If you want to move forward we have to globalize our workers' outlook. For example, in Singapore, they would even volunteer for a wage cut, like the situation in Thailand during a recession they would donate their necklaces. We never see that happen yet in the Philippines. To me that only shows the quality of our education," Lazo said.

She said the government should look at the quality of its assessment instruments and their availability, as information technology, to a large extent, a vendor-driven assessment program.

2ND NAT'L TREE FARMERS' CONGRESS HELD

THE 2nd National Tree Farmers' Congress was successfully held on July 11-13 at the Almont Inland Resort Convention Center in Butuan City. The TRESS Consortium and the Caraga Council for Economic Development organized the event in cooperation with the Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) and different government agencies, support programs, and private groups. Around 350 participants from the DENR, DA, DAR, DTI, LGUS, other government agencies, the private sector, and tree farmers' groups attended the three-day event. A side event of the congress was an exhibit, joined by a number of foreign-assisted projects, input suppliers, and small-scale entrepreneurs from Caraga region and Davao City.

Valentina G. Plaza, co-chairwoman of the Regional Development Council of Caraga, opened the exhibit. Right after the invocation and the national anthem led by the Butuan City Water District Chorister, the Congress was formally opened by Butuan City Mayor Leonides Theresa B. Plaza. Dr. Jose Rene Gayo, TRESS Consortium trustee, gave the congress overview and welcome remarks from the the organizers. Rolando Dy, outgoing chairman of TRESS Consortium, delivered the industry situationer through a series of slide presentations. The congress' keynote speaker was presidential adviser on Agriculture and Jobs Creation Luis P. Lorenzo Jr., who stressed the need to work for common solutions and put into action all sensible resolutions that tree farmers will pass at the end of the congress.

The first session showcased some success stories in tree farming. The New Zealand tree farming experience was shared by Ambassador Terry Baker, while that of Mindanao's very own Bukidnon Forests Inc. was presented by Manuel M. Casino, its vice president and general manager.

The second session presented the current technologies used in tree farming practices with Cesar Nuevo of the Forest Management Bureau tackling the application of clonal forestry in tree farming. In addition, intercropping options with vegetables and coffee were presented by Arsenio Barcelona of Harbest Agribusiness Corporation and by Glicerio Joel Lumagbas of Nestle Philippines Inc. respectively. Valentin Chiu of the Philippine Pole Industries Corporation shared the company's tree farming experiences.

Support programs to tree farming and other related projects were the topics during the third session of the Congress. The chairperson of the Philippine Watershed Management Coalition, Jessica Salas, discussed tree farming for watershed management and development while Ranulfo Feliciano of the Philippine Association of Water Districts presented the association's support to watershed development. A resource speaker from the Save the La Mesa Watershed Project of Bantay Kalikasan, Valerio Mendoza, shared experiences and current developments of their project. Ernesto Guiang presented the Philippine Environmental Governance Program and Felix Aguhob discussed the Department of Agrarian Reform's Programs on Tree Farming/ Agri-Forestry.

For the fourth session, topics were on investment opportunities in tree farming development. The first speaker was Samson F. Monton of Filipinas Palmoil Plantations Inc., Delia M. Ladao of Land Bank of the Philippines-Caraga and Michaelle Jeofrey B. Cassion of Quedancor presented their company's financing programs for tree farmers.

For the fifth and final session of the Tree Farmers' Congress, Joel Rudinas, assistant regional director of the Department of Agriculture in region 10, talked about tree farming within the DA Mindanao framework plan. Dionisio Tolentino of the DENR shared the forestry programs and policies in support to tree farming. DENR Undersecretary Ramon Paje presented strategizing implementation of the Caraga forest plantation corridor. An open forum was conducted after each session to give way to the participants' questions and reactions to the topics presented.

The DENR CD-ROM (electronic edition of Environment and Natural Resources Policy Issuances 1996-2000) was launched right after the congress' synthesis, which was delivered by TRESS consortium trustee, Dionisio Papelleras Jr. The launch was followed by the induction of the Caraga Tree Farmers Association officers and the presentation of the TRESS consortium resolutions by the new chairman of TRESS consortium, Salvaldor Escudero III.

The resolutions focused on the deregulation of the trading and transport regime for timber species, the increase in hectarage for commercial and fruit trees under the Integrated Forest Management Agreements (IFMA) scheme, the fast-track implementation of the Caraga plantation corridor project, and the resolution of long-standing tenure problems in forestland and alienable and disposable lands to accelerate tree farming development efforts.

Leonel A. Santos, president of the Surigao chamber, presented an overview of the forthcoming 11th Mindanao Business Council. Claro Luis G. Garcia, president of the Caraga Council for Economic Development, delivered the closing remarks. The three-day event ended with a lunch hosted by the Philippine Environmental Governance Program.



QC ROTARY CLUB HOLDS RECOGNITION NIGHT

THE Rotary Club of Centennial Quezon City (RCCQC) recently held its recognition and thanksgiving night at the Great Eastern Hotel in Quezon City, in celebration of its achievements during the term of outgoing president Eleanor "Elee" Lucero. Joining the RCCQC in the celebration are the Eagle presidents of Quezon City and the RCI district officers led by district Governor Danilo "Danny" Reyes (seated 4th from right) next to PDG Jess Laxamana and incoming district Governor Boy Mendoza, with president Lucero (center) beside Ann Linda Reyes, and Ann Rory Mendoza, RCCQC secretary Nancy Raquiza, Boy Fajardo and other officers and members of RCCQC.



AQIDAH CORP. SPONSORS MSC KEGFEST

AQIDAH Import and Export Trading Corporation, exclusive distributor of Alhami Special Mi Goreng Noodles, has agreed to be a major sponsor of the 10th Media Sports Club Mixed Team Bowling Tournament. In photo are Kartina Binti Mohammad presenting the P100,000 check to Chito Maninang, Media Sports Club president, with (from left) Errol Afalla, Aqidah PRO and national marketing and sales coordinator; Louis Lim K.H., Aqidah managing director; Louis Lim Tin Nah, Aqidah finance director; Isagani Romero, MSC adviser and *Manila Standard* team captain; Dhel Damian, Aqidah regional marketing and sales coordinator; and Manny Orea, Aqidah marketing manager.

FREE SEMINARS ON THE 'KING OF HERBS' SET

INSAM Corporation, exclusive distributor of Cheong-Kwan-Jang Red Ginseng in the Philippines, in its bid to educate consumers on the potency of the best quality ginseng in the world, gives important bits of knowledge on the wonder root, as they continue with their free product awareness seminar series set for the year.

For the month of August, it will be held on the following schedule and venues: August 15, Thursday at 3 p.m. at Jollibee Gotesco Commonwealth and on August 17, Saturday, at 6:30 p.m. at McDonald's Pacita Complex, Laguna.

Despite published pharmacological benefits of Korean red ginseng otherwise known as 'Miraculous Herbal Medicine' and 'King of Herbs,' Filipinos are still to be exposed to the kind of active ingredients contained in ginseng, the manufacturing process it undergoes and the wonders it could do to the body especially its health potential to ailments plaguing the lives of a lot of people worldwide such as diabetes, hepatitis, stroke, heart attacks and even cancer.

Grab this chance of learning from the ginseng experts. For reservations and details please call 526-4399/550-1652.



This Made Me Laugh



Politician's Way

VOTER: "Senator, you promised me a job."

Senator: "But there are no jobs available."

Voter: "Well, you said you'd give me one."

Senator: "Tell you what I'll do: I'll appoint a commission to investigate why there are no jobs, and you can work on that."

Essential

"NOW, I want Alfredo to have a thoroughly modern and up-to-date education," said his mother, "including Latin."

"Yes, of course," assented the teacher, "although Latin, as you know, is a dead language."

"Well, all the better. Alfredo is going to be an undertaker."

★

What Our Readers Say

Solar Energy Viable

FIRST, it was the solar home system (SHS). Started sometime in 1976 by the pioneering "green and clean" Natural Energy Systems (NES)-turned Solar Electric Company (SOLARCO), the basic electrical power supplier now ventures into the world of entertainment by tying up with a broadcasting system to deliver both "sights and sounds" anywhere in the country.

With the initial installation of the transportable SPSDS at the 15th floor of Solarco on Annapolis Street, Greenhills, San Juan, Metro Manila, the maiden offer has attracted so much attention that current demand for the novel wireless cable TV is fast catching up with supply.

Much of the success of this state-of-the-art commercial, digital, direct-to-home TV entertainment via satellite in the Philippines may be attributed to the no-nonsense information-education campaign (IEC) and outreach service to the public and all media concerned.

Robert Puckett, Solarco founding president, says millions of people stand to benefit not only from the use of renewable energy systems but also from reduced environmental impact. He cites the recent decision of Shell which exercised its option to acquire the shares held by Siemens and EON in the photovoltaic (PV) joint venture. It was part of Shell's commitment to develop renewable energy as a commercially viable enterprise.

Plans are being firmed up to invest $0.5 to 1 billion, "subject to ongoing economic review, in developing commercially viable, alternative energy sources, particularly in solar and wind.

Shell Solar will employ up to 1,000 people and brings together world-class operations in both research and development (R&D) and manufacturing. It provides Shell with access to thin-film solar, which offers a wider range of applications than competing solar products and is seen as the solar technology of the future."

Solarco maintains a 24-hour access to free info and consultation through telephones, faxtels, e-mails and even cellphones that transmit and receive text messages to and from people from all stations of life.

An educator-environmentalist who has spread his knowledge of popular science and technology (S&T) vis-à-vis regenerative sources of energy, Puckett's lean but mean team of experts in sun, wind and water energy resources can be reached at any of the following lines of communication: (049) 827-1270 and (049) 827-1271; (049) 536-0144 824-4812, 726-4322; 724-0223; (63-33) 320-0368; 09164988192; solar@compass.com.ph solar@skynet.net thorig10@hotmail.com agzorig@hotmail.com. Solarco's main office is at Unit 1501, Annapolis Wilshire Plaza, 11 Annapolis St., Greenhills, San Juan, Metro Manila. Its Iloilo office is at Lopez Arcade, Jaro, Iloilo City. Solarco's satellite office is located at 10664 Demarces Ville, College, Laguna near UP Los Baños (UPLB).—THOR S. ORIG, UPLB, Los Baños, Laguna

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Not 'Masaya'

WE are appalled at the observance of National Family Planning Day in Marikina City held recently. Vasectomy and tubal ligation along the Marikina riverbanks was even advertised in the front page of tabloids for free Operation Tali. We thought it was free Operation Tule in the river.

We the ordinary, poverty-stricken, miserable Filipino "masa" understand family planning as some kind of a program that strengthens the family as the basic unit of society and make it a force in fighting forces that bring about poverty across the land.

But alas, it seems that family planning is just being made to control birth and make the family small. That is why the theme of the celebration was "Maliit na pamilya, Masaya, Maginhawa."

We think it is not true that "maliit na pamilya is masaya and maginhawa." A family with just one or two or no children is not "masaya." It is "malungkot".

Nowadays, the average number of children per family is 3 to 4 which is much lesser than the 6-7 children per family a generation ago. But it is very clear that the children of the last generation is *"mas masaya at mas maginhawa"* compared to the drug and computer games-addicted, "malungkot" children of today. And poverty did not abate, it increased.

Family planning is nothing but an alien-imposed program which is a condition for foreign loans. Those behind this program want to make it appear that poverty is due to many people not due to the excessive greed of global capital.

May we ask the government to foresake the foreign loans and also the NGO lapdogs to forsake the foreign grants coming from the international birth control lobby composed of big corporations, foreign governments and international lending and aid agencies.

Please open your eyes to the aftermath of birth control. Poverty did not decrease, it increased. On the contrary, it ruined the morality of society through increased incidence of marital infidelity, teen-age promiscuity and abortion.—KENT J. BIANES, President, Friends of Smokey Mountain, Tondo, Manila

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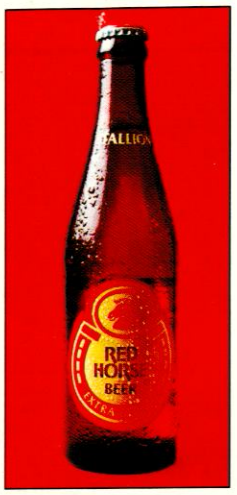







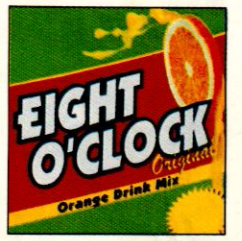









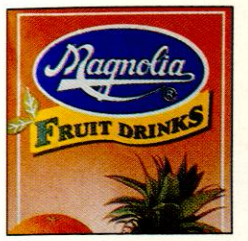





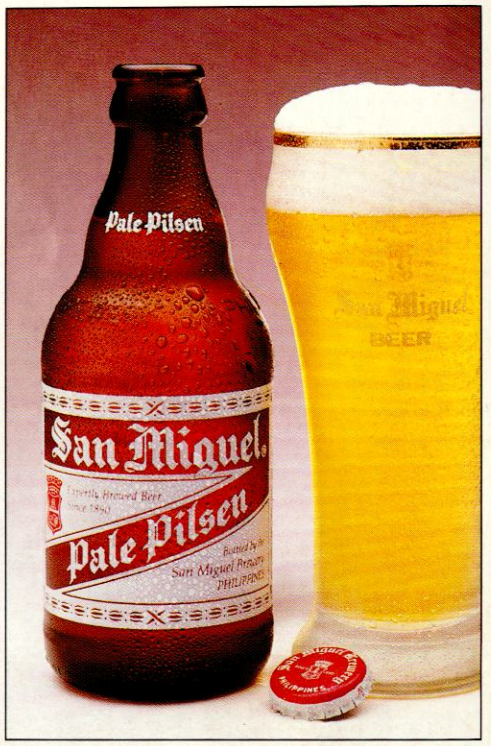

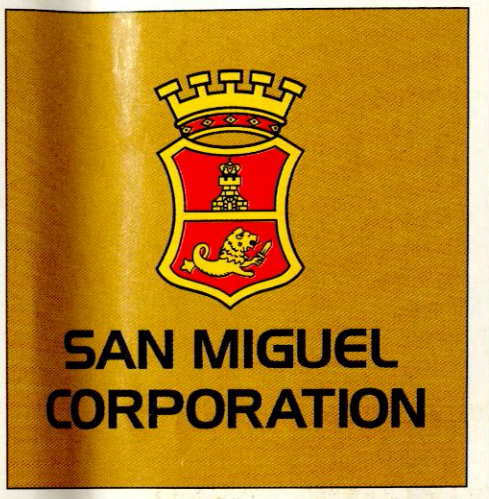





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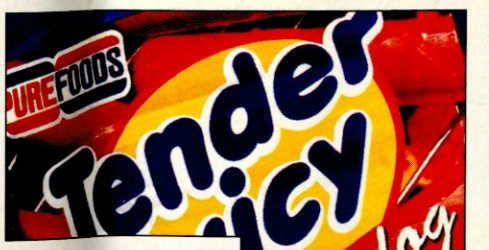









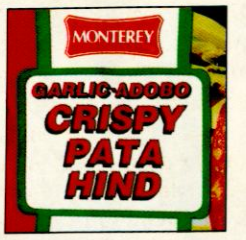

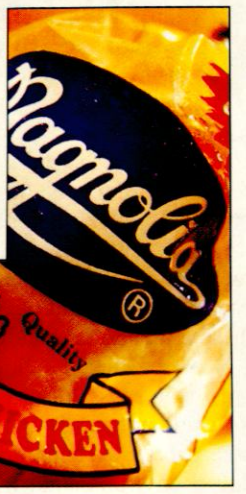





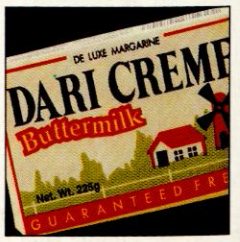

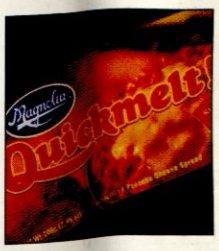

















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