- Transportation

Finally, a rehab plan for MRT3

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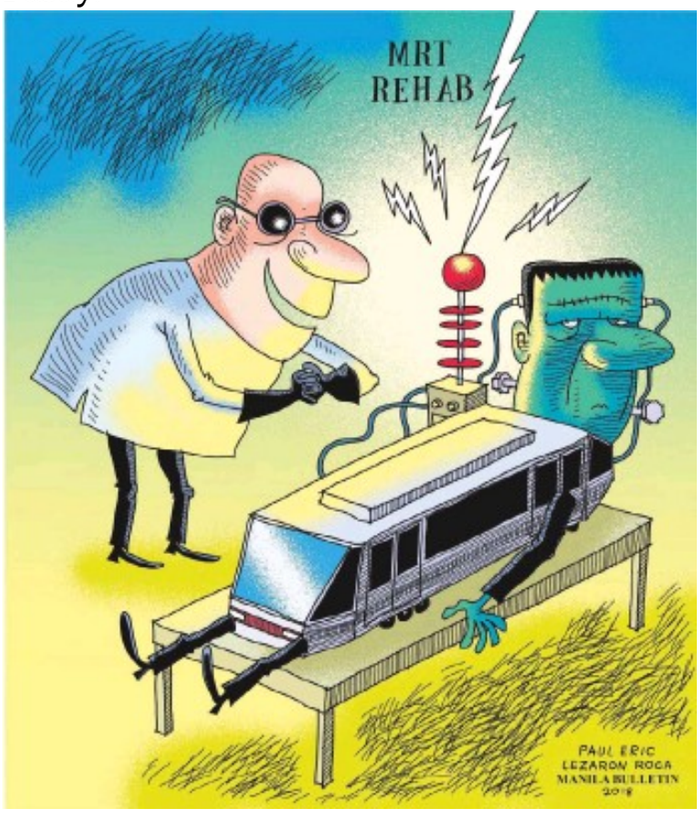
IN any solution to Metro Manila's traffic problem, a major part would be the rehabilitation of Metro Rail Transit 3 (MRT3) which runs from Quezon City in the north along Epifanio de los Santos Ave. (EDSA) to Pasig, Mandaluyong, Makati, and Pasay in the south. It complements the Light Rail Transit (LRT) which runs from Quezon City west to Caloocan, then south via Rizal Ave. to Manila and via Taft Ave. to Pasay.



Metro traffic gained international notoriety during the Aquino administration years when increased vehicle sales combined with heightened cargo deliveries from the piers and repeated breakdowns in MRT operations. Sen. Grace Poe highlighted a Senate inquiry with her lining up with thousands of rush-hour commuters in queues that ran for blocks around MRT stations in Quezon City. The inquiry, among others, brought out the fact that the new administration officials had somehow managed in 2012 to replace the reliable Sumitomo maintenance firm with a new company of their own with, however, little expertise in light rail operations.

At the start of the Duterte administration in 2016, rehabilitation of MRT 3 began in earnest. As emergency measures were taken to increase the number of running trains, the new Department of Transportation worked with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on an overall MRT3 Rehabilitation and Maintenance Project.

After long discussions and appraisal of the problem, the two sides agreed last Friday on a 43-month rehabilitation program designed to restore MRT3 to its original condition and capacity at a cost of 34.48 billion yen (P16.98 billion) covering the trains, overhead power lines, tracks, radio, public address, and signaling systems, stations, and equipment depots. Signing of the agreement is set for next month.

There was a time when MRT3 was down to running only seven trains and there was at least one breakdown a day, stranding hundreds of passengers in between stations. In

the last few months, MRT3 has been able to increase the number of trains to 15, carrying 405,000 passengers a day.

A new maintenance provider nominated by JICA is expected to start working this month and it is hoped the number of running trains will reach 20, capable of carrying 540,000 passengers a day.

At the end of the 43-month rehabilitation that was agreed upon last week, MRT3 should be back to its original designed capacity of 600,000 riders a day. That would take a huge load off Metro Manila's jammed roads and highways.