

# OPINION & FEATURES

## Running out of time



**T**HE United Nations-backed Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a major report with grim predictions about global warming for the coming decades last February 2007. Based on IPCC's recent track record, the predictions will be no exaggeration.

As defined by National Geographic, global warming, or climate change, is a subject that shows no sign of cooling down.

And it is—and has been—happening, as the planet is already showing many signs of worldwide climate change.

Are we causing it? "Very likely," the IPCC said in its February 2007 report.

The report, based on the work of some 2,500 scientists in more than 130 countries, also concluded that humans have caused all or most of the current planetary warming. Human-caused global warming is often called "anthropogenic climate change."

Some of these causes include industrialization, deforestation, and pollution have greatly increased atmospheric concentrations of wa-

ter vapor, carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide, all greenhouse gases that help trap heat near Earth's surface.

We have the means to drastically cut greenhouse gas emissions and avoid the catastrophic consequences of global warming, a major climate report released recently concludes.

While we do not discount the fact that the financial crisis and turmoil happening to the country today is important, we should always remember that the Earth is the only place we have to live in. Ignoring the signs of climate change could be the end of the planet and the species—and we wouldn't want that to happen. We still can do something about it, but fast—as we are running out of time. (AJPress)

## Chicago, Philippines

**T**HE much-anticipated indictment of Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich for corruption underscores the stark similarities between that state, which most Filipinos know better as the state of Al Capone's Chicago, and the Philippines. It also highlights the stark difference.

The similarities struck me when I read an item by *Associated Press* reporter, Sharon Cohen, which came out in Sunday's *San Francisco Chronicle*:

"More than 25 years ago, a visiting small-town judge stashed a tape recorder in his cowboy boots and came away with shocking evidence of bribe-taking and bagmen in Chicago's courts.

"Former Judge Brocton Lockwood was part of an unprecedented FBI sting operation in the Cook County courts called 'Operation 'Greyford' that uncovered judges, lawyers and clerks taking cash, fixing cases and engaging in other brazen judicial corruption.

"The case is a stark example of the corruption that has become a cottage industry in Illinois and contributed to its long history of scoundrels and scandals. Last week, there was an addition to the list. Gov. Rod Blagojevich's arrest on charges that he schemed to auction off President-elect Barack Obama's open Senate seat."

Cohen wrote further: "What is it about Illinois that seems to breed political corruption, and why hasn't anyone been able to do anything about it?"

"Corruption and graft have become so entrenched over the decades that they've become part of the political culture, and experts cite a list of reasons why: Weak state campaign finance laws that have allowed influence peddlers to make big contributions, Lawmakers who don't always get close scrutiny. A patronage system that makes employees beholden to political bosses. And a jaded public that seems to accept chicanery as the cost of doing business."

And Cohen delivered one kick on the butt of countries like the Philippines: "In some ways, Illinois kind of reminds you of Third

World countries where everyone knows to get things done, you have to bribe someone every step of the way."

That's the similarity. The difference is that, even in Illinois, the powerful political bad guys get caught, handcuffed, indicted, kicked out of office and thrown in jail.

In our country, the bad guys get reelected forever to the legislature, the governorships and the presidency.

Okay, okay, in the Philippines bad presidents also get thrown out of office—but only to be replaced by bad equally bad presidents. Sometimes worse.

The similarities go further. Chicago is the only US city I know that showcases a gangster as a tourist attraction. It actually takes pride in Al Capone as part of its history.

But the Philippines would have been a better haven for Scarface. First of all, Elliot Ness' Untouchables would have gotten nowhere in our country of Uncatchables. Secondly, Capone could have run for president and won.

Well, at least, in a manner of speaking.

We're the only country I know of that elected a president and a senator for playing gangster roles in movies. Asyong Salonga alias Joseph Estrada became president and Nardong Putik aka Ramon R evilla became senator, remember?

But 20it is a fact that people, whose uncatchable criminal records would put Capone to shame, control many of our cities and provinces. And if audio recording devices like that used by Judge Brocton Lockwood were to be given any credence, the snake pit called Malacañang (a description coined Imee Marcos) would yield a treasure house of criminal indictments.

Did Illinois' Blagojevich scheme to auction of a mere Senate seat? That's small time. Tape-recorded conversations tell us about a scheme to buy and steal a presidential seat.

But that's where the stark difference lies. The FBI can actually conduct stings that catch political criminals red-handed and when the U.S. justice system takes over the case, a serious effort to prosecute is actually undertaken.

What happens in the Philippines is a sick joke. In the first place, anyone who attempts an FBI-style sting will most likely end up assassinated—or, if lucky, fired and sent off into hiding.

But the sick joke part of it (as in Joc-Joc) is that the public official who is widely exposed in the media for corruption or, worse yet, for plunder never gets handcuffed (any cop or NBI agent who tries that would lose his job) or thrown in jail. The culprit is hailed before a Senate investigating committee where the principal objective of the inquisitors is to gain reams of publicity preparatory to running for the senate or the presidency.

And what's the end game in such a Senate investigation? You can expect any of the following scenarios.

**One**—The Supreme Court gets into the act and grants the culprit the right to observe the Code of Omerta aka Executive Privilege.

**Two**—The opinion of the current Secretary of Justice is sought and he promptly declares the accused innocent and the victim of a vindictive political opposition.

**Three**—The case is submitted to the Office of the Ombudsman which is a sort of Purgatory where the accused neither goes to heaven nor to hell. He just remains there waiting for either St. Peter or the Devil to make a move.

**Four**—It is tried by the Sandigan Bayan, there to be adjudicated in the near or distant future, take your pick.

**Five**—The Senate Red Ribbon Committee loses interest and so do the press and the public as they all get excited over a new and more sensational case, from which reams of publicity can be generated, preparatory to running for the senate or the presidency.

It should be clarified that those are the scenarios for lesser officials like Joc-Joc Bolante or Garci Garcillano. It's different when you're president and have control of a lapdog Congress.

After all the sound and the fury resulting from impeachment filings and rallies and demonstrations and Senate hearings and Church sermons and condemnations and reams of newspaper reports and hours of TV coverages and radio commentaries Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is not just safely lodged in her presidential seat, she's reported to be scheming to remain there indefinitely.

Poor Blagojevich. Despite clinging to his seat in the face of the public outcry, there's no other way but out office for him and, most likely, a jail term. If he only knew, he would wish he were a Philippine official instead. ■



**STREET TALK**

Greg B. Macabenta

## The carols of Christmas

**Y**OU know it's the start of the Christmas season when you hear Christmas carols being played everywhere. In the past, carols were only played over the airwaves during the start of December; and Christmas caroling (also known as wassailing in olden times, in which groups of singers travel from house to house, singing carols for which they are rewarded with gifts, money or food), only commence during the start of *Misa del Gallo*. Today, because of too much commercialization, Christmas carols can now be heard being played over the airwaves even as early as September!

The tradition of Christmas carols goes as far back as the 13<sup>th</sup> century and were first sung in Europe. The word "carol" or "carole" is a medieval word that actually means "dance" or "a song of praise and joy." Carols were originally communal songs meant for celebrations like harvest tide as well as Christmas. Event-ually, carols began to be sung in churches, and to be associated specifically with Christmas. As time passed, carols suffered a decline in popularity and almost disappeared entirely. A revival of interest during the 19th century, however, brought carols back to prominence. Now, the celebration of Christmas just wouldn't be the same without the joyous and heavenly sound of carols filling the air.

Traditionally, carols have often been based on medieval chord patterns, and it is this characteristic that gives them their unique musical sound. During the 14<sup>th</sup> century, carols became a popular religious song form with its themes usually dealing with saints, the Christ child or the Virgin Mary. By the 15th century, carols were written and

elaborately arranged and began to be considered also as art music. However, it is said that the birthplace of the true Christmas carol was Italy. It was St. Francis of Assisi who was the first to introduce the joyous carol spirit, when he wrote a beautiful Christmas hymn in Latin, in the 13th century. The carol quickly spread all over Europe.

Here in the Philippines, carols have become an important part of the Filipino Christmas tradition. Although we have inherited this practice from our foreign forefathers, caroling has been adapted to fit the nature and personality of our people. The celebration of Christmas in the Philippines is one of the longest and merriest in the world. Together with the *Misa del Gallo*, the *noche buena*, and the *parol*; caroling completes the warm and festive atmosphere of Christmas in the Philippines. Another feast that is commemorated during the Christmas season is the Feast of the Holy Innocents, which should rightfully be dedicated to the streetchildren.

We have many beautiful Christmas carols like *Pasko Na Naman*, *Sa May Bahay Ang Aming Bati*, but one of my all-time fa-



e n -  
Ay Sumapit.

vorite Christmas carols is the one composed by National Artist for Music and Literature Levi Celerio, titled *Ang Pasko*. It was beautifully very meaningful about the com- and the love and another even if it is not Christmas time. Indeed, Christmas should always be about true devotion to faith and family. This, perhaps, is what sets us Filipinos apart; and what makes Christmas in the Philippines so endearing. (Philstar.com)



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