

OPINION & FEATURES

Christmas is in our hearts

MOST of us are looking for some sort of a sign this Christmas—something that could calm our fears about what lies ahead, given the unsure situation the country is facing today.

We have seen the signs—thousands losing their homes, their jobs, shoppers cutting down their Christmas lists and people who just see the holiday season as a bleak one. Yes, probably at one point or another, a lot have asked if Christmas still exists.

But we would like to remain optimistic. It's a reality we all have to face—times may be hard, but Christmas and its spirit of love, faith and hope will always endure, not only during the season, but the whole year round.

So as we look for answers, and as we try to search for Christmas and its true meaning in these troubled times, we must be reminded that our focus should not be on what we don't have today. Christ was born in a manger, with hardly any possessions. And yet His birth is a symbol of hope for all Christians.

Christmas is also about sharing more than material things. It is embracing its true meaning, and knowing that it should always be in our hearts.

We at *Asian Journal* wish all our readers a blessed Christmas. May this season be filled with love for one another, faith that we will be able to endure these trying times and hope that the next year will hold a better life for all of us.

Maligayang Pasko! (AJPress)



AP Photo

EDITORIAL

Front-runners

ONE paper, the other day, headlined an item about the Movement for Good Governance (MGG). This is a citizen's movement aiming to influence the outcome of the 2010 elections by consolidating within its fold 10 million voters willing to participate as a bloc.

The people associated with this movement, including former Finance undersecretary Milwida Guevarra, are well-respected in the community. The movement itself is a novelty. It is, by far, the most notable attempt by ordinary citizens to break into patterns of traditional politics.

MGG presents itself as the rallying point for the widespread public disgust over politics-as-usual, with its propensity for money politics and dependence on the oligarchic powerbrokers. The reception to this initiative has, so far, been warm. In the e-groups I participate in, individuals are readily volunteering to work for this movement.

But the movement itself remains nebulous. It represents an ideal, but has not moved ahead to recommend the personalities who will embody these ideals.

In our personality-driven electoral culture, that might seem to be putting the cart ahead of the horse. The way we have done things in the past is for the lead personalities to emerge first and the political campaigns build up around those personalities.

Since MGG is without precedent, we have no way of determining at this point its prospects. It is running against the traditional wind flow of Filipino politics.

At the moment, the name of the game is still top-of-mind voter choices.

In the US, the presidential contest begins with party primaries where voters affiliated with one or the other major party conduct

voting to select their respective standard-bearers. That is how the presidential contenders emerge.

In the Philippines, we have a largely informal and unorganized process. Potential candidates are "rated" through privately commissioned surveys. Those who score well in the surveys begin to attract financing support, enabling them to push ahead of the others even more. They are eventually "nominated" by one or the other registered political parties.

In the first quarter of this year, vital decisions will be made all around. Interest groups will begin affiliating with the emerging front-runners. Potential candidates will begin meeting with electoral "investors," cutting deals to help finance campaigns.

Those who rate high in the popularity surveys are considered more "bankable." It would be worthwhile for electoral "investors" to risk some money to benefit their campaigns. These are favors extended for which some return might be expected when the candidate acquires power.

The state of play at the moment shows three candidates leading the pack of potential presidential candidates. These are: Sen. Loren Legarda, Vice President Noli de Castro and former Senate President Manuel Villar.

In one survey conducted between October 14-27 by Pulse Asia, a hypothetical tandem with Legarda running for president and Sen. Francis Escudero as vice-president was preferred by 28% of respondents. Comparatively, a hypothetical tandem with Sen. Manuel Roxas running for president and Sen. Francis Pangilinan as vice-president was preferred by 10% of respondents.

In that survey, a reversal of roles between Legarda and Escudero, with the latter at the top of the ticket, would be preferred by only 20% of respondents. That is significantly lower than if Legarda led the ticket.

In an earlier survey, conducted between July 1-4 this year, that compared top-of-mind preference among respondents for hypo-

thetical tandems produce the following: a Legarda-Escudero tandem rated 40%, a Villar-de Castro tandem garnered 26% and a Roxas-Pangilinan tandem 13%.

That survey also tested individual presidential contenders pitted against a hypothetical field.

In a three-way contest, Legarda rated 37% while both Villar and de Castro turned in 29% apiece.

In a five-way contest, Legarda took 27%, de Castro 24%, Villar 23%, Lacson 13% and Roxas 10%.

In an eight-way contest, Legarda ekes out 27%, de Castro and Villar are tied at 20%, Escudero takes 17%, Lacson 9%, Roxas 7%, Makati mayor Jejomar Binay 3% and MMDA chair Bayani Fernando 1%.

Remember that all the ratings quoted above are merely top-of-mind voter preferences. They do not include political organization, party support or grassroots capacity. But they are not unimportant. These ratings guide other decision-makers who will figure in the selection of candidates and the electoral coalitions that might emerge.

The Pulse Asia numbers allow Legarda to make a case before her political party—the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC)—that she, more than Escudero, is the more viable standard bearer. That is assuming, of course, that the NPC itself decides to field candidates independent of the broader multi-party coalition it is now part of.

If the MGG turns out to be a dud, or fails to gather support beyond its native middle-class base which constitutes only 3% of the voting population, then the traditional game of personality-based electoral alliances will continue as usual. Should that turn out to be the case, those now leading the popularity ratings, will likely play leading roles in shaping the alliances for 2010.

The first quarter of the new year should determine whether a new dynamic will dawn in our electoral politics. (*Philstar.com*)



FIRST PERSON
Alex Magno

Sock and awe

T'S hilarious and not a little heartwarming that Muntadhar al-Zeidi's famous stunt should have taken on the proportions of a monster hit worldwide. There's now a Web game called *Sock and Awe* that allows visitors to throw shoes at George W. Bush.

Sock and Awe is of course a take-off from "shock and awe," the B-movie-type title the Bush government gave its strategy for invading Iraq. It is no small irony that all the missiles the US threw at the Iraqis to grind them to submission have proven less potent than the ones Al-Zeidi threw at Bush during a press conference. Those have detonated with a force of several megatons, if only in the mind, but which is where the real battles take place.

And proven that Allah is not without a great sense of humor. The American "liberation" began with Iraqis removing their shoes and beating Saddam Hussein's fallen statue with them. It ended with an Iraqi journalist removing his shoes and throwing them at George W. Bush.

Quite incidentally, Al-Zeidi's shoes may have missed their mark, but not so the shoes that have been thrown at Bush in *Sock and Awe*. The site reports that Bush has already been hit by 21 million visitors. In the end, Al-Zeidi's missiles may have found their mark after all.

I've been wracking my brains the last few days trying to find out what kinds of acts or gestures carry the same weight of contempt or derision in our culture. Eduardo Ermita of course is right to say it's not likely shoe-throwing would happen here, even if he is wrong about the reasons for it.

While at that, he should thank his lucky stars there's no ambassador of an independent Iraq here to protest his words in the way the Thai ambassador protested Anthony Golez's words some weeks

ago. Golez said the rallies that ousted the Thai premier could not happen here because we Filipinos "have become more mature," a thing the Thai ambassador greatly minded for suggesting infantilism on their part when the characteristic was more patently to be seen here. Ermita himself said no one would throw shoes at his boss because "We Filipinos are different; we are more decent." Well, foot-in-mouth disease can always be remedied by the shoe-in-mouth cure.

But he is right to say that we are not likely to throw our shoes at GMA. That is so not because we value GMA but because we value our shoes. Imelda's fetish with shoes is not an accident. We share the culture of many poor countries where wearing shoes, particularly in impoverished villages, takes on the aspect of a humongous advancement in status. The last thing we are likely to part with, even to express loathing, is our shoes.

Far more importantly, the act carries no weight of absolute denigration in our culture. It's more droll or kwela than derisive or spiteful. We have to look for other equivalents. I do know that Winston Garcia once provoked an epidemic of coughing at the CCP when *Spoliarium* played there. He introduced the play (his big mistake), talked interminably (his bigger mistake), and defended his policy of using SSS money to buy Luna paintings (his biggest mistake). One person in the audience coughed. Another picked up the virus. Before long the whole theater was rocked by coughing of various loudness and signs of distress.

Its downside however is that it may be ignored by the speaker. Which Garcia did, plodding on despite the hostile reception. But maybe if the coughing were done to an extent that suggests people about to disgorge the contents of their stomach, it can daunt the dauntless, or kapalmuks.

Yet another tack might be to use something we Filipinos commonly do, though not always to express derision. That is to produce the sound, "Pssst!" when hailing someone. Foreigners have always

been amused, if not taken aback, by it. It does tend to reduce the hailed to a lowly state, the hailer often using it on waiters, jeepney drivers, itinerant cigarette vendors and the like. I certainly wouldn't mind an epidemic of *psssting* whenever our public officials talk, GMA first and last, the collective sound resembling either a hissing sound or the word "shit."

Feel free to jump in and contribute your two-cents' worth. The point is that for all its seeming simplicity—or simplemindedness—as his detractors depict it—Al-Zeidi's act has added mightily to the tradition of protest. It's not altogether a pale echo of civil disobedience and similar efforts. Henceforth, oppressors may not count on the rules of civility they so brazenly trespass by their deeds if not by their words to keep them safe from harm, or insulated from insult. The oppressed have a right—and duty—to make their oppressors feel unwelcome.

The charity group, Wa Attassimou, of Tripoli has a most interesting thing to say about what Al-Zeidi has done. They were giving him a medal, they said, "because what he did represents a victory for human rights across the world." A strange thing to say at first glance, the act not being a defense of the right to speak, assemble, live freely, or even just live at all but one that irate US and Iraqi officials call an offense against civility. But that is only at first glance. At second glance, it does strike a blow for human rights in that it gives a weapon to the oppressed, in that it empowers the powerless.

It may seem to go against the spirit of Christmas, particularly in light of Christianity's injunction that when someone strikes you in one cheek, give him the other cheek. But reminding yourself that Jesus Christ himself flailed angrily at the merchants in the temple, you can appreciate the recent lesson taught by a Muslim from a land Allah has not entirely forgot. And say:

When someone strikes you in one cheek, strike back with your shoes. (*Inquirer.net*)



THERES THE RUB
Conrado de Quiros



Main Office:
1150 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90017-1904
Tel: (213) 250-9797 • Fax: (213) 481-0854
e-mail: info@asianjournalinc.com
http://www.asianjournal.com

Northern California:
841 San Bruno Avenue West, Suites. 12-14
San Bruno, CA 94066
Tel.: (650) 583-6818 • Fax: (650) 583-6819

Las Vegas Sales Office:
3700 W. Desert Inn Road
Las Vegas, Nevada 89102
Tel.: (702) 792-6678 • Fax: (702) 792-6879

Manila Office:
Suite 208, The Manila Bank Corp. Bldg.
6772 Ayala Ave., Makati City 1226
Tel.: (632) 893-1720 • Telefax: (632) 813-8746

New York and New Jersey:
5 Penn Plaza, Ste. 1932, New York, NY 10119
Tel.: (212) 655-5426 • Fax: (212) 655-9241

2500 Plaza Five, Harborside Financial Center,
Jersey City, NJ 07311
Tel.: (201) 484-7249 • Fax: (201) 484-7201

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