

OPINION & FEATURES

ON OAV AND DUAL CITIZENSHIP

Yes, we can

GUEST EDITORIAL

SOME four years ago, the Overseas Absentee Voting Act and the Dual Citizenship Act were passed by the Philippine Congress and signed into law by President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. The first enabled overseas Filipino immigrants to vote in Philippine elections. The second allowed those of us who had become naturalized citizens of other countries to reacquire Philippine citizenship and, thus, enjoy the right of suffrage, among other rights.

We who live in America lobbied long and hard to have both laws passed. We said we wanted to alleviate poverty, stimulate national development and change the culture of corruption and incompetence in government. We demanded a say in the way the country was being run, because we were keeping its economy afloat with our billions in dollar remittances. And we argued that our voting potential, numbering in the millions, could place honest, competent and dedicated leaders in office and bring about a renaissance in the Philippines.

But what has happened when we were finally given the right to vote? Of the millions that make up the overseas Filipino population, only a few disappointing thousands have bothered to register and even fewer actually voted in the last Philippine elections.

Many reasons have been given for this. Stringent election rules and requirements. The belief that our votes would not be counted anyway in an electoral process notorious for cheating. The cynical view that the incumbent rascals would simply be replaced by a new set of thieves and incompetents.

But weren't these the very reasons why we demanded our rights as citizens? Didn't we insist that our enlightened votes could change the status quo?

As strangers in a foreign land, we have dared uncertainties and challenges and have become masters of our own destiny. Should we now become defeatists in the face of a challenge that we are perfectly capable of confronting?

In only a few months, a crucial election will take place. In May 2010, a new president will be elected, amidst increasing poverty and growing unrest among the masses and allegations of rampant corruption, extra-judicial killings and abuse of power. Once more we are being asked, as overseas Filipino citizens, to participate in the electoral process and help achieve the reforms that our country desperately needs.

It is not enough to send money. Not enough to criticize and complain. Let us not turn a deaf ear to the pleas of our country and people. Let us perform our sacred duty as Filipino citizens. Let us wield the Power of the Overseas Vote.

Yes, we can elect competent and honest public officials if we cast our votes wisely. Yes, we can make our votes count by being vigilant and involved. Yes, we can help lift the Philippines from its miserable state.

The last day of registration to vote in the 2010 presidential elections is on August 31. Let us all register and vote.

We can do it. Yes, we can! (Greg Macabenta)



Philstar.com Photo

US ready to intervene to ensure clean, free RP polls

THE Obama administration has signaled the strongest message yet that the United States is prepared to intervene to ensure free and clean elections in the Philippines next year.

Speaking to reporters at the US Embassy celebration of July 4th on Thursday, US Ambassador Kristie Kenney said "a postponement of the general elections next year will be a cause for concern in Washington."

This was the bluntest expression of Washington's concern over the holding of the May 2010 elections, which has created considerable doubts in the country in the face of mixed signals from the Arroyo administration. Kenney could not have been more emphatic.

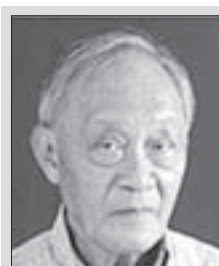
She unveiled the brass knuckles without the diplomatic niceties. "We believe elections are a good way of renewing democracy," Kenney reminded Filipinos in a statement that left no doubt that Washington wanted to see a change of administration in next year's elections.

US concerns over Philippine elections were expressed in the midst of the near-collapse last week of a project of the Commission of Elections (Comelec) to automate the counting of votes to eliminate large-scale rigging of results.

The collapse was averted on Friday, when partners in the consortium that won the contract to undertake the poll automation project resolved their differences and agreed to sign a joint-venture contract under pressure from the Comelec.

Kenney's statement came a few weeks after US Defense Secretary Robert Gates visited Manila for a few hours. According to press reports, Gates said Washington expected elections to push through in May 2010.

Unease
Washington's unease over the uncertainty of



ANALYSIS

Amador Doronila

Philippine elections has been fueled by efforts of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's congressional allies to amend the Constitution to pave the way for a shift to the parliamentary system that would allow Ms Arroyo to extend her term beyond 2010.

Washington's interventionist mood was underscored by the fact that US President Barack Obama marked Independence Day by calling for a revival of the American "spirit" to confront and resolve problems.

"We are not a people who fear the future," Obama said. "We are a people who make it. We need to summon the same spirit that inhabited Independence Hall 133 years ago on July 6."

Last month, the US president responded to criticism that he was too mild in reacting to the crackdown on protests of opposition groups claiming that the hardline Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stole the June 12 election through massive fraud.

Obama called on the Iranian government "to stop all violent and unjust actions against its own people. The universal rights to assembly and free speech must be respected, and the United States stands with all who seek to exercise those rights."

Ready to denounce cheaters
This tough statement indicates how far the Obama administration is ready to move to denounce measures by any regime to crack down on opposition groups being cheated in elections.

Echoing this theme, Ambassador Kenney told reporters that Washington was not concerned only over the postponement of Philippine elections.

She also emphasized that Americans believed in term limits. US officials have pointed out that in the 233-year history of the United States, it never failed to hold elections even during the Civil War.

They noted that although President Franklin D. Roosevelt served four terms, the United States imposed a two-term limit that has been followed by succeeding presidents.

The gravity of Washington's message did not go unnoticed by the Arroyo administration. It immediately issued a statement from Arroyo, who has been angling for a meeting with Obama this year, after three failed attempts.

In a statement for the celebration of Philippine-American Friendship Day on July 4, Arroyo assured the US government that elections would be held as scheduled next year.

"The ties that bind our nations are strong. They are based on family, a shared history and a common commitment to democratic values," Arroyo said.

There is doubt that this statement would reassure Washington that elections would not be postponed. It's also clear that the Obama administration will not turn a blind eye to any attempt by the Arroyo administration to either cancel the elections or rig them in favor of its candidates.

Constituent assembly
The Obama administration is also expected not to countenance the use by Malacañang of its congressional allies to ram through Congress a House resolution convening it into a constituent assembly to approve constitutional amendments for a shift to the parliamentary system.

The uncertainty over Arroyo's plans for the elections next year is causing a lot of uneasiness and political instability in the Philippines. She has earned a pariah status in the Obama

administration that has kept her at arm's length, as the US president is reshaping his foreign policy priorities and reexamining his policy with the Philippines.

In plain words, the Arroyo administration, which is now engulfed by corruption scandals, is under close observation in Washington and enjoys little confidence in the White House.

The Obama administration, in its present mood relative to the Philippines and to countries with regimes curtailing free elections, cannot be less inclined than previous US administrations to intervene in the Philippines against attempts to rig the 2010 polls to extend Arroyo's stay in power.

This article is not a brief for US intervention in our elections. Should Arroyo tamper with the 2010 elections, there are more than enough countervailing forces that will try to thwart cheating.

Popular movements
In an electoral crisis, the United States would no doubt come in to support popular movements and knock out legitimacy from regimes about to fall.

That happened in EDSA I in 1986. Washington pulled out its support for Ferdinand Marcos after it became clear that he rigged the presidential election and that people power had swept him out of Malacañang.

Obama no doubt would come in to deliver the last blow in the event of tumult over election rigging after outraged Filipinos had done the job of expelling incumbents from Malacañang.

This time, however, we are not sure if Obama would come in to the rescue to offer asylum, as President Ronald Reagan did when he ordered the US Air Force to snatch Marcos and family from the howling mob, and hijacked them to Honolulu.

Will Obama do that for Arroyo? (Inquirer.net)

Madame Imelda and Tita Cory

IT'S NOT so difficult to imagine that more than 40 years ago, many Filipinos were enamored with Imelda Marcos. This was during the first campaign for the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos, and Pinoys, still reeling from the Camelot presidency of Jack and Jackie Kennedy cruelly cut short by an assassin, thought they found a local counterpart in Ferdie and Meldy.

Meldy especially mined her celebrity power: tall and fair, winsome of face, winning crowds over with her singing.

I remember the thrill that ran through our neighborhood in Alaminos, Pangasinan (elections coincided with summer vacations) when news spread that the Marcoses might be making a pit stop in our town. The adults lined the main street, while we kids looked out of the huge windows of my lola's house overlooking the plaza. All through the sweltering afternoon, we peered out into the blazing hot sunshine, craning our necks for any sign of a motorcade.

Finally, a long trail of cars whizzed by, raising dust and a sigh of expectation from the crowd. But the cars did not stop; they were behind schedule and were expected in the next town. Our



AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

one chance of catching a glimpse of Meldy evaporated with the heat that floated from the ground.

Nevertheless, my parents not only voted but actively campaigned for Marcos. They were die-hard Nacionalistas, and even if Marcos was a mere turncoat who had left the Liberals when it was clear that Diosdado Macapagal would not give way and seek re-election,

they were driven not just by party loyalty but a sincere belief in the man, no, the couple.

When my sister and I found activism in the early 1970s, dinners at home, when we were home, would be tense affairs punctuated by debates over the Marcoses and the problems of the nation. You can guess which side our parents took, but when Marcos declared martial law even they had to admit that the President and his increasingly powerful First Lady had crossed a line.

It was Cory Aquino who finally weaned Filipinos from their fascination for the Imeldific. While Cory's husband Ninoy pursued his political ambitions, she chose to keep a low profile, keeping close to home and looking after the

family. She was thus a largely unknown entity when she came home in August 1983 after her husband's assassination. She was as far from the Imeldific model as a Filipina could be: quiet and plain, basically unadorned, so soft-spoken her young daughter Kris did much of the talking for her.

It seemed quite a long shot that this retiring, unassuming woman would pick up the mantle of the opposition dropped by Ninoy. I remember raising an eyebrow at a story in Veritas, the "alternative" paper I was writing for, about a Makati rally in which Cory for the first time emerged as an opposition figure. Cries of "Cory!" "Cory!" filled the air, the story went, and I rolled my eyes at the editor's conceit of seeing a mandate for Cory where none existed.

But I was wrong, it turns out (so sue me). When the other (male) opposition leaders couldn't reach a consensus, it seemed only Cory had both the credibility and charisma to unite the warring factions, and so she emerged the unlikely, unexpected candidate in the snap election called by Marcos.

Many times during that campaign, we would despair of ever turning Cory Aquino into the flamboyant fire-brand that Filipino voters seemed to hanker for. Young reporters would enter the

newsroom imitating Cory's monotone, especially when she would trot out the portion of her speech that would begin "Nung nabubuhay pa si Ninoy... [When Ninoy was still alive]."

Imelda was older, but kept a firm grip on her image, telling the media that Filipinos loved her because she stood for "the true, the good and the beautiful." Her husband, meanwhile, denigrated his opponent's sex, coming out with ads in which a woman intoned that she was "only" a woman and belonged in the bedroom (imagine that!).

But it seems that either the Filipino electorate had matured, or had grown sick of the high-wattage glamour of an Imelda. Crowds chanted Cory's name, and snapped up cute "Cory" dolls with the distinctive curly top and wire frame glasses.

On a personal note, she even outdid Imelda, dropping by Alaminos and paying a visit to my lola's house (the local opposition had convinced my aunt to host Cory), partaking of lunch of her favorite rellenong alimango.

Many times during her administration, Cory was compared unfavorably to the Imeldific, scored for her alleged lack of refinement, her seeming disdain for the things Imelda treasured, including the status of patroness of the

arts. But still, Cory kept her grip on the people's hearts. An indication was that, while Imelda would always be referred to as "Madame," Cory became everybody's aunt, "Tita Cory" even to those not even remotely related to her.

In the news recently were twin stories on Imelda and Cory. The former President had taken a turn for the worse, but her family assured that she had begun to eat though her condition remained "delicate." It also happened to be Imelda's birthday, and a still sharp-looking Meldy paused long enough from her "party" with the urban poor to say she was praying for Cory.

It's enough to give you pause, to reflect on the vagaries of fate and destiny, image and character, and the still-unresolved dispute of what makes for better iconic status: terno or callado.

In public life, one can go for dazzling the masses, blinding them with glamour, bling and boyfriends. Or one can take the opposite route, underwhelming with simplicity, yet winning with sincerity and courage.

Madame Imelda can still walk into a room and silence it by her mere presence. But Tita Cory can move a nation. (Inquirer.net)



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