

OPINION & FEATURES

Speak no evil

PRESIDENT Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is all set to deliver her State of the Nation Address on July 27.

Speaker Jose de Venecia, Jr. alleges that the Chief Executive will use this opportunity "to convene a constituent assembly and introduce amendments to the Constitution," says Philstar.com.

Senators Francis Pangilinan, Panfilo Lacson, Aquilino Pimentel Jr., and Mar Roxas have already expressed their intentions to boycott this year's SONA, despite assurances from Speaker Prospero Nograles that "there is no factual and/or legal basis for this unnecessary warning from the former Speaker."

"The former Speaker should not unduly alarm and agitate the public about outrageous scenarios for convening a constituent assembly which we do not believe is within the contemplation of the present House leadership and certainly not in the Palace agenda," aired Presidential Adviser for Political Affairs Gabriel Claudio over Speaker de Venecia's allegations.

Meanwhile, Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile warned that he would adjourn the session if any representative makes a move to

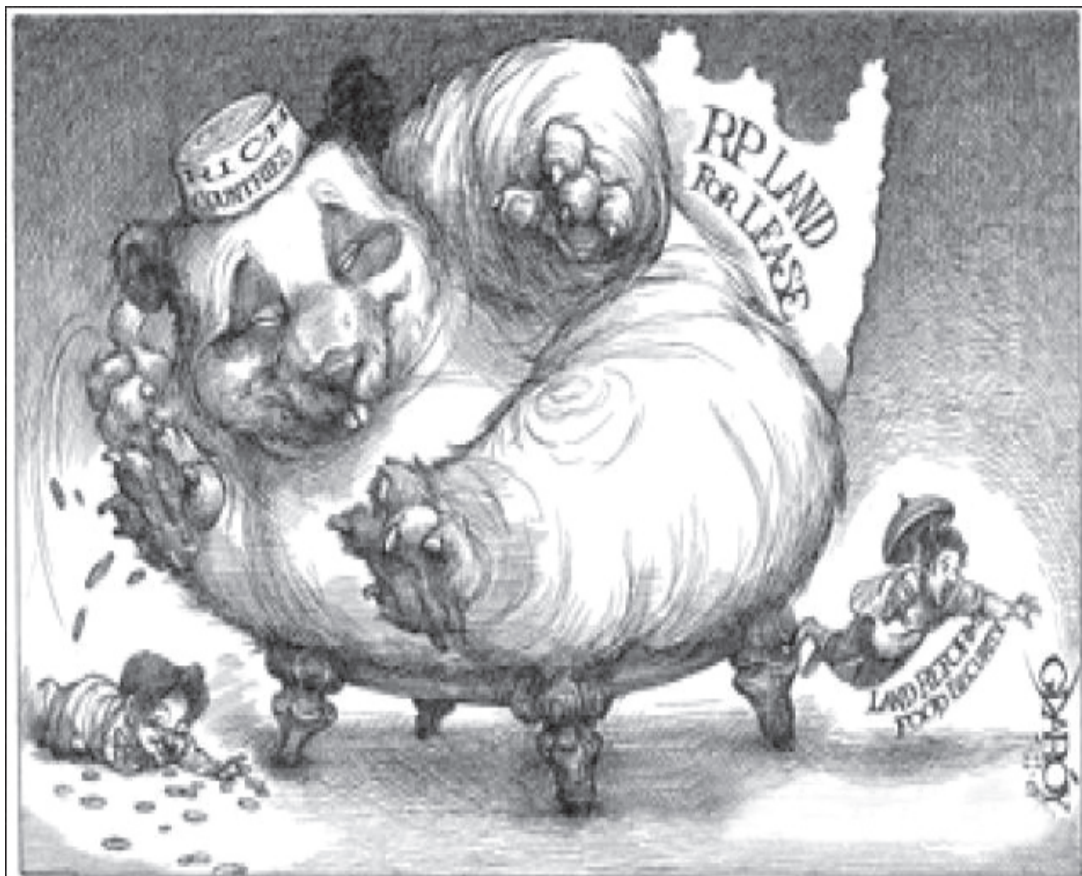
convene a constituent assembly after the President has delivered her address.

It's a raging battle between the Senate and the House of Representatives at this point.

And who could blame the senators for their paranoia? With House Resolution 1109 envisioning a joint vote on the amendments among the two legislative chambers, the 265 members of the lower house would easily outlook the 24 members of the Senate.

Whatever the outcome of Pres. Arroyo's SONA may be, one thing is certain – the Senate vs. Congress factionalism is causing so much conflict and political unrest among our government leaders. Even before Pres. Arroyo could deliver her speech, it's already crystal-clear what the state of our nation has become. (AJPress)

EDITORIAL



Inquirer.net

RP tourism gets needed push

THE Subterranean River Natural Park in Puerto Princesa, Palawan is inching its way into the list of the new "Seven Wonders of the World" after clinching a spot in the top 77 nominees through a worldwide campaign. If ever it does make the list, that would mean a whole lot of good things for the Philippines. Aside from being a historical milestone, having one of the "Wonders" is sure to boost our country's reputation as a prime tourist destination.

The importance of tourism to a nation's economy undeniably has the most impact in terms of its multiplier effect. In fact, most countries rely on their tourism industry to spur economic growth and to generate revenues for their governments. And this is exactly what keeps the Republic of Maldives afloat through these years since becoming an independent state in 1965 after years of British rule.

I have these good impressions about Maldives in my most recent trip there under the auspices of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). I was part of the media group that covered the mission in Maldives led by Sen. Loren Legarda as the UNISDR "champion" for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.



COMMONSENSE
Marichu A. Villanueva

About 60 percent of the gross domestic product of Maldives is generated by its tourism industry. The number of tourist arrivals in Maldives average at more than 600,000 a year, or this is double the number of their population.

When Maldives was struck by the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2006, Chinese kung-fu actor Jet Li who starred in some Hollywood action movies was on vacation with his family in one of the resort islands there. Jet Li and his family survived their harrowing experience but it did not stop them from going back to Maldives to spend their family vacation there.

Thus, it's no surprise why the Maldivian government has been aggressive in trying to bring in to their country foreign investors to bankroll the development of their islands into tourist resorts. Maldives has about 1,192 islands but only 200 are inhabited while the rest are just plain islands surrounded by blue lagoons, atolls and vast protected coral reefs and marine areas.

We were taken to Banyan Tree that operates one of the island beach resorts in Maldives. As I gathered, Banyan Tree is also putting up one tourist resort in our very own Palawan.

There is no direct flight from Manila to Maldives but we flew there via Singapore. The tiny island state of Singapore is another very excellent example of a fast-growing economy in the South East Asian region. Before becoming the impressive city-state that it is on July 20, it was a British colony also struggling for independence. It took a great leader like Lee Kuan Yew, who dared to dream for economic prosperity and to transform Singapore into one of the most powerful island nations in Asia on July 20. Now, Singapore's "new look" has astounded the world, that apart from its bullish economy brought about by foreign direct investments, it has become a prime tourist destination in the Asian region.

This reality tells us how much tourism changes and improves the lives of the people as the chief engine of a nation's economic growth. Though our beloved Philippines is endowed with rich natural resources and world-class tourist attractions, our government has barely tapped the full potentials of tourism.

Even months after President Arroyo had already signed into law the Tourism Act of 2009, we have yet to see the implementing rules and regulations of this landmark piece of legislation pushed in Congress by the indefatigable Sen. Richard "Dick" Gordon. Being a former Tourism Secretary himself, Gordon knows where he speaks from in

his criticisms against the government's lackadaisical attitude in implementing an aggressive tourism campaign for the country.

Fortunately, we have people like Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (Pagcor) chairman and chief executive officer Efraim Genuino who is spearheading a Philippine tourism infrastructure project that would help sell the country abroad as a choice place for family vacation, nature trips, conventions and adventure travels. Genuino deserves credit in pursuing this flagship project of the government to build the "Bagong Nayong Pilipino-Entertainment City Manila."

Considered to be the biggest foreign investment in the Philippines, the Entertainment City will feature six-star theme hotels, amusement parks, educational and cultural complexes, shopping malls, a sports stadium, restaurants, convention halls, state-of-the-art theaters, gaming centers, race tracks, residential villages, and other facilities, some of which are either undergoing construction or already existing like Henry Sy's Mall of Asia at the Manila Bay reclamation area.

As what Genuino envisioned, the Entertainment City Manila will not only become a catalyst for economic growth for its "multiplier effect" on both upstream and downstream industries. He firmly believes this flagship project could also become a means of stop-

ping the "brain drain" in our country. We have lost many of our professionals and highly skilled workers to better paying jobs abroad. This has been the downside of deployment of overseas Filipino workers whose remittances have sustained the Philippine economy through these years.

Through this \$15-billion tourism development project, it is projected to create at least 450,000 new jobs. This number is seen to increase once the Entertainment City Manila becomes fully operational.

Genuino says that salaries in the Entertainment City shall be paid in dollars and pay scale will be the equal of those paid by foreign companies. This means that Filipino workers don't need to travel farther than Manila to find a job that pays well. Our professionals overseas may even decide to come back to the Philippines and start what could become a "reverse migration." However, for all that the Entertainment City promises, others are still criticizing the Pagcor chief for being too ambitious.

But with at least two major investors just waiting for the green light to begin construction, those critics might be singing a different tune once they see the first hotels and amusement parks being built. Who knows, Genuino dreams, by the next decade we might have two entries into the Seven Wonders of the World. (Philstar.com)

Age of transition

I NEVER realized that I was born in an age of transition. The myopic mind, attached so much to the narrow self, cannot grasp the nuance of unfettered time. It cannot appreciate history except for selected details, and is not able to flow to the future beyond imaginary images. The myopic mind sees only metered time, as though it were counting the miles traveled by minutes and seconds to measure a taxi fare. Indeed, time is directly proportional to one's level of consciousness.

Fortunately, wisdom does seep in, even among the unwilling. Life is a teacher and insists on a minimum standard of learning. When one stubbornly refuses, life can be quite demanding and severe. Those who adapt quickly to the essentials being taught are not necessarily spared difficulties, but definitely spared the worst impact of those difficulties. The obstinate, though, learn the hard way, and often way too late to avert the inner pain that had to be absorbed along the way.

That inner pain is reflected by fear which haunts the hard-headed. Fear among the worst wrongdoers is not usually obvious because it is often cloaked with raw power and willfulness. The world outside sees only the consistency interpreted as determination, which, when combined with power or wealth, effectively disguise fear. But human behavioral scientists quickly see how the fearful behave when their fears are active, the various ways of coping and compensating.

Born after World War II, baby boomers like me are said to have had a rare moment in hu-



GLIMPSES
Jose Ma. Montelibano

man history. After particularly violent episodes called world wars, a brief respite from global conflict allowed a mini-renaissance. While artists and social scientists may disagree that such a development has been taking place, my own view is that technology found a special moment to grow in dazzling speed and now allows the most refined to be experienced, even virtually, by the majority of mankind. The Renaissance of yore was contained to the elite at that time. The Internet brings it to billions, many of whom may be considered poor.

Because the myopic mind sees mostly what happens to oneself, dramatic change can be happening yet be missed. Changes especially in human consciousness can be substantive but quiet until a trigger makes that change overtly erupt in contrasting behavior. Even societal change of radical proportions can be misread and dismissed as a special event rather than a manifestation of a quantum leap.

For example, in 1986, the world's first known peaceful people-powered revolution toppled a dictatorship in the Philippines. It was a first sign of a collective option for political change, and other people and countries have followed. But ensuing conflicts around the world, and disappointments in post people-powered revolutions, have diffused in human appreciation a grand shift towards more refined means to effect collective, political change.

A continuing manifestation of the transitioning age is the growing awareness of poverty. Indeed,

modern times may have aggravated poverty in many places, but it is clear that the poor have defined most of mankind more than abundance. And poverty had always been accompanied by slavery – which has lessened considerably over the last century. In other words, poverty is more recognized today because it has become more objectionable, not necessarily more massive.

There is a deepening distaste for tyrants where they were simply accepted as strong leaders in the past. And authoritarian or dictatorial governments are viewed as violative of human rights which really never found value among the leading powers of the past. The appreciation of human rights was as rare as legends like Camelot, and the era of the Inquisition carried out by the Catholic Church showed that mankind, indeed, was made to get used to brutality and injustice even in the religious setting.

Power valued secrecy, and the arts of war of the most aggressive of societies in recorded history would consider secrecy as a prime and indispensable strategy. Even the occult world worshiped secrecy and elevated it to sacred levels. Thus, the most powerful weapons of both man and religion were hatched and preserved in the dark and the quiet.

The age of secrecy is now being battered badly by the age of information. This shift cannot be understated or underestimated. This is a 180 degree turn that will yet dictate the future of mankind in an earth-shaking way. Already, I submit that the openness of information and the speed by which it is disseminated has been an effective way of controlling the spread of violence.

In the Philippines, there is a growing wish for change. I call it just a wish at the moment, not yet a demand. The issue is not just the government and those who run it, but people and how they wish to be governed versus how they have been used to be governed. Colonial rule was not exactly a picnic, and a Gloria-Mike Arroyo tandem may not be worse than the king-queen, senior-senora tradition of the last 400 years.

It is the age of information, though, that is acting like a ripening agent for change. The example of how life can be much better is not seen via television only, it is now in cellular phones, too. Those who are marginalized and kept immobile by poverty will feel frustration more deeply when they can see and almost taste the better life. And the young will demand the change with more impatience than their parents.

Politics in the Philippines will experience change, too, in form and substance proportional to the stimuli that is titillating the public, even the poorest among it. What is not easy is to say when even though dramatic, radical change is a foregone conclusion. And it will not affect only politics; it will impact only all governance in all fields. It is a matter of evolution, of the young taking charge.

Woe to those who believe otherwise, that holding on to power by a fading generation is possible. I am extremely struck by what a young man said to his elders recently. He said, "There is no need to develop and hand over power to the next generation provided the first generation promises not to die." From the mouth of babes, the wisdom of our world. (Inquirer.net)

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