

OPINION & FEATURES

Last newspaper boom

THE celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Asia News Network last week served as an occasion for a great sector of the Asian media to examine themselves and to discuss the challenges that lie ahead.

The ANN, an association of 20 newspapers in 17 countries, was founded in 1999 to reduce dependency on Western news agencies and to give the readers the Asian perspective. Starting from seven newspapers with a readership of seven million, it has increased to 20 member-newspapers with a readership of 30 million.

The ANN operates in what is the most vibrant and most dynamic region in the world. Asia and the Pacific accounts for nearly 56 percent of the world's population and for over one-third of the global domestic product. Kishore Mabubhani, author of *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Power to the East*, says that Asia and Asians are "reclaiming the prominent role they played before the surge of Western industrial and imperial power over the last two centuries."

In Asia, the media exhibited amazing growth before the global economic meltdown occurred. The World Association of Newspapers last June said that three of the largest markets for newspapers are in Asia: China with 107 million copies sold daily; India with 99 million copies; and

Japan, with 68 million copies. Last Feb. 19 Hannah Beech, in an article on time.com said, "Fueled by a growing literacy rate and press reforms in some parts of the continent, Asia is enjoying what may be the world's last great newspaper boom."

But in the wake of the global financial crisis, all this optimism is being tempered. In most Asian countries, newspaper circulation is declining and advertising revenue is down. The member-newspapers of ANN, like other newspapers in the world, will have to reinvent themselves and look for new business models that will help them survive in an unfavorable economic environment.

They will also have to revise their editorial models to better meet the needs of their readers. A study made by the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in 2007 said that as rapid changes in technology make the Web more reader-friendly, more and more people are turning to the Internet in their search for daily news. Convergence now appears to be the name of the game.

A more liberal political environment in many Asian countries could also help greatly in increasing readership of newspapers and other media in the continent and help them weather the storm of the current global financial crisis. (*Inquirer.net*)

GUEST EDITORIAL

Emmanuel Pelaez, 'Mister Right' of RP politics

NEW BIOGRAPHY

by LITO B. ZULUETA
Inquirer.net

WHEN President Corazon C. Aquino was invited in 1989 to the 79th birthday celebration of Diosdado P. Macapagal, Malacañang writers prepared a speech that would predictably have her extolling Macapagal at the cost of the deposed strongman Ferdinand Marcos.

This writer was the Malacañang reporter of the *Manila Chronicle* at the time and as was the protocol, we in the presidential media had received copies of Aquino's speech ahead of its delivery.

When Macapagal was president, the speech read, the Philippines was second only to Japan as the richest country in Asia. By the time Macapagal's successor was ousted by a popular revolution 20 years

later, the Philippines was the basket case of Asia. "Oh why did Macapagal have to lose to Marcos in 1965?" Aquino was supposed to have said in her speech, referring to Macapagal's failed reelection bid.

But Aquino was never to deliver the speech. On the same night that Macapagal was supposed to bask in the glory of having reached his 79th year as the only living ex-president aside from Marcos, with whom he was being compared in a vastly better light, Marcos died in exile in Hawaii, and the traditional Filipino respect for the dead dictated that Aquino restrain the prepared speech's vitriol.

Not only that. Aquino had to announce to the public on Macapagal's own birthday celebration that Marcos had passed away.

Thus in 1989, as in 1965, Marcos rained on Macapagal's pa-

rade.

Missing destiny

But Marcos had played a spoiler even before. Aquino might not have rued Macapagal losing his reelection if his opponent had not been Marcos, but Emmanuel Pelaez, the man from whom Marcos had stolen the Nacionalista Party (NP) nomination in 1964.

Pelaez was Macapagal's vice president who had stood the best chance of replacing him in the elections of 1965. Appointed initially by Macapagal to his Cabinet as foreign secretary, Pelaez later broke away from the president and returned to the NP where he seemed assured of the presidential nomination.

But alas, Marcos, the Senate president at the time, broke away from the Liberal Party after Macapagal indicated he was running again for president. He then joined the NP and grabbed

the presidential nomination by vote-buying and dirty tricks.

Pelaez missing his date with destiny is powerfully told by journalist-historian Nelson Navarro in *What's Happening to Our Country: The Life and Times of Emmanuel Pelaez*.

According to the biography, Pelaez and Marcos met at the Manila Hotel in July to agree on the ground rules for the nomination fight in November 1964. They had a "gentleman's agreement" to conduct a clean and honest campaign for the nomination. It was an agreement that Pelaez, writes Navarro, "would stubbornly try to stick to."

In the NP convention, Pelaez



Emmanuel Pelaez with Ted Kennedy

stood his ground against the counsel of his advisers to match the Marcos vote-buying machine. "What kind of a president would I make if I were to indulge in such activities?" asked Manny of his alarmed advisers. "I'd rather be right than be president."

Indeed, Pelaez became Mister Right, and Marcos the NP standard bearer and later, president and corrupt dictator.

Mindanao roots

Navarro wonderfully evokes the life and times of Pelaez.

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Accusers and accused in Santa Banana

IN the Central American Republic of Santa Banana, the ends of justice are always met.

Yes, they are always met with raised eyebrows, a snicker and a chuckle, a smirk and a frown, a puke and a spit, or with gales of laughter.

Nobody takes Senate Blue Ribbon Committee investigations, impeachment charges, warrants of arrest, accusations of graft and corruption, even buy-bust stings (a-la FBI in the US) seriously.

In fact, even when somebody gets caught red-handed—literally with his pants down—he manages to get away with it by vehemently and vigorously denying it.

Politicians have become particularly adept at this, having had a lot of practice by cheating on their wives, being caught red-handed, denying it and

getting away with it.

"Aha! I've caught you with your pants down with this woman!"

"What woman???? What woman???" (Meanwhile, the woman dashes out of the room).

"What woman???: Do you see a woman in this room???" (The wife sees no woman in the room and gives up in exasperation—she then cheats on the husband to get even).

And so, when a politician or the husband of President Gloria En Excesses Deo is accused by such venerable institutions as the Worldwide Bank of rigging the biddings on infrastructure projects funded by the international body and the bank shows documentary evidence to the authorities, all he has to do is vehemently and vigorously deny it. Then his allies in the Senate demand that the accuser provide proof.

"Here's proof!" the bank declares.

"What proof? What proof? Is this proof?" the allies of the accused ask with raised voices into the television cameras. "That's only hearsay. You must produce solid proof!!!"

In Santa Banana, there is no such thing as the authorities following up a lead, investigating suspicious conduct and eventually coming up with airtight evidence. No sir. The accuser has to do all of that. So, if you're not prepared to spend loads of money gathering evidence (and risking your life doing it), you better follow the advice of the Mafia dons, "Fuggedaboutit!"

In the end, nothing comes out of an accusation and the whole case is eventually forgotten. Of course, in the case of Worldwide Bank, it decides not to fund infrastructure projects in Santa Banana anymore, but then it is accused of discriminating against a poor, defenseless, Third World country.

Then, there is the Santa Banana Senate which holds this regular showbiz extravaganza called the Blue Ribbon Committee hearing.

This is the favorite publicity platform of politicians intending to run for the presidency. It always gets a lot of media coverage and the members of the committee are able to wear their best looking suits (it's sweltering hot in Santa Banana, but the politicians love to wear suits because they think they look good in them) and ask pointed questions like the DA's in Hollywood films.

Of course, the responses are predictable. All the accused has to do is to either declare outright innocence, deny any involvement or invoke presidential executive privilege. Prying information from them becomes an impossibility.

The inquisitors make a big show out of appealing to the Supreme Court which, predictably, upholds the right of the accused to invoke executive privilege. The media then have a field day hurling mud at everyone in sight, and the public relations

people of all the parties have a field day making accusations and putting up defensive arguments and, in the end, everyone has a good time.

They all meet the following morning at the coffee shops and laugh over the previous day's extravaganza. And then, they invite each other to be the sponsor at the wedding of one of the children or the baptism of one of the grandchildren.

And, so, they all end up being compadres and comadres. But during the Senate hearings, you would be convinced that they are genuinely at each other's throats.

Now, sometimes, they are genuinely at each other's throats. This is when the accused resorts to the classic tactic unique only to Santa Banana (although, we understand they also do it often in that Third World country called the Philippines).

The accused produces a medical certificate to the effect that if he is forced to testify, he could collapse and die—and would the Senate be willing to take responsibility?

That is usually enough to persuade the Senate investigators to settle for a videotaped deposition in which the accused, predictably, vigorously and vehemently denies the accusations, pleads innocence and counter-accuses his accusers of political vendetta.

Oh, yes, the counter-accusation is the ultimate weapon of an accused. It works best when the accused is extremely powerful and wealthy and the accuser is an ordinary mortal who has been wronged or raped, whichever.

Obviously, when an accuser is counter-accused by someone with power, influence and money, he better start relocating to parts unknown because he is liable to end up in jail.

And so, not surprisingly, when the Ombudsman of Santa Banana, Merciless Gutreyes is accused of "betrayal of public trust and culpable violation of the Constitution" and impeachment charges are

filed against her, she does what every accused person of influence in Santa Banana does—she accuses right back.

The impeachment charge is based on apparently meritorious grounds, filed by some of the most respectable individuals in Santa Banana (oh, yes, there are still respectable folks in that country). The grounds have been highly publicized in the media, mainly cases of corruption that the Ombudsman was supposed to promptly prosecute but, instead, were allowed to gather dust in her drawer.

That includes allegedly "ignoring the Supreme Court's findings" concerning the questionable purchase of election paraphernalia by the Commission on Elections, "deliberate and inordinate inaction" on "collusion and corruption" involved in the Worldwide Bank bidding of infrastructure projects, "gross inexcusable inaction" in the case of a billion peso fertilizer scam by officials of the department of agriculture, etc.

Guess how the Ombudsman has responded to these charges.

"I am filing charges of perjury and falsification of charges and misleading and false statements against my accusers!" she has declared. She has also accused them of politicking.

The folks of Santa Banana are used to this process of accusation and counter-accusation, describing it as a "zarzuela," a reference to the fantasy plays that their Spanish conquistadores introduced to the natives during the colonial period.

In Santa Banana, they do not have a motion picture industry like Hollywood or theaters like they have on Broadway. All the showbiz entertainment that the citizens need is provided by the justice system and the legislature.

No wonder, a lot of entertainment folks in Santa Banana end up becoming senators. (*gregmacabenta@hotmail.com*)



STREET TALK

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