

ASKS GORDON

Why is Monsod singing different tune?

by MICHAEL LIM UBAC & KRISTINE L. ALAVE
Inquirer.net



Former COMELEC chair Winnie Monsod

WHY is lawyer Christian Monsod, a former Commission on Elections chair, now singing a different tune?

Sen. Richard Gordon, the author of the election automation law, asked this after Monsod warned last March 10 that the haste in automating the 2010 elections could lead to computerized cheating.

The senator said Monsod was a "Johnny-come-lately" because Congress has already passed the budget to fund automation. He said the election automation law has sufficient safeguards to avoid cheating.

He also pointed out that Monsod had himself advocated poll computerization when he was Comelec chair in 1995.

Gordon assured the public that the election automation law had enough measures to prevent hacking of the computer system, the precinct optical counting scan, that the Comelec is adopting for the May 2010 elections.

He said the system has been pilot-tested in the August 2008 elections in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Hinting that he would be declaring his candidacy for President soon, Gordon joked that presidential aspirants like him

had more chances of winning in an automated poll.

"I'm really considering running and maybe it's time to announce it in the sense that on the 27th of April we will have a big meeting of the Bagumbayan Movement at the Manila Hotel," he said.

"It's time we change the paradigm. It's time we have a Bagumbayan (new nation)," he said.

The Comelec, meanwhile, said it had finished reviewing the terms of reference (TOR) for the bidding for the P11.3-billion contract to provide the automated election system to be used in 2010.

The TOR will be made available to bidders on March 18 and a pre-bidding conference has been scheduled 10 days after its release. The TOR is priced at \$20,000.

Comelec Chair Jose Melo said the deadline for the submission

of bid documents is April 27. The Comelec will open the bids and start the evaluation process the same day.

The poll body expects to award the contract on or before May 21 to give the winning company enough time to reconfigure the machines and the software.

"All the technical bids will be opened first," Melo explained. "When the bid passes, only then will we open the financial proposal. If it doesn't pass, we will no longer open the financial proposal. The lowest bidder is not necessarily the winner. The technical proposals will be scrutinized thoroughly."

The TOR includes provisions disallowing replacement of rejected ballots and over-voting. It also provides that the voting and counting machines must meet the 99.995 percent accuracy standard.

The Comelec said 11 companies have expressed interest in providing the precinct counting optical scan (PCOS) to the poll body: Sequoia, Avante, ES/S, Hart and Scantron of the United States; Venezuela's Smartmatic; the UK-based DRS; India's Bharat; South Korea's DVS Korea; Gilat Solution of Israel and Spain's Indra System. ■

Ninoy slay cons mark first week of freedom

MANILA—Nine of the 10 soldiers, who were convicted and recently pardoned for the Aquino-Galman murders, on March 11 celebrated their first week of freedom after 26 years in prison with a Thanksgiving Mass, reuniting with three colleagues who were released earlier.

The mass was organized by the Public Assistance Office (PAO) and officiated by Monsignor Robert Olaguer, chaplain of the New Bilibid Prisons (NBP) in Muntinlupa City who had lobbied for the soldiers' release.

Present at the Mass were former Air Force 1st Lt. Jesus Castro; Master Sgt. Pablo Martinez; Sgts. Claro Lat, Arnulfo de Mesa, Rolando de Guzman, Rodolfo Desolong, Ruben Aquino, Arnulfo Artates, and Filomeno Miranda; C1C Rogelio Moreno; and A1C Felizardo Taran.

These were the soldiers who had escorted and guarded opposition leader Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino the day he arrived from exile in the United States and was shot at the airport tarmac on Aug. 21, 1983.

Former Air Force Capt. Romeo Bautista, the highest ranking official in the group, was sick and unable to attend, a relative who was at the Mass told.

In his homily, Olaguer noted that while the former

soldiers were now free, they will only have real freedom when people come to believe their assertion that they were not part of the conspiracy to kill opposition Sen. Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr.

"Perhaps it will remain just a dream," Olaguer said in Filipino, of the "real freedom" he referred to.

Still, Olaguer remained hopeful as he quoted from the song *Vincent*.

"They would not listen, they did not know how. Perhaps they'll listen now," Olaguer said, apparently alluding to Aquino's children, Sen. Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino, III, and celebrity Kris Aquino, who have both expressed disappointment in the release of the former soldiers.

Martinez had admitted that he brought an ex-convict, the reputed gun for hire Rolando Galmar into the airport security perimeter that day on orders of Col. Romeo Ochocho deputy chief of the Aviation Security Command (Avsecom). He said the other soldiers, did not know that something was going to happen that day. (Ochocho was never charged and is at large)

De Guzman, who was specifically instructed to immediately kill anyone who harmed Aquino, had suffered a stroke. He came to the Mass in a wheelchair and Desolong held his arm while the congregation sang the *Lord's Prayer*. (*Inquirer.net*)

Emmanuel Pelaez, 'Mister Right' of RP politics

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from his Cagayan de Misamis roots to his Manila education at the Ateneo de Manila, University of Manila, and University of Santo Tomas, then on to his heady political rise, first as congressman of his home district, and later as outstanding senator.

Handsome, tall and learned, Pelaez seemed the perfect embodiment of the old political elite, with its social entitlements and professions at public service.

But as Navarro points out, Pelaez was different because he had integrity and a sincere intention of reforming the nation, as shown by his closeness with President Ramon Magsaysay, perhaps the most populist and most popular president in Philippine history, who heavily relied on his counsel, especially on agriculture, land reform, and countryside development.

In a way, Macapagal, who had styled himself as the "poor boy from Lubao," had tried to approximate the Magsaysay charisma in his own campaign for the presidency against President Carlos P. Garcia. And in taking Pelaez as his running-mate, he would like a little of the Magsaysay magic to brush off on him.

But apparently stopping Pelaez from becoming another Magsaysay, Macapagal appointed him to the foreign affairs portfolio. Pelaez had wanted to become agriculture and environment secretary.

But there was no denying Pelaez's fitness to become president. As foreign secretary, he tried to negotiate the terms of the American bases treaty and advanced the Philippine claim to Sabah.

Macapagal was also adept at foreign policy (he had been assistant foreign secretary prior to becoming congressman), but circumstances militated against him taking over the world stage.

When the US Congress failed to pass a measure that would benefit Philippine veterans of the Second World War, Macapagal hit back at the Americans by switching Philippine Independence Day from July 4 to June 12.

Washington was incensed at Macapagal, but felt it had to repair relations with Manila. So when Pelaez was in Washington, President John F. Kennedy asked for a meeting with him.

The gentlemanly Pelaez only agreed to the meeting after clearing it up with Macapagal. But the White House photo-op that showed Kennedy and Pelaez—both of them handsome and talking as equals—clearly upstaged Macapagal.

Singular cry of pain

After his defeat in the NP convention, Pelaez refused Marcos' offer for him to become his running-mate and later, to head the NP Senate ticket. He wisely reclaimed his old congressional seat in Misamis since he felt his expertise really lay in agriculture reform policy-making.

He was to run again for the Senate and win, but when martial law was declared in 1972, he had to confront the reality of his warning to the nation in 1965 against a Marcos presidency:

"Whether you agree with me or not, my assessment is that today the greatest danger to this country is for a man of the character of Ferdinand Marcos to ascend to the presidency."

He had said in 1965 that Marcos was raised under the "politics of violence of the Ilocos," and that a Marcos propagandist had even written that Marcos "has no specific program of government, nor a definite philosophy, except power."

Pelaez himself was to suffer from the fascism of the Marcos dictatorship, and over an issue that was close to his heart: agriculture.

As assemblyman of the Interim Batasang Pambansa during martial law, Pelaez criticized the coconut levy collected from farmers at a time of falling world prices of coconut oil, impoverishing both coconut farmers and producers, or at least those producers not close to Marcos.

According to Navarro: "It was an open secret... that the levy... had created a super-monopoly headed by Danding Cojuangco (Marcos' close associate and supporter). The coconut funds, which over the next 10 years had piled up to about P9 billion, were put under the control of a shadowy maze of corporations that in time would buy and control San Miguel Corporation... and built up the United Coconut Planters Bank... into one of the biggest banks in the country."

On the late evening of July 21, 1982, Pelaez's Toyota Crown Sedan was trying to head home in New Manila when it was cut by a car that sprayed it a hail of bullets. Pelaez played dead while the gunmen dragged out his driver, Arsenio Rogero (Pelaez did not have bodyguards), and shot him dead.

As he was wheeled to the operating room of St. Luke's Hospital, Pelaez said he wondered, "Had brute force taken over from the rule of law?" When he saw Gen. Tomas Karingal, the chief of police of Quezon City, Pelaez uttered what was to be the singular cry of pain and injustice that would be on every Filipino's lips: "What is happening to our country, General?"

As Navarro writes, "It was a question that would soon be heard across the nation and reverberate around the world, encapsulating in seven words what would come to haunt the Marcos regime in its final three years of power."

Powerfully told and well-written, *What's Happening to Our Country?* is the biography of a vice president that may well eclipse presidential biographies. In a way, perhaps, Pelaez didn't really miss his date with destiny. ■

Don't politicize homecoming of Mancao-Palace

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testimony of one man.

"It's not enough that we have one witness or one evidence. The prosecution should be able to handle [the case] in a manner that it can prove somebody's involvement or guilt beyond reasonable doubt," he said.

While Gonzalez believes Mancao's affidavit is strong enough for the filing of criminal charges against those that he would implicate, he said the key to solving the Dacer-Corbato double murder remains on ex-police officer Michael Ray Aquino.

"The most important person here is Michael Ray Aquino...because he is in direct contact with somebody who was interested in doing away with Bubby Dacer," he said.

But it would be "futile" to try and get Aquino extradited to face charges for the Dacer-Corbato case at this time, he said.

Aquino is serving a six-year prison sentence

in the US after being convicted earlier this year for espionage and for possession of classified US documents that he leaked to opposition figures in the Philippines.

Gonzalez said it was Mancao's wife, Maricar, who sought assistance from the government when her husband was arrested in the US on the basis of a Philippine extradition request.

He said House Speaker Prospero Nograles had asked him if he could talk to a certain "Mrs. Mancao."

He said he never talked nor met personally with Mancao's wife. He said what he got were e-mails from her.

But Gonzalez admitted to having talked with Mancao over the phone while the latter was in jail.

"I just said that I wanted to talk to his lawyer," Gonzalez said. (*Inquirer.net*)

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