

OPINION & FEATURES

Missing pieces

AFTER several months of delay, Cezar Mancao II finally returned to Manila last June 4. The former police senior superintendent, whose promising career in law enforcement ended in 2001 with his flight to the United States, said he was ready to testify about the brutal murders of publicist Salvador "Bubby" Dacer and his driver Emmanuel Corbito in November 2000.

Government prosecutors expect Mancao's colleague, former police senior superintendent Glenn Dumlao, to be extradited as well within two weeks. Together, the two former members of the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force or PAOCTF could finally provide the missing pieces in the twin murders, specifically the identities of those who directly implemented, oversaw and ordered the hit on the high-profile public relations man in the final months of the short-lived administration of Joseph Estrada.

The ousted president reiterated last June 4 that he had nothing to do with the twin murders, even as Mancao vowed to unmask two men behind the crime, identified

only as "Bigote" and "71." Since civilians arrested in connection with the case led investigators to PAOCTF members who allegedly carried out the crime, speculation has focused on the mastermind and the motive.

The PAOCTF was Estrada's elite anti-crime unit, which Panfilo Lacson headed even when he became national police chief. In the months after Estrada's ouster, Mancao and Senior Superintendent Michael Ray Aquino fled to the United States. Dumlao followed later. An officer accused of direct involvement in the twin murders,

former senior superintendent Teofilo Viña, was shot dead by a lone gunman in Tanza, Cavite in January 2003.

All the officers were top commanders of the PAOCTF. Could they have acted on their own? Mancao has alleged that Lacson had ordered Michael Ray Aquino to execute Dacer for incurring the ire of "Bigote." Critics have lambasted the Arroyo administration for selective justice, pointing out that if Lacson had not been implicated, this case would not have been pursued with unusual zeal. But if Mancao and, later, Dumlao, stand by their original statements and see this case through, two families at least stand to get justice. (*Philstar.com*)



Philstar.com photo

GUEST EDITORIAL

Breaking through the glass ceiling

IN America, the "glass ceiling" refers to the point considered beyond the reach of immigrants and ethnic minorities such as becoming CEO of a Fortune 500 firm. Breaking through the glass ceiling in various aspects of mainstream American life has been a continuing struggle, particularly for people of color, but modest triumphs have been won and these have led to bigger victories.

The biggest breakthrough was seen recently with the election of the first African-American president of the United States.

From those pre-war years when signs on entrances to public places read, "Absolutely no Filipinos allowed," our people have come a long way in America. Proof of this are the recipients of the annual Filipinas Magazine Achievement Awards organized by the magazine of the same name which I publish and edit. The honorees have ranged from political figures like Governor Ben Cayetano of Hawaii and Hollywood stars like Lou Diamond Philips and Tia Carrere to military brass like Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba and Lt. Gen. Edward Soriano and corporate tycoons like Loida Nicolas-Lewis. In the last congressional elections, Steve Austria of Ohio, son of a Filipino doctor, won a seat in the US Congress. Still beyond the grasp of Fil-Ams is a seat in the US Senate.

It is in this context that events unfolding in Europe is *déjà vu* for us in America. For the rapidly growing Pinoy population on the continent, the glass ceiling still needs to be broken through in many aspects of European life, but a hardy few have been trying.

The most remarkable of these gallant efforts has been that of Gene Alcantara, a journalist and one of the most prominent community leaders of the

Filipino-British community in London. In 1998, he ran for a seat in the Westminster Council as a member of the Labour Party. He lost by 200 votes. He ran again in the May 2005 general elections, as an official candidate for the British Parliament of the Veritas Party. Again he failed.

But Alcantara's seemingly Quixotic efforts have begun to raise awareness among the United Kingdom's large ethnic minorities of the representation government in of racial discrimination and scapegoat-to mention in corruption and misconduct in of power.

In the forthcoming European Parliamentary elections on June 4, Alcantara will be running once again, this time as an independent candidate for one of the 78 seats allocated to the UK.

Since 1979, the European Union has held elections for seats in the European Parliament whose decisions have a profound impact on legislative initiatives in the 27 member states of the EU.

A look at Alcantara's curriculum vitae reveals that he is no slouch. He comes more than adequately prepared to represent, not only the ethnic minorities in the UK and other EU member states but the British mainstream, as well.

Born in San Pablo, Laguna, he worked in Saudi Arabia before moving to London to pursue Russian studies, following this up with a postgraduate

diploma in East-West Trade at the University of Westminster. He then got his MBA from Oxford Brookes University after successfully presenting a thesis on UK, French and German Cultural Diplomacy. He also finished the TUC Employment Law course at the College of North East London in 2005.

Alcantara worked for the British Council for over two decades in various capacities, the last being as head of accounting services and accounts payables with 20 people under him. As a program officer of the British Council, he looked after scholars from Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Africa, and as a management consultant, he traveled widely in Asia, South America, East and Southern Africa and the Middle East. In 1999, he was assigned to Poland and operated between Warsaw and Krakow for three and a half years as assistant director and resource manager, promoting British cultural relations in Central and Southern Europe.

Aside from English, Alcantara speaks Russian and some Spanish and Polish and continues to be fluent in Tagalog. In fact, he occasionally does Tagalog news reports for ABS-CBN's Balitang Europe. He became a naturalized British citizen in 1992.

I first met Gene Alcantara when my wife and I went on the road around Europe in late 2004 to encourage the participation of European Filipinos in the 3rd Global Filipino Networking Convention that was held in Cebu in January 2005. Already well known among Filipino-Britons because of his involvement in community organizations like the Centre for Filipinos, Alcantara had become the *Pinoy* to watch after his almost successful attempt to win a seat in the Westminster council.

Alcantara accepted our invitation to speak at the Cebu convention on behalf of Filipinos in Europe, along with Switzerland-based Anny Misa-Hefti of Babaylan. He delivered a paper on the growing presence of Filipinos in the United Kingdom while Hefti made a presentation on the plight of Filipina workers, mostly domestics, in Europe. Shortly after the convention, Alcantara announced his candidacy for the British Parliament.

I first learned about his current candidacy over a month ago from another *Pinoy-Brit* in London, Peps Villanueva, a colleague in my ad agency days in Manila. According to Villanueva, Alcantara has generated a lot of attention and growing support, not only among fellow Filipinos but also among other minority groups. This is because one of Alcantara's thrusts is fair treatment of illegal immigrants and a path to legalization. Exactly what ethnic minorities are trying to achieve with immigration reform in the US.

Alcantara currently works as an immigration adviser and case worker, a function regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services (OISC), and deals with various immigration issues affecting migrants in the UK and their families. He has dealt with cases involving Filipinos, Thais, Pakistanis, Indians, Turks, Africans and East Europeans.

Alcantara thought he could adequately serve the needs of his clients and the community through his immigration and journalism work, but he soon realized that he would be of greater service and impact if he was in an elected position, to give voice to the many who are not heard. It was for this reason that he decided to throw his hat into the electoral ring again. (*gregmacabenta@hotmail.com*)



STREET TALK

Greg B. Macabenta

Will the 2010 elections be for parliament?

PRESIDENTIAL political adviser Gabriel Claudio and Interior Secretary Ronaldo Puno have been stressing repeatedly that the elections in 2010 will push through as the country "is already in an election mode." Puno told the Foreign Correspondents Club Tuesday, June 2, "Trust me, there will be elections in 2010," and cited as one proof of this that he's presenting himself as a candidate for vice president. What these two Arroyo officials do not say is that the elections in 2010 could very well be for a new parliament.

The popular thinking the morning after is that Charter change sans the Senate would be carried out by the President's allies after her July 27 State of the Nation Address, and that it could result in a shift to the parliamentary system after a plebiscite. The constituent assembly would call only for elections of members of the new parliament in 2010, from whose ranks the prime minister would be chosen, while a single-line transitory provision would set synchronized local elections in 2012. Or it could mean that the present members of Congress, including the senators, would be the new members of parliament. Term extension could be the sweetener, though there are unconfirmed rumors that additional pork barrel was dangled before House members at the earlier Lakas-Kampi merger meeting.

Queried whether an earlier covenant signed by House members pledging no extension of the President's or their own terms would be honored by the House, La Union Rep. Victor Ortega said he considered himself bound by it but he didn't know if it applied to his colleagues. This answer is reminiscent of the remark of the late Speaker Ramon Mitra, who opined facetiously that House members would sign even a piece of toilet paper shoved under their nose. The situation in the House is so fluid that anything can happen. But the question is, how will the Senate react? And would the Supreme Court, whose two new members are to be appointed by the Presi-

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

dent soon, rule once and for all on the issue of whether Charter change should be undertaken by the entire Congress voting together, or by the two chambers voting separately?

After House Resolution 1109 was passed close to midnight last Tuesday, June 2 Speaker Prospero Nograles and Ortega, chair of the committee on constitutional amendments, said that while the resolution has to be implemented, they didn't know what would happen next. It's obvious that HR 1109 was railroaded instead of Nograles' HR 737 because the former was more nebulous, since it provides only for the convening of a constituent assembly even without the Senate's participation, whereas HR 737 was specific about amending economic provisions such as foreign ownership of key industries. HR 1109 needed only the majority vote of the 270-member House, which could easily be mustered by the 145 Lakas-Kampi members, whereas HR 737 needed a three-fourths vote by Congress.

The midnight railroading of HR 1109 was rather weird. Its principal author, Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte, the Kampi president who failed to show up at the Manila Hotel merger, had disowned it earlier. The question now is, was his act for real? At any rate, administration allies were well-prepared for the showdown, for as the media have pointed out, Arroyo's favorite traveling companions, including Deputy Speaker Amelita Villarosa, did not go with her to Russia this time. The railroad of the resolution has sent mixed signals to the nation and the world (a confused recent visitor was US Defense Secretary Robert Gates), because only last Sunday at the Manila Hotel, Arroyo said the merger of Lakas and Kampi was the best indication that elections would go through in 2010. The confusion is causing needless instability and ruining Arroyo's legacy to the nation.

Former Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr., who took the floor to register

his objection to the railroading, likes to point out that when he was leading the Cha-cha train three or four years ago, a healthy debate was played out fully in the tri-media. Joe DV delivered over a hundred speeches across the nation. This recent Cha-cha express, however, rolled stealthily through largely subterranean territory, with its leaders asserting one day there's no more time and now suddenly it's on.

Sen. Loren Legarda, in a privilege speech last Tuesday, June 2 called for an investigation to improve and strengthen existing laws that affect the pawnshop and jewelry industries, such as the Pawnshop Regulation Act, Anti-Fencing Law and others. She made the proposal after condemning the criminal syndicate behind the so-called "high-society jewelry scam." The media recently reported the unscrupulous practices of Marilen So-Guisande and her cohorts, who are perhaps being coddled by some influential people. The Jewelers' Association of the Philippines and a number of well-heeled victims of Guisande showed up in the Senate to support Legarda's challenge to her fellow legislators to do something about the apparently rampant swindling being carried out in conspiracy with some pawnshops.

Some people have noted that Guisande has been the aide, chief of staff and frequent traveling companion of socialite/philanthropist Rosemarie "Baby" Arenas, for many years. Those who know Arenas well say that Guisande wouldn't have had such good access to upper-crust ladies if not for her association with the socialite. It behooves her to help Guisande's victims get justice. It seems, however, that she hasn't lifted a finger in their behalf. Legarda threw a challenge of sorts to Arenas when she recalled that when her own staffer was involved in some kind of scam, she immediately axed her and helped the victims. Arenas has the moral responsibility to help Guisande's victims, especially since she is reported to have encouraged some of them to entrust their jewelry pieces with her aide. (*Inquirer.net*)



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